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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4, second reading of Bill 5.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, that Bill 5, An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to an amendment to the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*. Here in Newfoundland –

MR. SPEAKER: Standby, sorry.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Sorry.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to an amendment to the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador –

MR. SPEAKER: No, I'm sorry.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: No?

MR. SPEAKER: I wasn't ready.

It is moved and seconded that Bill 5, An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997." (Bill 5)

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Service NL.

My apologies.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and indeed throughout the world, people move through their careers and have an expectation that a time will come when they will be able to retire. Many individuals pay into pension plans throughout their work lives. Pensions not only provide retirees with the financial support they need, but also provide a benefit to the overall economy.

Pension plans are highly complex financial vehicles and the pension plan's financial position is changing constantly due to many factors including the stock market or interest rates. When there are potential negative impacts to pension plans, we recognize the effects on those who rely on this income at the end of their careers. We have seen this unfold throughout our province's history.

As an example, the former employer at Wabush Mines filed for protection from its creditors under the federal *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* impacting the pension plans of retirees and former workers at the mine. Within hours, Mr. Speaker, of the commencement of our mandate, this administration made a series of decisions all in the best interests of those most affected by this difficult position created by the employer.

Most recently, however, we were successful in our application to have the *Pension Benefits Act* deemed trust clause upheld by the Newfoundland and Labrador Court of Appeal confirming our belief that pensioners deserve to be recognized as a priority in creditor claims. If money is available in the CCAA process, we will work with all stakeholders to ensure the best possible outcome for the members of the Wabush Mines pension plans. My department continues to monitor the situation and work to ensure members' best interests are upheld and the plans are compliant with the *Pension Benefits Act*.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, our government worked with the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Limited to develop a solution to secure the future of the company's pension plans, while allowing the

company to focus its financial resources on maintaining the viability of its operations. Our government worked to protect the interests of pension plan members. This arrangement helps ensure the sustainability of the pension plans into the future. This innovative solution enabled the company to meet its pension funding obligations while allowing it to focus on meeting its commitments to capital investments and operations under agreements made in 2014.

I want to acknowledge the support of my colleagues in the House of Assembly for the necessary amendments to the *Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957* to facilitate this arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador's pension legislation is among the strongest in Canada. Provincial laws require all pension contributions to be held in a separate trust that cannot be accessed by the company or affected by bankruptcy so as to ensure the money people contribute is safe.

Since 2008, provincial laws prohibit a solvent company from terminating a pension plan in a deficit without making the required payments to fully fund the benefits promised to the members. This is known –

MR. SPEAKER: Sorry.

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

MS. MICHAEL: I may have heard incorrectly, but I thought the Government House Leader opened up the second reading on Bill 5, the *Pension Benefits Act*.

Am I correct? I thought that was the debate he started.

MR. SPEAKER: It was Order 4, Bill 5.

MS. MICHAEL: Okay, which is –?

MR. SPEAKER: *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*.

MS. MICHAEL: With a permanent exemption from the requirement to fully fund pension benefits on the termination of a pension plan is very specific. It has no relationship to anything

that I'm hearing the minister talk about. That's why I wanted to get clarification.

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask the Minister of Service NL if you have a comment.

You are addressing Bill 5?

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay, please proceed.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Since 2008, provincial laws prohibit a solvent company from terminating a pension plan in a deficit without making the required payments to fully fund the benefits promised to the members. This is known as terminal funding.

The province's *Pension Benefits Act* protects pensions earned by workers in the province by legislating minimum standards for pension benefits and by requiring minimum funding to ensure, to the extent possible, that the pension promise is met; however, not all pension plans are based on a typical employer-employee relationship, some are unique relationships. Small pension plans can be set up by business owners for their own benefit or for key executives to maximize tax deductible retirement savings, rather than target a specific benefit level. These types of pension plans are generally referred to as individual pension plans, or IPPs, as they have only one or two members in the plan.

The federal *Income Tax Act* recognizes these unique employer-employee relationships regarding individual pension plans; however, the provincial *Pension Benefits Act* does not. All pension plans registered under the *Pension Benefits Act* must also be registered under the *Income Tax Act*.

Any instances where a conflict exists, the *Income Tax Act* prevails over the *Pension Benefits Act*. The *Income Tax Act* recognizes differences between individuals within pension plans and defines specified individuals as employees earning above a certain threshold, currently around \$140,000 per year, or employees who have connected with the employer such as shareholders of the company.

Mr. Speaker, there are three parts to the amendment before the floor of the House of Assembly today which will address current financial concerns for some employers that have existing individual pension plans. I also anticipate that these amendments will make it more beneficial for employers to register new individual pension plans in this province.

Part one of the bill proposes two amendments to section 2 of the *Pension Benefits Act* adding a definition for an individual pension plan, which means a defined benefit pension plan with two or fewer members or former members where at least one of the members is a specified individual; and, adding a definition for a specified individual which has the same meaning as in the federal *Income Tax Act Regulations*.

These changes recognize that individual pension plans set up for business owners or executives are a unique type of pension plan under the *Pension Benefits Act*. The *Income Tax Act* limits the contributions permitted for these types of plans while the plan is ongoing to avoid excessive tax deferral or sheltering.

Despite the requirements under the *Pension Benefits Act* to fund the pensions, because of the conflict with the *Income Tax Act* the necessary funding is not permitted while the plan is ongoing. This results in many individual pension plans developing very large deficits.

When the plan terminates, the *Income Tax Act* limits no longer apply to paragraph 61(2) of the *Pension Benefits Act*. It requires that the employer fund the full benefit promised under the plan. This is known as terminal funding.

Very often the employer and the employee are in fact the same in an individual pension plan. This complicates the issue as the employer is required to fund their own pension even if they would choose otherwise. In some cases, the large contribution required can negatively impact their business and possibly result in job losses.

Terminal funding was not always a requirement under the *Pension Benefits Act*. Prior to an amendment in 2008, an employer could choose to terminally fund or reduce benefits to the level that could be provided by existing pension fund.

Throughout the early 2000s, due to volatility in financial markets and lower interest rates, many pension plans had significant deficits. The termination of plans with deficits and benefit reductions led to a trend across the country where many jurisdictions introduced full funding on termination.

Individual pension plans established before April 2008 were not designed with terminal funding in mind. They were designed to maximize tax-sheltered savings. Terminal funding hampered the ability of the employer and employee to use the plan as originally intended. Now that some plans have matured and the individuals are looking to retire, the significant cash flow required to fully fund the pension is negatively impacting these individuals and their businesses.

Part two of the bill proposes two additional subsections to be added to section 61 of the *Pension Benefits Act*. Subsection 61(3) exempts individual pension plans from the terminal funding required under subsection 61(2). Subsection 61(4) provides an exemption for individual pension plans that exist on the coming into force, provided that the members of the plan and their spouses or cohabiting partners who will be beneficiaries of their pension consent in writing to the exemption from terminal funding.

The protection of terminal funding would remain if they do not consent. The consent must include a certificate of independent legal advice to ensure that all parties are aware of any rights or benefits that may be given up. Any new individual pension plans created after the legislation is amended will not have terminal funding as a requirement.

In order to register a new individual pension plan, the superintendent of pensions will require clear language in the plan documentation to this effect. Section 18 of the *Pension Benefits Act* provides authority for the superintendent to require certain information be provided when registering a pension plan. Such requirements are typically outlined in a directive issued by the superintendent which is copied to all pension plans and other interested stakeholders and posted on the Service NL website.

The plan document must be submitted for approval and the superintendent would review it to ensure it's in compliance with act regulations and any directives before approving a new plan for registration. Any amendments to a pension plan must also be filed and approved by the superintendent. So the same process will be applied before an amendment is registered.

Directive 1 would be an amendment to require that any new individual pension plans registered after the bill will come into force on December 31, 2018, include a statement that the employer is not required to fully fund any deficit that may exist when the plan is terminated, and that this could result in reduction of benefits. This would ensure all parties including spouses or partners are aware of the rights or benefits that will be foregone prior to entering into an individual pension plan.

The third part of the bill we are introducing today sets December 31, 2018, as the date for these changes to come into effect. While the changes we propose today are not unlike the rules in other jurisdictions, the introduction of an independent legal advice and consent is unique. It aims to protect those individuals in existing individual pension plans who want their benefit to be fully funded. Most jurisdictions provide some form of exemption for pension plans associated with specified individuals or connected persons.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments we are debating today only apply to a unique group of pension plans that are set up for shareholders of companies or very high earners. I cannot stress that, Mr. Speaker. It is for shareholders of companies or very high earners. It will not affect any pension plan in the province that has more than two members or diminish the protection for workers or retirees who have pension benefits.

By adding a definition of individual pension plans along with providing a permanent exemption from terminal funding for these plans these changes will allow businesses to provide retirement savings for members without imposing challenging funding requirements for the employer who can negatively affect the business operations.

Mr. Speaker, in *The Way Forward* our government committed to better services and better outcomes to promote a healthy, prosperous province. It is essential that we continue to work with the business community throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to eliminate barriers to their operations. Amending legislation to ensure it is meeting the needs of the people we serve is a responsibility that we take seriously.

As I stated earlier, the requirements associated with the majority of pension plans in the province are not affected in any way by these changes which deal with a small number of individuals; however, they will address current financial concerns for some employers.

It is important that we as a government continue to address matters like this one which help create a better business climate for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It is indeed a privilege to get up here this morning and speak on Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act.

I listened to the minister explain the different changes in the act and why the act is going to be changed. As a caucus, we have some questions that we do want to ask when we get into Committee because there is a lot of different information that I'm sure the minister can provide, but for the general public out there, pension plans are very, very important. People spend their livelihood paying into pension plans so they have a future that they can ensure that when they do come to the part where they can retire, there is a fund in place so that they can secure their later years in life and know there will be an income for them and their family.

The pension plan that we're talking about today is an individual pension plan. So these are plans

that are set up for different – not corporations mainly, it could be companies, it could be a law firm, it could be a doctor's office or something like this. And these pension plans are set up for two or fewer people.

So it's not for a company that has a group of employees, like the minister mentioned about Wabush Mines, but this is completely different altogether. These are set up for individuals that probably own a company or have a small business where it could be just two people in that business and they set up a business plan.

Right now, this particular pension plan that we're talking about this morning – and this is the reason why we'll have more questions down the road – there are only 50 of these individual pension plans that are in place right now. Most of these pension plans came into effect before 2008.

To give you an example – and the minister, I'm sure, will explain when we do get into Committee – it could be a small company that could be a construction company that the owner of that company sets up a pension plan for himself, and it could be a spouse, it could be a minor partner or something like that. But it's only two individuals that are set up in this pension plan.

Sometimes this is set up for different purposes. It could be for the actual pension itself, which some do, but it's also set up, sometimes, for tax relief. That plays a major role in everything too, how people set this up, because high earners and people have to look and say which way am I going to pay less taxes. So that's reason why some of these pension plans – again, it's a very few.

I think the gist of what I'll do, once we get to Committee, is to dig down some more information and find out what the purpose is, who was consulted. I know that when we were in our briefing they talked about the board of trade and different groups that were involved. So I'd like to know what their role was in this and to find out what the reasons are for doing this.

Again, I understand that it could be important too, for example, if a company was up for sale, that these pension plans – what they call as

windup. So you could wind up the pension plan so there wouldn't be a huge liability to anybody that wanted to purchase the company or had to pay this forever and a day until the pension was over basically.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to talk too much about it, but I think once we get to Committee I will have lots of questions for the minister. A lot of it will deal with reasons for this, who was looking for it, why it was done and stuff like that so we can get a clear – because it's a very limited few that this does affect.

It would be interesting to see what happens to those individual pension plans, where they go forward and what this will do for future individual pension plans also. Will this mean that there will be a lot more set up or will it mean that – I think there are only 18, like I said, since 2008 that were actually set up since then.

I will have lots of questions when we get in Committee. That's all I have to say about it.

Thank you.

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

MR. B. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, thanks a lot.

I'm delighted to speak here today to Bill 5, An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997. I've had the opportunity to stand several times in the House of Assembly to speak to legislative amendments since I became the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Service NL. Over that time, and each time, I'm struck by the far-reaching impacts the department has on the lives of residents of our province.

I once said that it touches everyone's lives, from birth to death and everything in between. The *Pension Benefits Act* is a prime example, given that so many of us contribute towards pension benefits with a goal of reaching retirement somewhere down the road.

As the Minister of Service NL just stated, the pension funding rules in Newfoundland and Labrador are some of the strongest in our country. The act protects pensions, our pensions earned by workers in this province, by

legislating minimum standards for pension benefits and requiring minimum funding to ensure that these pension promises are met.

In the case of an individual pension plan, small pension plans are set up by business owners for their own benefit or for key executives to maximize tax deductible retirement savings rather than focus on a specific benefit level. They are example of a pension plan that isn't based on a regular employer-employee relationship. Rather, it is a plan with two or few members where at least one of the members is considered a specific individual under the *Income Tax Act*, as alluded to by my colleague across the way.

It is important to note that the federal *Income Tax Act* has special rules that limit the amount of tax deductible contributions that can be made while such plans are ongoing to avoid excessive tax deferral or sheltering. This is also important to note that the federal *Income Tax Act* recognizes these unique employee-employer relations while the provincial benefit act does not. Because of the income tax limits, the minimum funding requirements under the *Pension Benefits Act* generally cannot be met and many of these plans develop large deficits while they are ongoing.

When the plan terminates, the *Income Tax Act* funding restrictions no longer apply and then the *Pension Benefits Act* requires the employer to fund the full benefit promised under the plan.

On plan termination, it is common for an employer with an individual pension plan to be caught off guard by a large required contribution that they cannot comfortably afford without a significant impact to their business. The large contributions requirements, often hundreds of thousands of dollars, can be detrimental when an owner is trying to close or sell their business. Very often, the employer and the employee are the same. This complicates the issue as the employer is required to fund their own pension even if they would choose to do otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, terminal funding was not always a requirement under the *Pension Benefits Act*. As the Minister of Service NL indicated prior, a prior amendment in 2008, an employer could choose to terminally fund or reduce the benefit

to the level that could be provided by the existing pension fund.

Throughout the early 2000s, because of the volatility in the financial markets and lower interest rates, many pension plans had significant deficits, as we know with our own provincial pension plans. The termination of plans with deficits, the benefit reductions related to many jurisdictions introducing full funding on termination.

Terminal funding is vital for the security of pension benefits under most types of pension plans, but in the case of individual pension plans it has hindered the ability for the employer and the employee to use the pension plan as originally intended. Now that some of these plans have matured and that the individuals are looking to retire, the significant cash flow required to fully fund the pension is negatively impacting these individuals and their business.

Stakeholders have requested that the terminal funding requirements be eliminated for these plans, arguing it's unnecessary and noting that many other jurisdictions have recognized the need to exempt these plans from such pension rules, including funding requirements. In addition, the St. John's Board of Trade has recently brought forward this issue as the current rules are considered to be an impediment for businesses trying to sell or restructure their business.

Providing a permanent exemption from terminal funding would allow individual pension plans to provide retirement savings for the plan members without imposing funding requirements which can negatively affect their operations.

While the Minister of Service NL has spoken to the individual amendments in detail, I want to highlight some of the important changes that will come into effect the end of this calendar year. In order to register a new individual pension plan after this bill would come into force on December 31, 2018, the plan documents must include a statement that the employer is not required to fully fund any deficit that may exist in the plan if the plan is terminated that could result in a reduction in benefits.

This will ensure all parties, including spouses or co-habiting partners, are fully aware that the terminal funding is no longer a requirement. If any party has a concern with the plan, they can opt not to enter into this type of an arrangement. For existing individual pension plans, members will be required to seek independent legal advice and provide consent to ensure they are aware of the rights and benefits that they would be foregoing. The protection of terminal funding would remain if they do not consent. Now, that's an important piece.

We need to be clear that this change only applies to the unique group of pension plans that are set up for shareholders or companies of very high earners and does not diminish the protection for workers or retirees who have pension benefits somewhere else. It is also very important that I echo the important message that the amendments to the *Pension Benefits Act* we have brought to the House today will not – and I repeat will not – affect any pension plans in the province that have more than two members. Mr. Speaker, this is a very unique group of individuals.

As the minister stated in her opening remarks, we have many residents in our province who work throughout their careers with an end goal of retirement. The changes we are proposing today will not, in anyway, affect the pension plan that are comprised of more than two members. This is about providing flexibility within the pension legislation for a very select group of individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is also about our government making changes that will help make improvements to the business environment in our province.

Since 2015, we have continuously looked for ways to improve the lives of the people we serve, trying to deliver better services, which will result in better outcomes. Bill 5 is one more example of our ongoing efforts in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): The hon. the Member for Signal Hill - Quidi Vidi.

MS. MICHAEL: St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: St. John's East, sorry.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you very much.

I'm happy to stand and speak to Bill 5, An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act. Different explanations have been given to it by the minister and by the former speaker. I'm happy to speak to it. They are being accurate around what they're saying. The bill is a minor amendment to our *Pension Benefits Act* and it changes rules around private pensions of a very select group of people, of companies that are made up of two or less.

I find it interesting talking about relieving the financial burden for these situations. Yes, I guess it is a financial burden in a sense that companies of two or fewer people, which is a very small group of people in this province – as has been indicated – can have these pension plans, and according to our current act that when they come to a point where the plans are closed out, the company ends, or they decide to close out the pension – right now if the plan cannot support what a pension plan should be able to support, they have to put money in. They have to make up for the deficit that's in the fund before it's closed out.

I'm sure that it's quite possible that somebody all of a sudden after years of having this fund, whether it's five years, 10 years or whatever, may not like the idea of having to pay in and make up for the deficit that they've allowed to accumulate – because they would have allowed that to accumulate. They probably would very much like not to have to do that.

I can understand why there was lobbying by the Board of Trade for the 50 or 60 people that this covers, and that's how small the group is; we were told that in the briefing. The minister has said that it's a very, very small group of people. I'm not saying that these people shouldn't be cared about but, in actual fact, these people could have RRSPs just as well as a pension plan. They could have RRSPs, which would sound very logical, but the thing is that with RRSPs you can't be sheltered as much as with these pension plans. So that with an RRSP the

maximum shelter is \$23,000 to \$24,000 a year; whereas with a private pension plan, they can get tax shelter upwards of \$40,000 a year.

Basically it's a tax haven, and it's a choice of the people who set up these plans to do it that way. Now, they're getting protection under our *Pension Benefits Act*. They're getting protection by exempting them from having to make sure that the pension fund is fully viable when it comes to an end.

I think it's important for us to fully understand that. In the act, in section 61 of the pension and benefits act, it says: "Where, on the termination, after April 1, 2008, of a pension plan, other than a multi-employer pension plan, the assets in the pension fund are less than the value of the benefits provided under the plan, the employer shall, as prescribed by the regulations, make the payments into the pension fund, in addition to the payments required under subsection (1), that are necessary to fund the benefits provided under the plan."

So our act does protect employees. However, as has been pointed out, if you're talking about one of these pension plans, which is basically one or two people who in most cases are family, they're saying this doesn't fit because it's a different situation. Having to fully fund the pension at the end could be hard on them. Maybe their business will end.

Well, I'd like to know what the businesses are, actually, of these 50 or 60 wealthy people in the province. They're probably most likely professional businesses. We don't have the details. I'm agreement with my colleague from Cape St. Francis that I'm going to want to have some answers too about, well, what exactly are these very tiny businesses where the pension is for one or two people.

What is going to happen is – I just read that subsection from section 61. What will happen is this bill shall not apply to an individual pension plan, which is what these plans are called. They will not have to make payments in addition to fund the benefits under the plan. They won't have to protect themselves under their own pension plan, basically. That's what it is, and that's fine.

If we're going to say these pension plans can exist, I can understand doing this, but let's not say we're showing tremendous care for the people of the province by doing this. It's helping these people with this plan, which is a valid plan. It's legal, they can do it. They're choosing to do it rather than have RRSPs because they get more of a tax saving by doing it. So we'll be honest about all of that. If we want to do that, fine, but let's not make more of it than it is, because that's what it is. That's what it is. That's fine, but I'd like to have some more information and we will get that in Committee.

I'd like to point out that if this province really cared so much about people and their pensions, why isn't the government of this province banging on the door in Ottawa and saying make a change toward the corporate tax rules in this country? Why not make a change to the rule around bankruptcy that a company like Wabush Mines or Abitibi in Grand Falls-Windsor can go under – or Sears, it might be a large company outside but it affected an awful lot of our workers in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: A company like Sears, that they can go under, they can go bankrupt and the last people to get considered are the workers of those companies who never get considered. Their pension plans die. They died in Wabush, they died in Grand Falls-Windsor and they died with the workers who've worked for Sears.

So if this government is so caring about people having pensions –

MR. A. PARSONS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: I'm certainly one for free debate, but I would ask that debate be relevant to the bill that's being debated.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Anyone else like to speak to that point of order?

I would remind Members, the intent of this bill is very restrictive and I ask Members to keep relevant to the subject of this bill.

MS. MICHAEL: May I speak to the point of order, Mr. Speaker, please?

MR. SPEAKER: To the point of order?

MS. MICHAEL: May I speak to the point of order?

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, to the point of order.

MS. ROGERS: He said there was no point of order.

MS. MICHAEL: No, but I need to have an opportunity before he makes that ruling.

I want to speak to the point that was made, not to what the Speaker said, but to the point that was made, the point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

MS. MICHAEL: The reason I want to speak to it is that I understand in second reading we are talking to the general principles of a bill. The general principle of this bill is protection of people with pensions. To me, I've been talking about protection of people with pensions. I respond to the point of order saying that.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, I would say the Member has been speaking generally to the principle of the bill and I would encourage all Members to remain relevant to the subject of this bill.

MS. MICHAEL: I'm speaking about the care for people in this province with regard to pensions. I heard the minister talk about the care that the government has, the concern it has for people in the province. The minister talked about what happened with the Abitibi workers. So I think I'm speaking to the spirit of this bill and saying let's care. I'm asking this government to also show their concern.

If the board of trade can lobby government for 50 or 60 wealthy people, I can stand here and ask this government to care about our people in this province who have lost their pensions and to fight for them in Ottawa and to get Ottawa on the track with regard to changing the corporate laws in this country.

MR. A. PARSONS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order from the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Under section 48, relevance; I just made this point. I think you made a ruling that we continue on. I would ask that we be relevant to the bill. I don't believe the commentary from the Member opposite is relevant to the content of the bill being debated by the Minister of Service NL.

MR. SPEAKER: Anyone else who would like to speak to this point of order before I rule.

The Member, in my estimation, is speaking to the order of the general principle of the bill in terms of she's talking about pensions and the principle and how it should be applied.

I ask the Member to remain relevant to the subject of this bill.

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

You have indicated that I have been, and I will not make my point again. I think I've made my point clearly, so I will not repeat it, but I do ask the government and the minister to listen carefully to what I did say. I look forward to when we're in Committee to ask specific questions that I'd like to have answered.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take a whole lot of time and I'm not going to repeat everything that's been said. I think it's been explained, the details, but

basically I guess at the end of the day this is not – so that we're all clear and anyone watching is clear, this is not creating some new bill that's going to shelter some people in big business and so on. This bill already exists.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: So there's nothing new here.

Really, all we're doing here is taking a bill and a circumstance that currently exists, that allows private pension plans to be able to contribute up to \$40,000 per year as opposed to \$26,000 – is the maximum, I think, under the RRSP, like my colleague for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi stated.

That provision already exists. The problem we have is there's basically a clash between the *Pension Benefits Act* and the *Income Tax Act* so that when an individual – and we're only talking about individuals here, it could be up to two people but generally an individual – when that person decides to retire and shut down their pension plan, under the current provisions there's a clash with the *Income Tax Act* and they end up having to basically pay themselves because we're only talking about the same person. All that's happening is they're saying that you should have – under the pension plan maybe you're underfunded by, I'm just going to say \$100,000. It could be \$200,000, it could be \$500,000, I don't know, but say \$100,000. The reason why it was underfunded is because under the *Income Tax Act* they weren't allowed to pay that \$100,000.

Now when they shut down their plan, there's \$100,000 that you owe. It makes no sense because all I'd be doing is just taking \$100,000, paying it into my own plan and then taking my own money back again. It just doesn't make any sense. That's the problem that's created under the act as it currently exists. All that's happening is that it's just recognizing that situation and fixing that situation so it doesn't happen again. That's what the bill is all about as I understand it and from the explanation I received. Based on that, I have no problem whatsoever in supporting the bill.

I will say this in fairness, that's not to say the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi is not making relevant points about the problem we

have with pension plans and the average person. We know how they have – we've seen situations. She gave some good examples where workers who had paid into a pension their whole life ended up getting shafted, to some degree, because of the system. I certainly agree with her there. I think we all should strive to lobby the federal government to change that.

I do agree with her, but while she's speaking in the spirit of it, and I agree with the spirit of it, really what this bill is about is what I just said. Based on the bill, based on what's written, based on what I understand of it, I will support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the opportunity to stand and have a few comments on Bill 5. I certainly did listen to the minister as she introduced the bill and went through the particulars in regard to the intent and some of the information that was received in regard to challenges with the current bill and what some of the provisions here in Bill 5 are all about. As my colleague from Cape St. Francis indicates, I'm sure when we get in Committee we'll have a further discussion specific to the parts of the bill.

The Pension Benefits Act, 1997 required plan sponsors to fully fund deficits for windup of a pension plan. Bill 5, the intent of that is to look at the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997* to exempt certain existing individual pension plans with two or fewer members or former members from the requirement in the act for pension plan sponsors to fully fund any deficits on windup of the plan if certain conditions are not met.

Now, I know when the minister talked about this she talked about some of the difference in regard to the employer-employee relationship with this smaller group. My understanding, and we'll probably talk about it more in Committee, is this is relevant to those that owned the actual small business. I am not sure if it's just something that's incorporated, would it be involved

proprietorship, partnership, and those kinds of set-ups. As we go through, we'll certainly have discussion about that as well.

She spoke to provisions of the bill that talks about those that are either married, cohabitate, have a partnership, and how any windup would affect those individuals. And some provisions are mentioned here in the bill in regard to some protection for that. Because as we know, someone, it could be a partner of an individual, who one individual could be involved in the business, it could be a director of an incorporated entity, others may not be aware that in some cases maybe the pension plan even exists.

So what transpires with the clue-up, with the sale of that business or with bankruptcy or a number of things that could occur. What protection is there for that individual or individuals who, as we know with small business, may not have participated directly, could have participated in some form, but still that fund and that benefit is for them and has been put aside and their expectation is they would avail of that at some time in the future as part of a pension plan.

That's certainly significant and relevant that we have a discussion on that and how that exactly is set up for those that may not be aware of it, for those that are aware of it, that full understanding is grasped by all concerned to make sure everybody's protected as we go through the process.

Just a little background in regard to the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*, it governs employer-sponsored pension plans and the minister referenced that when she spoke in regard to this particular bill and the *Pensions Act*. The objective of the act is to protect the accrued pension entitlement of plan members in the province, and to assure equitable treatment of all plan members. So the general principle of a pension benefit, you start out, you put aside in a registered pension plan, part of your employment; sometimes it can be contributory by the employer and the employee, whatever that basis; it's looking to the future to make sure at a time when you leave that employment you have a benefit, and maybe other benefits as well as you leave that place of employment.

Since 2008 the *Pension Benefits Act* has required plan sponsors to fully fund any deficits on windup of a pension plan. This is what we're talking about here today in regard to this bill. I think the minister indicated and in some of the briefing information there were about 50 cases of this where it exists. This bill specifically deals with those cases.

There are certainly different pension plans. The amendments outlined in Bill 5 apply only to certain existing individual pension plans, as I said, with two or few members or former members. The individual pension plan is a registered defined benefit pension plan designed to provide the maximum benefit permitted under the *Income Tax Act*. The minister has indicated some of the concerns or some of the relevancy to the current set-up and what it would mean in regard to Canadian tax law, how they intertwine and what the said results could be.

The pension plans are often set up by business owners, incorporated professionals and executives, it could be through financial specialists and advisors, to look at what the income would be at a point in time when you would leave the operations and go on and have a secondary income. There are also Registered Retirement Savings Plans when you look at deferred taxation; RRSPs are one registered means to do it today. I guess there is concern in regard to this particular instance in regard to whether this will be perceived as a tax shelter and how that money is protected from taxation under both provincial and federal taxation law.

We hadn't had any discussion before. We know recently the federal government has looked at small business legislation in regard to small business. I'm not sure if there's any relevance here in regard to how that's intertwined, if there are concerns here in regard to that. That is something we'll probably talk about in Committee.

Some of the moves that were made then – and I know there were concerns for small business in regard to infringement on their ability to save for that point in time in the future where they would retire and would have benefits available in the form of a pension. It could be monies in that incorporated entity at the point in time that would stay there. They could use that at a later

date to draw down when they sold their company, when the company was passed on to a family member, but they would have that to draw down on. So it's something we can certainly talk about when we get in Committee about if there's a connection to that as well.

We know in the discussions, the superintendent of pensions indicated – as I said, there are 50 more of these type of pension plans currently registered under the *Pension Benefits Act* in the province. The majority of these were set up somewhere around, prior to 2008. Approximately, 15 to 20 were set up since 2008.

As well, according to the superintendent, some have started to mature and issues have emerged. I guess that's why we're here today talking about Bill 5 related to the requirements in the *Pension Benefits Act* for these sponsored plans to fully fund the pensions plan upon wind up. I guess that's what we're talking about.

Under these plans, certain circumstances result in individuals being forced to potential bankruptcy, possibly, for their company in order to find their own pension plan upon windup. As you get to windup of the particular company, the unfunded pension plan – currently, my understanding is that deficit today, under the current legislation, would need to be met. That would be finding the dollars within that corporate entity or within that structure, within that business to meet that requirement.

According to the superintendent, there's certainly increased pressure to address the issue surrounding the requirement for the plan sponsors of the pension program to fully fund any deficits upon windup. He said his office received correspondence over the years concerning the issue. There are others who lobbied for changes that it would improve the ability of business owners to close out their financial affairs. Other financial consultants and planners have, as well, expressed interest in seeing the amendments outlined in Bill 5.

My understanding is the bill will come into effect in December of 2018. It would look at – from the taxation point of view in regard to when it would come in, it would be a full year then in terms of operation for a taxation year.

The department is not, as I said, bringing it in until 2018.

When we get into Committee, as I said, my colleague for Cape St. Francis talked about some of the questions we'd want to ask in regard to protection for those that are involved or involved in the business, corporate entity to make sure they're protected. I know the minister did talk about that, some of the provisions and definitions in the bill. We'll probably drill down a little bit on those to make sure that protection is there for those concerns.

Those are some of the thoughts as we go through in regard to the exact nature of why we're bringing this forward at this particular time, how those involved are protected, what the framework is going to look like going forward.

So it's an interesting bill. We're certainly looking forward to discussion in Committee. At that time we'll have some questions and we'll go from there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Service NL speaks now she will close the debate.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Members for their comments.

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

The motion is that Bill 5 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK (Murphy): A bill, An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997. (Bill 5)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 5)

MR. A. PARSONS: I thought you were going to recognize me, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: I don’t speak until you tell me to speak, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, okay.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 5.

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 for consideration of the said bill.

Is it the pleasure of the House that we adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Motion 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 5, An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997.” (Bill 5)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: It took you a long while to figure that one out, Mr. Chair. I can’t believe it.

Amendments requiring the pension sponsor to be fully funded any deficits or windup has been there since 2008, why are we introducing these amendments now?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, I think it’s in the best interests of the House that I kind of give an example of what’s going on here so people can get a clear understanding of why we’re doing this.

The individual pension plans are generally set up for owners or key executives of a company. Due to privacy legislation, Mr. Speaker, it would not be normally acceptable to name a specific company with an individual pension plan without their consent. I have arrived at that consent from Atlantic Home Furnishings Limited. They provided me with that consent to identify them.

This company, Atlantic Home Furnishings, is an established employer in the province. They presently have a number of employees in their Mount Pearl location. A prior owner of this company, Mr. Speaker, set up an individual pension plan as a means of savings for retirement; however, when the ownership changed, the individual pension plan became an obligation of the new owner of the company. The significant cost of this funding to the pension is a burden now to the new owner.

Instead of being able to invest in the company and into his employees, Mr. Speaker, the legislation as it exists today requires the

company now to invest in this pension plan. Even though the individual that owned the company prior consented for him not to do this, but the regulations – the legislation now requires him to do it.

We're here today, Mr. Speaker, to try to change the legislation to assist – there are 50 of these plans in the province, 15 since 2008. We're here today so we can allow small business owners the opportunity to invest in their business, to invest in the company, to employ individuals, and not to have this over their head that they would have to invest in a pension plan that the owner who owned the pension plan agreed they didn't have to do. That's the issue.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: What sort of consultations were done with any different groups about this pension plan?

CHAIR: The Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, we consulted with Kevin Dunphy. He's the financial advisor for the company that I just identified. We also consulted with the St. John's Board of Trade. They were clear that this was a good thing to do and it was needed to do because it was hindering the growth and the development of some of the businesses in the province.

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

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

I want to go back, actually, to the first question that the Member for Cape St. Francis asked and the minister's response to it. I'm really glad to know, Minister, that you have the example, but would you be able to give us more in the sense of, sort of, general areas of who the companies are? Are there retail companies, are there professional, are there doctors' companies, are there lawyers' companies – can you do that? That wouldn't be against privacy, I don't think.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, there are a variety of companies and, take note, it's only 50; however, the plans are for two or less people, not exactly the company. I gave the company example so you would understand that it was the owner himself that owned the pension that's required to be funded and he's agreed for it not to be funded.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I'm just wondering if there were any jurisdictional scans done on this and see what other jurisdictions are doing.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, Mr. Chair, there are variations in how these individual pension plans are treated across the country and most jurisdictions provide some form of exemption for the pension plans.

In our province, we have developed our own made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador approach. Actually, Mr. Chair, I do have a jurisdictional scan sheet here. It's quite lengthy. I don't know if the Member wants me to enter it or read it all out, or table it.

Table it, okay.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: I know the minister gave an example of a business that had a problem with this individual pension plan and the reason for it. But has there been other individuals come to you? You mentioned it could be a law firm; it could be a doctor's office. Has there been other individuals also come forward with this problem?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, the Board of Trade came forward on behalf of other companies and individuals.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if I could ask the minister under the definition of specified individual, there's reference to individuals connected at any time of the year with the employer who participates in the plan. Does that mean there's a one-year period where the connection to the plan is established and anything outside of that would be a disconnect as having a connection to the plan?

Someone could have interrupted service with a small business. It may not have been in the year prior to the plan winding up or the company being sold. So would they still have a right to the pension plan?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, it's two or less people who are in the agreement at the time. I think the Member opposite is asking me if there's a break in the period of time. Is that what you're asking? I'll have to get that answer for him.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Yes, so just to be clear the issue is – and it's in the definition here as specified individual. It talks about a year and the connection. There could be two people in a company, they may be owners, they may be shareholders, a minority shareholder. They could leave the company. They could come back. They could have different interactions.

The question is related to the one year. Does that disentitle them if there's interrupted service or they haven't been involved in a company actively in the year prior to this occurring – would they be discounted from a pension that originally was intended for them? I guess that's my question.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, I think if I give the definition of specified individuals it may, in fact, answer that question. Specified individual is an individual specified for the

purposes of paragraph 1(a) in respect to a pension plan in a particular calendar year if the individual was connected at any time in the year with an employer who participates in the plan.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Okay, just to be sure, so if that individual wasn't involved in the year with the employer, they wouldn't be entitled to the benefit?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, it's for ownership shares only.

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK (Barnes): Clauses 2 and 3.

CHAIR: Clauses 2 and 3.

Shall clauses 2 and 3 carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 and 3 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1997.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 5 without amendment?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 5.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 5.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise and report Bill 5 carried without amendment, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): The hon. the Chair of Committees, Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 5 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 5 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

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

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

I would call from the Order Paper Motion 10. I would move that the notwithstanding Standing Order 9(1)(a) this House meet at 2 p.m. on Thursday, May 3, 2018.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The motion is that the House meet at 2 p.m. on Thursday, May 3, 2018.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I certainly won't belabour this point, but this, I think, is obviously a very necessary motion to be moved here. To those that may be listening and wondering why we would make such a motion, normally on Thursdays this House meets at 1:30 p.m. to start regular proceedings. However, tomorrow is certainly a very special day in this province, where we have the installation of a new a Lieutenant-Governor in this province, Ms. Judy Foote.

That will be tomorrow in this House, actually. There are certainly some festivities planned, and the anticipation is that regular business may be delayed due to these ceremonies which are taking place. In order to ensure that there's no discrepancy here and that the House is not conflicted out, we'll say, what we're asking is that Members meet and this House open at 2 p.m. I think, obviously, it's going to be a big day for this province. There are a lot of positive things about the appointment of Ms. Foote to this position.

I might not get a chance to say so publicly, what I'd like to do before I sit down is just to take this opportunity publicly to thank the current Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Frank Fagan and his wife Patricia, their Honours, for the great that they've done over the last number of years for this province. I, like many in this House, have had a number of opportunities to be in their company and to be in their presence, and have heard many of their speeches. I have to say, they're a very warm couple, very giving, always willing to talk to people, to talk to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. So the service they've provided to Her Majesty, to our country and province, certainly they've gone above and beyond. In fact, I think his term is actually – he served a bit longer than perhaps anticipated in order to allow for this transition.

To those fine folks, I would say: Thank you for everything you've done and for allowing us to be in your presence.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: To Ms. Foote and to her husband, Howard, who will be sworn in tomorrow, I'm sure they're going to do a wonderful job for this country as well. We all know Ms. Foote's background in public service

to this province and to this country. I'm sure she'll carry that same record over in service to the country and province in this brand new role.

I look forward to tomorrow. I think it's going to be a very – it's a big day for this province and this country. I would be remiss if I didn't note that I do believe it will be our first female Lieutenant-Governor in this province, and that's a great milestone.

I thank the Prime Minister for his wonderful selection and I thank Ms. Foote who has already served a number of years in public service and taking on this new role. It says a lot about her commitment to the people here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the debate on this motion and hopefully seeing it passed and look forward to the installation tomorrow.

Thank you.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As well, I concur with the Minister of Justice and Public Safety in regard to this particular motion at 2 o'clock on Thursday for the installation of the new Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador.

My understanding is the regular orders, business of the day, will proceed that activity here in the House, which is indeed, as the minister said, a special day for the province as we have a changeover of Lieutenant-Governor.

I, as well, would like to acknowledge and thank the service of Frank and Patricia Fagan, their Honours, on the work they've done in their tenure. As an elected official in the province during that time, I've certainly seen the elegance and the presentation they have brought to the role as Lieutenant-Governor and their Honours and thank them for that and for their dedication.

As well, from the new installation of a new Lieutenant-Governor, we're going to see the first female Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as the Queen's

representative, as us as a member of the Commonwealth acknowledge that and look at it as a new age in terms of our province and acknowledge that and the Prime Minister on making that appointment with the blessing of the Queen.

Again, we certainly recognize this motion and we support it, and looking forward to Thursday and the ceremony here in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm happy the Government House Leader took a moment to explain what is happening tomorrow for those who are watching and to give us all an opportunity to recognize this special moment. I think it is most appropriate that we change our schedule in order to have the installation of the new Lieutenant-Governor in this House, and noting, along with my colleagues, that it is a very special day when we have the first female Lieutenant-Governor in our history and for some of us, somebody whom we sat with in this House, actually.

I am looking forward to that. I think it is – I mean this in a non-political sense – a red letter day. I realized as I went to say it.

The Lieutenant-Governor plays a special role with us here in the House. Albeit it's a formal role that the Lieutenant-Governor plays but it is part of our parliamentary system and it's something we all respect.

I'm proud to say as I stand here, that this actually will be the fourth Lieutenant-Governor that I will have been an MHA with. So this is significant for me at this point in time that it is a woman. We all should celebrate that.

Again, I join with my colleagues in thanking Frank and Patricia Fagan for the wonderful job they did while in that role.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 3, the Concurrence Motion.

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to –

MR. SPEAKER: I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LETTO: I'm speaking to the Resource Committee.

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

MR. LETTO: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to rise this morning to have a few words on Concurrence. I just want to talk a bit about the district that I represent and I want to thank the people of Labrador West for giving me this privilege to represent them in the House of Assembly, as all hon. Members do in this House, I'm sure.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of things said about the budget and some good, some not so good. I want to focus on an industry this morning that is a bright light for us – it has been for 60-or-more years, 100 years – and

that's mining. I think that is a great part of our future. We only scratched the surface, pardon the pun, on what mining can do and the contributions that it makes to our province.

Labrador West, as you know, is a big part of that. It's our *raison d'être*. We would not be there if it wasn't for the iron ore mines and the great riches of the Labrador Trough that exist within that region. It's fairly new in relative terms. Labrador City was established in the early 1960s and Wabush came along shortly thereafter. In relative terms to many communities in this province, Labrador City and Wabush are fairly new.

We built there because our pioneers and prospectors found a great resource in the region of the Labrador Trough and that's iron ore. Mr. Speaker, I just want to have a few words this morning on what this industry has done for the region of Labrador West and what it continues to do, and the prospects and the possibilities that exist within the region to make it an even stronger region for us.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that if we were to go on today's terms of what's happening exactly at this very moment, we would not be very prosperous because, right now, due to an unfortunate labour dispute, the production is at a standstill. This, too, will pass. We've had many, many of these interruptions since the 1960s. They're never good. They're never good for the workers. They're never good for the region. They're never good for the company.

Mr. Speaker, we have to respect the wishes of the people. When the union members voted they voted unanimously, I would consider, in the 90-plus range. You have to respect that. You have to respect their convictions, and I certainly do. That doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing. I have been very active as the MHA for the region in dealing with the union and the company to try to get this unfortunate stoppage resolved. It's in the best interests of everybody within the region, within the province and within the country.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to do that. Of course, back in 2014 we had the unfortunate incident of the stoppage and the shutdown of Wabush Mines. Again, I want to say that was most unfortunate and the region has suffered terribly

because of it. The people of Wabush have been certainly dealt a severe blow. When you talk about Wabush, I can't help but talk about the pensioners. The Member of the Third Party referred to them earlier in her conversations.

Mr. Speaker, when a group of people – when you work 30 or 40 years and you find out in your retirement that you're going to lose 25 per cent of your pension, that's never good news. You were there with me when we had to go to – it was my first task as an MHA, actually.

AN HON. MEMBER: Twice.

MR. LETTO: Twice. Yes, you were there.

My first task as an MHA was to go and explain to the members, to the pensioners, that their pension plan was being terminated. Mr. Speaker, that was not a very good evening. When you start off your rookie career as an MHA on that foot, you know that you're into the thick of it now.

Since then, we've been working with the pensioners. One of the things that we did as a government was referred the section of the pension act to the Newfoundland and Labrador Court of Appeal for an interpretation and a reference. We did get a very favourable reference from the Court of Appeal. Since then, we've been very active. I've been working with the lawyers, the company, the union members and the staff members to try to get some resolution to the loss of pensions that they've experienced.

I can honestly say, Mr. Speaker, we're making progress. It's taking forever, in their terms certainly, because that's 2014, so we're talking now four years later. It's a long, tedious process, but I think there is light at the end of the tunnel. We will see some resolution to what they've encountered. We hope that's going to happen very shortly.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at mining in general, it is a bright spot in our province, it is a bright spot for our future. When you look at *The Economy*, the book from our *Budget 2018*, you will see what mining really means to this province. It says the value of the Newfoundland and Labrador mineral shipments totalled an

estimated \$3.6 billion in 2017, representing an increase of 24.6 per cent from 2016.

Part of that, of course, is due to the commodity prices. The last two years we've seen a drastic drop in commodity prices, whether you're talking about oil, whether you're talking about iron ore, nickel – all the minerals and natural resources have taken a severe blow. We are seeing some rebound. It's not as fast as we'd like, but at least it's steady. Because of that, we are seeing renewed interest in the mining industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at some of the mines that exist within the Labrador West region – and I would start there – and Iron Ore Company, of course, despite the stoppage right now, the Iron Ore Company is a great contributor and it's the largest iron ore mine in the province and is the largest mine in the province.

AN HON. MEMBER: And the best iron ore.

MR. LETTO: And the best iron.

What the iron ore of the Labrador Trough has going for it, even though it has to be processed, but when it is processed it's some of the best quality in the world. It's the best quality in the world, and that's why it's in such demand, and that's why it continues to be a commodity on the world market that is in big demand. So we will get through this, and we'll get back to production, I'm sure.

IOC have big plans. As you know, this year they had the Wabush number 3 deposit approved, released from environmental assessment and that is a big part of the future of that mine. So what we see, that's already started to develop, and we hope to see some production from that by the third quarter of 2018.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I got to go back to Wabush. Since the closure of Wabush Mines, we've been working very closely with different companies to look for a new owner for Wabush. As you know, as the people of this province know, Tacora Resources is the new owner of Wabush Mines. We're in close contact with them pretty well on a daily basis. They have been released

from environmental assessment. So that's positive.

They are going through the procedures and the motions to raise the capital they would require to restart the mine. There's a lot of capital work that needs to be done. We hope to be there within the next couple of months and we will see, hopefully, the rebirth of Wabush Mines, which would be a tremendous, tremendous boost to the region of Labrador West, and to the province, because everyone benefits from such a development as that. I mean, you're looking at employing 250-300 people, maybe more, in a mine that's going to be there, hopefully, for the long haul.

Mr. Speaker, as well, because of the renewed interest in mining and the prices have been rebounded, a project that's been shelved for four or five years, as a result of the downturn, is Alderon. We've seen renewed interest from that group as well. Again, I'm keeping in close contact with them, helping them along the way and we have seen a great renewed interest and they've shown interest in restarting the Kami project to rebooting, they are called. Again, there's a lot of work to be done, absolutely, and there are a lot of things that have to come together in order for it to happen. But the fact that there is a renewed interest gives us hope for the future.

There's a mine that's just across the border into Quebec called Bloom Lake that's just restarted. That was shut down the same time as Wabush. The same company, actually, at the time, Cliffs Natural Resources, they were shut down. They've since been sold to Champion and they have begun production, so they have restarted.

You may question and people may question well, that's in Quebec. It is in Quebec, the mine itself is in Quebec. I can tell you, as I said in my last few words that I had, anything that happens on the border is a benefit to all of us. We have to remember that the Bloom Lake operating in Quebec across the border, the railway comes through Labrador, they are serviced by the industrial park in Wabush. There's a lot of work going on in the Wabush Industrial Park in relation to Bloom Lake. Mr. Speaker, what happens across the border is a benefit to everybody.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: We certainly are very pleased to see that train running across the overpass again because it didn't for four years. I tell you, people felt that effect too when Bloom Lake shut down. It's not until you lose something do you realize the benefit that it has.

Mr. Speaker, things are looking positive and we have to get beyond the doom and gloom. We know we had a couple of rough years but there is a bright future for all of us. What happens in Labrador West is good for province, is good for the country, and that's what we have to remember is that we all benefit from renewed interest in the mining industry.

Mr. Speaker, in March I attended the PDAC, which is the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada, and I can tell you we have prospectors in this province, not only in Labrador but on the Island of the province, that have some very good stakes and claims that they've been optioned to junior mining companies, and we saw that at PDAC.

I have a prospector in my district who's partnered with a prospector from the Island. I won't say their names, but they've been very successful. They just optioned off a property on the Great Northern Peninsula, a sink property on the Great Northern Peninsula that could possibly develop into a mine, because that's where mines start. They have to start with a prospect, and prospectors are the root and they're the beginning of any mining development. It has to start. Just look at Voisey's Bay, for instance. It started because two prospectors found a nickel deposit that was the richest in the world, Al Chislett and Christopher Verbiski, and we all know where that went.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of Vale, the ovoid is getting mined but we're still very hopefully that Vale will see the ways and means to go underground into the eastern deeps and to extend the life of that mine for the next 20, 30 years. That's very important to my friend, the Member for Torngat Mountains, and the people of Nunatsiavut. Again, it's a mine that has fingers everywhere.

Long Harbour, for instance. The smelter in Long Harbour is there to smelt the ore from Voisey's. Mining has it's fingers everywhere and its tentacles everywhere. It just doesn't benefit the particular region the mine is in. It has far-reaching effects.

Mr. Speaker, I can't get up and talk about mining, of course, without talking about my good friend from Baie Verte - Green Bay. We know that area is doing very well. That region is doing very well in its gold deposits. We know there's lots of gold there to mine yet. We have to be optimistic and we are optimistic that Anaconda, Rambler, these are going to do well. These are going to do well, and it's good for the province.

Then, of course, we go down to the Burin Peninsula –

AN HON. MEMBER: St. Lawrence.

MR. LETTO: – in the great Town of St. Lawrence, the fluorspar. They are in their infancy stage of putting the production in place and we will see production from there, sooner rather than later.

Again, Mr. Speaker, that's a mine that's been dormant for years. We, as a government, were very happy to invest in that with a \$17 million loan to help them develop that new mining prospect, and it's something that's going to benefit all of us again.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about mining, of course, I go back to the prospectors and developers. We're seeing more claims than ever in the mining industry, not only in Labrador. Labrador is doing very well. We look down on the South Coast of Labrador, of course, the Search Minerals, the Rare Earth – my friend in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair – that's now going through an environmental assessment process. Mr. Speaker, who knows where that could go.

Rare Earth is the way of the future when you look at all the technology that's taking place today and the electric cars and everything is all developing. You have one, Mr. Speaker, you know. You may have Rare Earth operating in your car, I don't know. Anyway, it's something that's going to be in big demand for the future.

That's what we have to do, Mr. Speaker. What happened in the past, what happened in the last two years, we can't forget it because it's been very bad for our province. We understand that, but we have to get beyond that now. We have to put that behind us. We've dealt with it. Now let's look to the future because the future is very bright.

I'm just concentrating on mining because that's where I spent my career. I love the industry. I think it has great potential. I follow it every day.

The first thing I do when I get up in the morning is check the iron ore prices. So it's something that's near and dear to my heart. It's near and dear to the district I represent. It's very important for our province, very important, whether it's on the Burin Peninsula, whether it's the Great Northern Peninsula, whether it's the Baie Verte Peninsula, whether it's Labrador, the South Coast, the North Coast, West, East, it affects everybody. We all have a part to play in that. It's a great boost to our economy. It creates jobs, lot of jobs. It's high-paying jobs. It creates lots of expertise. It creates lots of royalties. It creates lots of taxes.

The supply sector, the spinoff industry; there's probably no other industry in the world that has a bigger spinoff industry than mining does because you need parts every day, whether it's a piece for a tractor, whether it's a piece for a filter, whether it's inflatable tents. There are so many moving parts in the mining industry that the service industry is huge, not only in parts but in the expertise, the technical part of it.

Mr. Speaker, this government, our government, is committed to the mining industry because we see the benefit in the mining industry. We see how beneficial it is to our province, and that's what we have to start believing in, Mr. Speaker, because it's not only for the one region where the mine is, it's for everybody. It's good for the province, it's good for the company.

We have to get beyond the doom and gloom that people are leaving in droves and the sky is falling. Mr. Speaker, there's so much potential in the mining industry that for anybody who understands it, we've only scratched the service, as I said. The future is so bright for mining.

Prices will rebound. The commodity prices will become stable again.

It's a very cyclical industry, Mr. Speaker. We know that. It has its ups and downs, its peaks and valleys, but I tell you what. We have to be ready for the peaks and we have to be ready for the valleys because they are going to happen again. As a matter of fact, the point I'm trying to make is we have to be ready for both, Mr. Speaker, and mining is a bright part of our future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

It's indeed a privilege to get up here again today and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful people in Cape St. Francis.

I want to thank the former Member who just got up there. He did a Member's statement a little while ago on a resident from the Town of Flatrock. I heard a lot of residents want to make sure that I said thank you to him. It was Gord Parsons. He was a resident and had a big family in Flatrock. I'm not sure, I think there was like 19 of them in the family all together; a big family. I live very close to them. I knew Gord personally. He was a fine gentleman and you did a great job on the Member's statement.

AN HON. MEMBER: Great last name.

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, great last name. You did a fine job, and I know the family really appreciated what you did, so I just want to say thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, today we're going to be talking about, and I am going to try to stick my best to it, is the resource sector. What we're looking at in this sector is there are different parts of Estimates that we did. I did Estimates on the fishery part but there's also Advanced

Education, Skills and Labour. There are Fisheries and Land Resources, Natural Resources and Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

Now, I'm going to try to touch on a little bit of all of them in my time that I have here this morning. Mr. Speaker, this side of the House and our party has never looked at the sky falling. We've never looked at this as, oh, she's gone b'y, she's gone type thing. I go back to a few years when I heard – I think it was at dinner, not the Premier at the time but the leader of the Opposition described Newfoundland as the least, the last and the lowest. I don't think we've ever, on our side, or our party has ever considered Newfoundland the least, the last and the lowest.

To that day, I'll always remember those statements because what we need in society, we need people to be optimistic and we need people to believe in what we have in our province, and we need to believe in who we are as people. That's the one thing I can really say that's changed in society in Newfoundland and Labrador, and I'm going to give you a little example now before I start to go into the resource area.

I can remember before, when I was working in the industry I was working in, I used to do a lot of training. I remember in the '90s and in the '80 that I was training, we'd go to, it could be Toronto, it could be Halifax, all over Canada. Do you know something? The attitude that was in other parts of Canada about Newfoundland and Labradorians was disgusting. In the 2000s and the later couple of years, it changed because we changed it. We, as a people, changed it. We, as a government, changed the attitude that people had toward us. We were the brightest, we were the newest province and we were the most exciting province in Canada.

Everywhere you'd go, they talked about what we were doing in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what we have to continue to do. That's what we have to show people around the world, in other parts of Canada, that this a great province. It's a great province to invest in.

I know I had a brother of mine that worked all over the world and he always used to tell me that the name Newfoundlander and Labradorian,

once it went to the workforce, people knew that they were getting great workers because we were known around the world for our ethic of how we worked, hard workers and great individuals. That's who we are as people, so we always have to stay on the positive side. There's no sky falling in Newfoundland and Labrador. As long as our people are here, we're going to be rich because we have the richest thing in the world: the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to just start talking today – I'm definitely going to get into the fishery, but I want to touch on natural resources. I know the Member just before me spoke a lot about mining. I do a lot of hunting in Central Newfoundland; it's around Millertown, in that area. Costigan Lake is where we have a place. I love it. I'll have a trip up this summer and I'll have another trip this fall. We have a cabin up there. It's a beautiful part of this country. It's just amazing.

There's a lot of activity on the go up there too with mining and stuff like that, and it's amazing to watch it. Like the Member before me said, what happens is the spinoffs, the road construction. You go up one year and you're in towards Valentine Lake – a lake they're doing up there now. There's mining actually right under the lake. I think it's gold they're looking for. They're doing it right underneath the lake.

The road going in there now is as good as the Trans-Canada. From the main road going up through to go into Valentine Lake, it's 24 kilometres. It opened up the whole country forest and stuff like that. And just to see the number of people – it's amazing, last year, when I went up. There were all these young, I guess, university students that were there. They were doing some kind of course. There were young people there and they had all the core – it's amazing when you look at this because what they do, I guess, they drill into the rock and they haul out this core. It's about two inches around and they take it out. It doesn't look like there's any gold there, at least I didn't see it shining or anything like that, but it was amazing how these young students were in and the spinoff that our mining resource does. It is huge.

We are very rich. I know the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, the mining is huge in his area, but in the Central area also it's huge. Mining is very important. That's something that we have to work on. That's one industry that we can because we're very rich – if you look how Voisey's Bay was discovered, it was just a fly over in a helicopter, I do believe, and look down and saw okay, that looks a little bit different, here we go. Our mining and our natural resources are very important to our province. That's who we are. We are a province with huge natural resources.

I look to the offshore also. I look at the offshore and I know, over the years, I've had a lot of good friends, a lot of good buddies of mine, that was their livelihood and they're still at it today, going back and forth to Hibernia.

I can remember the day the Ocean Ranger went down actually. It was a hard day for my family because at the time my brother was out on the Sedco 706. We heard that morning. I can remember exactly where I was; I was going up Hamilton Avenue when I heard there was a rig in trouble offshore. I can remember hauling in, listening to it and concerned about what would happen to my family.

Offshore oil has been around a long, long while for people in the province and it's done great for some people in our province. It's been an industry that – not only the wealth, what oil comes out of the ground and what it does to our province but it's the people that work there. It takes a special individual too to be able to fly out there three weeks at a time and come back in three weeks at a time.

I've seen a lot of people with young families and basically you are six months away from your family. It's not easy. It's the same thing as going to Alberta or whatever, but our offshore oil industry has brought wealth to our province and has helped all areas of our province. You can have people from Grand Bank or you can have people from the Northern Peninsula, you can have anyone. There's a lot of employment after being created. Again, like the former Member said it's the spinoffs that these industries that bring the wealth to our province, gives us employment and stuff like that.

Our natural resources are so important to us and it's so important that we manage them correctly and we do what we can to ensure we take full advantage of what we have to offer. We have to make sure that our environment and everything else is taken care of too, whether it's our fishery or whether you are in Central Newfoundland mining at Valentine Lake, Pats Pond, or one of these places. Once you go in there and see the environment I'm sure that if everyone in the country could come and see what I see when I go to Millertown, they'd all want to go up there and see the caribou, the moose, the bears and everything else that I've seen, because it's absolutely beautiful.

That's one part of our Resource Committee. It's very important. It's huge to this province the income that it brings. Next I'm going to talk about the fishery, and I know I'll end up going back to the other two because I think I'm going to end up almost taking up the rest of my time in the fishery.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of talk today about cod fish and whether the food fishery should be going or if there should be a food fishery or should not be a food fishery. I believe there should be a food fishery. I really do believe there should be a food fishery, and I partake in it. I have my own boat and I enjoy, absolutely love being on the water. To me, and I know there are other Members across the way, the Minister of Finance, we've talked about it before, about being out catching a cod, different sides, and the feeling you get just to be able to go out and catch a codfish and the feeling you get when you bring it in and you fillet it or you take it and whatever you want to do. If you have a boil up in the garage or you have a boil up here and what it does, because it makes you feel like: that's our resource. It's a resource we have. Again, it's something that I think everyone who partakes in it enjoys it.

I can always remember, a good few years ago there was no food fishery. Actually, the moratorium wasn't even on. I had an instructor come from Montreal down to teach a course. He came out one evening with me and I took him out cod jigging. About 10 years after he told me it was the greatest trip he ever had in his life. He couldn't believe – he was used to catching something about six inches long and here we

were out catching fish 24, 26, 30 inches. Real nice cod and he was just blown away that we had this resource right on our shore that we could just get in a boat and go out and catch it.

The cod fishery is a huge part of who we are to people. I'd like to see more studies done on the cod. I believe that science and things have changed. We always looked at the cod fishery that the capelin would come first. In the last number of years, I have a big concern with capelin. I have a huge concern with the capelin fishery.

I trucked capelin for years. We'd start in St. Mary's Bay and we'd come to Conception Bay. We'd go right around, and that's what I did for the summer. I used to take time off work where I was and we'd catch capelin. I saw capelin seven, eight inches long, nice size capelin, lots of females. They were there. They'd come in – the seine would go out and we'd get 50,000 in the seine.

Last year, I saw capelin down in Middle Cove Beach that was three and four inches long. We have an issue with capelin. We need to do more science on capelin. Capelin is a food that cod will eat. Capelin is something that attracts cod. The reason why I believe the cod was so late coming last year is because capelin was so late coming. They follow it. That's like anything, if that's what you eat that's what you're going to follow. I believe we really need to have a proper science on everything.

Now last year in the cod fishery, we never saw it down our way before, that you'd catch cod in October and November. For the last three or four years now harvesters down our way have been out fishing, and it's rough. I'm telling you right now, I watched the boys come in last year, to see them coming in a 26-foot rodney in seas like you wouldn't believe. I couldn't believe they were out there at it, but they're diehards. The fish they were catching last October and November was never seen before.

There was a change in what's happening. I think people need to look, science and what we have, DFO need to do a bigger evaluation on what's happening with these different stocks. The capelin stock is something that really needs to be looked at because it seems like every year

they're getting less and less and we need to make sure because that's the food the cod likes to eat.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the shrimp fishery, especially in Area 6. I talked to a couple of harvesters here in here in St. John's actually, only a little while ago. I go over every Saturday morning, over to the basin over in Prosser's Rock. I know a good few of the people over there and I have a chat with them and stuff like that. Right now, the shrimp fishery is not worth their while to go and harvest shrimp.

Last year, they had the buddy up where they could put two licences on a boat. I think this year it's changed again, that they can put three or four. I know myself and the Member for Cape Freels talked about it the other day. The whole area, Area 6, is a huge issue. That's where most of our inshore shrimp is caught. Now, the offshore are still in Area 6 and they also have options for 5 and 4 to go a little bit further North and catch some, but we have some serious issues there in that fishery.

Right now, in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there are eight shrimp plants. These are eight communities that rely on these plants for their employment, for their communities to survive. Like we talked about the mining, there are a lot of spinoffs from those areas.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk a little bit about the crab. Just yesterday, my son left at 10 o'clock in the morning. They went off 80 miles, dropped their pots and they got in again at about 11 o'clock last night. So they were gone for 24 hours. They'll go back again.

The mid-shore crab seems like it's not bad. It's as good or on par with what it was with other years. Offshore, further out, the 200-mile stuff, that seems pretty good, but inshore has a real issue. It's a concern because there are lot of spinoffs on the inshore. There are a lot more harvesters inshore than there are mid-shore and offshore.

On Saturday, over in Prosser's Rock, I saw boats come in with 1,200 pounds, 700 pounds, 1,400 pounds. These boats usually came in with, this time last year, 3,000 and 4,000 pounds. So that

has a spinoff effect too in what's happening with the plants and stuff like that.

I believe we need to really – I know that DFO, we're just a little small part of DFO here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I brought a motion to this House last December on joint management. It's time for our province and it's time for the people in our province to have some say in our fishery. That's how we're going to get it. I don't care if it's an all-party committee or what it is. I know we have the Atlantic Accord for our offshore. We should have some accord with our fishery so we get a say in our fishery because it's who we are, it's what we are as people and we really need to manage our stocks.

I just mentioned a couple that are a huge concern of mine. I know that proper management and input from people that are on the water, input from people that know a little bit about the industry is needed. We need to do more. We need to do a whole lot more because I know it's not the industry it was. It's not the industry it was where there were fish plants in every second community, we know that.

It's so important that – while harvesters will catch the crab and while they'll do something with shrimp, but there are a lot of communities in this province that rely on that fish plant that's in that community, and not only that community. It could be on the Baie Verte Peninsula. It could be down in Fogo. It could be on the Bonavista Peninsula. It could be anywhere at all. That's where we need to be, but we all have to work together on that.

Mr. Speaker, I've got three or four other things marked down. I wanted just to mention about the surf clams. I'm really disappointed in what happened with allocation of quota for surf clams. I think there were a couple of good proposals made by companies here with Aboriginal groups with them, and I think it should have stayed in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think most people in this province agree with me that the 25 per cent we're going to lose should be here and should be harvested in Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, I think that's something we should all work together and make sure.

The last thing I want to mention – and I know I had conversations with both Members for Baie Verte - Green Bay and the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels. We had a great conversation the other day, and it was on the seals. I got up the last time – it wasn't the last time, the time before I got up, and I think I spoke about 15 minutes on seals.

Mr. Speaker, we need to do something. I know back in 2011 there was real close, we were so close to striking a deal with China that would have made a huge difference in our sealing and the market itself. Listen, there's no doubt about it, the market for seals has been cut like you wouldn't believe with the European, American and different markets, but the Chinese market is a place where we can be. There is so much of seal that we can use.

Mr. Speaker, we have a country that's out there, and we're known around the world to be one of the best countries in the world that when we see a crisis anywhere where there's starvation or anything at all in this world that we step up and we take care of people. I can think no better way of stepping up and being a leader in the world and donating food to countries.

We have 20 million people a day that are starving in this world of ours, and what a better – the leader of the Opposition asked me today if I'd go to a dinner up in Topsail. The Topsail church are having a seal flipper dinner and I said I'll definitely be there because I love eating seal –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: You're going too; good for you.

There are other things – omega-3, the oil that's coming from them. There are markets out there. We just have to work – the federal government has to come through for the people in this province.

Seals, just to let you know, are eating a lot of our fish. We say there's 7.4 million – DFO's estimate now; it could be a lot higher – harp seals that are here off Newfoundland and Labrador right now. Estimates show that 7.4 million harp seals in six days will eat the total

amount of catch that we have in all our fisheries, whether it's shrimp, crab, cod, you name it. It will take care of it in six days.

That's a huge problem. I think that us, as a province, and us, as people in this Legislature, should be getting together and demanding that Ottawa step up because the seals are the reason, I believe, that our fishery is in the state it is today and I think –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: I really believe –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: I really believe it's something we can do something about.

I think all of us working together – and like I said, I spoke to my two colleagues across the way and we agree that something needs to be done.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member on his comments, the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis who just finished. We did have a wonderful conversation and I'll refer to that a little bit later in my notes as well.

I guess before we get started, I always want to say thank you to my District of Baie Verte - Green Bay for giving me the wonderful opportunity to represent them here in this time-honoured building that we're in, known as the House of Assembly. It's always a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to represent the good people there as well.

Just a short while ago, the Government House Leader, as well as Members from the Opposition ranks, got up to thank the outgoing Lieutenant-

Governor, Frank and Patricia Fagan. I do want to thank them as well at this particular point in time. They've been wonderful ambassadors in their roles as Lieutenant-Governor. I certainly want to thank them for all that they've done for us here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to congratulate and welcome our newest Lieutenant-Governor to be sworn in tomorrow, the hon. Judy Foote, and her husband as well and family, and wish her all the successes. I'm sure she will make us proud as well.

It gives me pleasure to stand and speak to Concurrence. I had the opportunity to sit on two committees. I had the opportunity to chair the Resource Committee. This year, I sat on the Social Services Committee as well. I thank my hon. colleagues for giving me that opportunity as well.

While I spoke to the Resource Committee just a couple of days ago, the Resource Committee represents the Departments of Fisheries and Land Resources; Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation; the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour; and last, but not least, the Department of Natural Resources.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to thank the Members: the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port; the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, who's sharing the seat with me this morning; the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; the Member for Exploits; the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; the Member for Mount Pearl North; and the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

Again, Mr. Speaker, those meetings of the Estimates would have never have taken place without the help and guidance of our Table Officers, the Broadcast Centre, our wonderful Pages who continuously do a good job from day to day and the ministers and their departments. The last time I rose to speak to the budget, I talked about the role of Estimates and the wonderful education that it is. It really is, Mr. Speaker, when you get an opportunity to sit down and look at the budgets, what was budgeted last year, what was spent and obviously what the budget speaks to this year.

Members of the Committee and, in particular, the Official Opposition and Third Party and our independent Member had the opportunity to go line by line and discuss the budgets of that particular department. I have to take my hat off to both those committees and the departments that were represented in both those committees this year. The ministers went above and beyond to speak to any question that was asked of them in the three hours that we did have for each committee.

In particular, take for instance the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, I know that we didn't ourselves finished on time and, cordially, he gave the Committee extra time to make sure that they asked the questions that were pertinent to this year's Estimates. I know they appreciate it as well. Mr. Speaker, my hat is off to both those committees that I had the opportunity to represent.

Mr. Speaker, when I spoke to the budget the other day, I sort of finished off, I was speaking to some highlights in my district, or highlighting opportunities provided by this year's budget in my district, but I just want to take a few minutes to discuss – I think, first of all, I'll talk about this year's ice conditions. I know last year with the ice conditions that we had along the Northeast Coast, which is where my district falls into – and you've all often heard me say before I did have 42 communities in my district, of which 41 of them are touched by the salt water. The community of Sheppardville is the only community in my district that doesn't touch the salt water.

As you know, fishery and aquaculture are huge in my area. Last year I remember, in particular, the port of La Scie. La Scie used to be the home of a national sea plant. They were processing many species at that particular point in time and 100 per cent employment in the community of La Scie. Actually, they had to go out to outlying communities to fill their employment needs.

Today, Mr. Speaker, it's probably one of the largest longliner ports in the province and probably one of the largest offloading ports in Newfoundland as well. I know last year, again with the ice conditions, we saw that port practically shut down until well into mid-season and it was devastating. It was devastating for

that whole part of that Baie Verte Peninsula because in a good year, we have – and you've heard me say that here in the House of Assembly before as well – anywhere upwards to \$350 million to \$450 million of seafood that travels up over the La Scie highway, up over the Baie Verte highway and on to plants throughout the Island.

It goes without saying that it was a huge downfall in that part of my district last year, but things are looking good. I wish the crab and the shrimp were looking just a good, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately that is not so. Hopefully, the harvesters will get an opportunity at least to fill their quotas.

I want to talk about the aquaculture industry for a bit. We had the opportunity last year to host an aquaculture summit in the area of the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune and certainly in my area of Green Bay. It was an opportunity for me to highlight to my colleagues that part of my district, especially in Green Bay South.

We have two harvesters in Green Bay South, Sunrise sea farms which is operated by the Halfyard family and Badger Bay Mussel Farms which is operated by the Roberts family out of Triton. I can't forget the mussel farms in Shoal Arm which are operated by the Simms family out of Little Bay.

I shared with some of my colleagues yesterday a picture that was on Facebook of the mussels. It was low tide in Little Bay Islands. For those of you who saw those pictures yesterday, it was absolutely amazing the amount of mussels that had come to shore.

It's just a wonderful industry, Mr. Speaker. I certainly want to highlight that. There are lots of jobs that are created by that industry. I know in *The Way Forward* document we are hoping to grow that industry to 8.3 million metric tons, and certainly we want to be a huge part of that.

I can't leave the aquaculture industry, Mr. Speaker, without talking about a post-secondary plant that I had the opportunity to visit in Triton. I spoke with the owner, Mr. Jason Roberts, maybe just a short while after I got elected, maybe sometime in mid-2016. He took me down

to a plant that had never operated and told me of his plans.

At that time, I spoke with the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources and had the opportunity actually to bring the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation to that part of my district, as I did the Minister of Municipal Affairs had the opportunity to go down and visit that plant as well.

I'd like to announce today the plant is up and running, doing an absolutely fabulous job. I did bring in some product for my colleagues here in the House of Assembly to share. There are some colleagues, Mr. Speaker, that are still waiting for their product. They know I have it readily available for them to sample, and sample they will: three types of mussels that they are processing out of that plant, and bottling as well. We have mussels in garlic and vinegar, mussels in vinegar and a mussel salad.

They have 18 to 20 people working in that plant now. They have picked up a contract with Sobeys enterprises. Just a little while ago, Mr. Roberts reported that he's picked up a huge contract in Quebec as well. Things are looking up for the mussel industry in that part of my District of Baie Verte – Green Bay, certainly in the Green Bay South, Green Bay North area.

Mr. Speaker, I only have a few minutes left and I want to touch on the Member for Cape St. Francis, my good friend, on the seal fishery. I want to talk about – I have an advocate of the seal fishery as a constituent in my district. I keep reminding him he's forgotten more about the fishery than I'll ever know, and that's Captain Wilfred Bartlett. Those of you who know Captain Wilfred Bartlett will know his passion for the fishery. It goes without question, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Bartlett is – I don't know if he'd like for me to say his age, but I can tell you that he's not 79 anymore, nor is he 80.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, he's a man who I have a deep respect for, especially his opinions around the fishery. I shared some of those comments with the Member for Cape St. Francis and the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels. We had a wonderful conversation. I, too, agree with the Member for Cape St. Francis. We've got way too many seals. I think we have a cull of a total

of probably half a million animals this year. Mr. Speaker, we won't take 100,000 animals. We're not hurting the industry. I mean, the industry is actually hurting us when you look at what it does to our groundfish industry.

We have a plant, Mr. Speaker, probably one of only a few plants. I think there's one in the Member for Bonavista, in his district as well, but one of the only few plants in Fleur de Lys as well. It's a busy plant when there are animals that are harvested. Again, I agree with my friend with regard to his comments on we have an abundance of seals.

We have people all over the world that, as a country of Canada and Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we're very generous to with our support and our giving to these countries that are less fortunate than what we are. Mr. Speaker, I see no reason why we shouldn't be harvesting an animal that is depleting our stocks to help people all around the world. I agree with his sentiments on that as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk briefly on the forest industry of which my district for centuries – I come from an area that has harvested wood for hundreds of years. My own family's business, we were probably one of Bowater's largest contractors for many, many years. I want to talk about a business in my district, Arthur Fowlow Limited from South Brook that received notice just two or three weeks ago with regard to the anti-dumping tariffs that are being put on Canadian companies from the US government and –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. WARR: I will take my time, Sir – from the US government and, Mr. Speaker, it's caused the demise of a company in my district – one that was just recognized a few short years ago as contractor of the year for the Kruger plant in Corner Brook and today they find themselves out of business.

I understand somewhat the decisions behind the Kruger company, but it was unfortunate that those decisions weren't spread out over the three or four major contractors that they have. Right now, we're going to have maybe 24 to 30 people

without employment. Some of those other workers have found employment through the bumping system, I guess, in their unions.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, I continue to work with the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, I have brought my concerns to the Premier as well and, hopefully, we'll see a light at the end of the tunnel with regard to that.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that I get an opportunity to speak to this again. Like I said, I want to thank again my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to sit on those two committees. I appreciate the comments from my good friend from the lovely District of Cape St. Francis.

With that, I will take my seat and ask for the opportunity at a later time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I would adjourn debate on the Concurrence Motion that we were just debating.

At this time, I would suggest we recess, but prior to doing so, I just to put on the record for posterity, I'd like to wish a very happy birthday to the Member for Bonavista today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: In accordance with Standing Order 9, this House is in recess until 2 o'clock this afternoon.

And Happy Birthday!

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

In the Speaker's galley today, I would like to welcome Ms. Sarah Lewis, who will be mentioned in a Member's statement this afternoon. Sarah is joined by her parents, Tracey Shave and Peter Lewis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I would also like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery and recognize members of the Avalon Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. With us today we have Cindy Clouston, Peter Clouston, Heather Mercer, Zita Kavanagh-Taylor, who is the Multiple Sclerosis Avalon Chapter Chair, and a very special guest, we have Buffy, who is a loyal service dog belonging to Ms. Mercer. Buffy also acts at the society's mascot.

Welcome to you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we will hear four statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Burin - Grand Bank, Bonavista, Cape St. Francis and St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again the month of May is upon us, and with it, its annual and eternal offer of hope.

With hope being the central theme of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, it is fitting that May be designated as MS Awareness Month, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday was a very busy day. I had the pleasure of joining members of the Avalon Chapter of the MS Society for the signing of the proclamation, a flag-raising ceremony to mark the commencement of this year's MS Awareness Month, and the annual light up of the Confederation Building in commemoration of this worthy cause.

I was pleased to have been joined by Zita Kavanagh, Cindy Clouston, Heather Mercer and the chapter's mascot, the petite and adorable service dog, Buffy, who are all here in the gallery with us today.

There are hundreds of individuals suffering from MS, Mr. Speaker, here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but those are not individuals living without hope. I too am hopeful one day a cure will be found.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in thanking Zita Kavanagh and the Avalon Chapter for their efforts in helping eradicate this terrible disease.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista.

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, April 22, I was honoured to attend the CLB Trinity - Conception Battalion's spring parade and church service. The Trinity East - Port Rexton Company hosted the event and were joined by companies from St. George's, Harbour Grace - Carbonear, Upper Island Cove, Bay Roberts, the Battalion youth band, the CLB Regimental Band, RCSCC Clode Sound and local guiding units.

Under the command of Major Wayne Lilly, the parade marched from Bishop White School to Christ Anglican Church in Port Rexton. The service was presided over by Rev. John Nicolle with a wonderful homily provided by Bishop John Waddon. One of the highlights of the service was when the jam-packed church was educated on the different uniforms of the CLB by both the young members and officers.

Many honours and awards were presented, recognizing the hard work and dedication of those who serve this wonderful organization. Congratulations have to be given to 2nd Lieutenant Michael Cooper who became the new Commanding Officer of the Trinity East - Port Rexton Company.

Please join me in congratulating the Trinity - Conception Battalion, and wish them many more years of: Fighting the Good Fight. Keep the Flag Flying.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Sarah and Nicole Power, two young women – cousins actually – from Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove who are making their mark on the Canadian acting scene.

Mr. Speaker, Sarah attended Ryerson University's Theatre School and landed roles in many successful Canadian films and television series such as *Random Passage*, *Rosewood*, *The Good Witch*, *Schitt's Creek* and the *Killjoys*.

Nicole is a graduate of Sheridan College's Musical Theatre Program as well as Second City Conservatory. She also performed across the country in roles in productions of *West Side Story*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Legally Blonde*, *Evangeline* and *Anne of Green Gables*. Nicole is currently playing a role as Shannon Ross on the hit series *Kim's Convenience* and was nominated for a 2018 Canadian Screen Award.

Mr. Speaker, Sarah and Nicole Power are excellent representatives of the amazing talent our province has to offer. I know they're shining starts of their parents Sylvester and Eunice, and James and Chris Power, and also to their grandparents and their entire families.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating these young women on their achievements and wishing them continued success in their acting careers.

Thank you.

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'm delighted today to congratulate Sarah Lewis, a grade 11 student at St. Bonaventure's College, who was recently awarded the Lester B. Pearson scholarship to attend the prestigious Pearson College in Victoria, BC.

Sarah was chosen for the award due to her excellence in a broad range of academic and extracurricular, community involvement and athletic achievements. Sarah is a President's Honour student at St. Bon's and holds a 92 per cent average. Sarah is also the president of the St. Bon's Social Justice Club and competes provincially in debating.

Sarah is an avid runner and won the provincial gold for cross running in 2017. She also plays competitive soccer and was the youngest member of the 2017 Women's Canada Games soccer team.

The Pearson College United World College is a part of 17 schools worldwide that create a global framework for learning. The Lester B. Pearson scholarship will allow Sarah to attend the school for two years of pre-university study in the International Baccalaureate Program at Pearson.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Sarah Lewis on her academic achievements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate two members of the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities on being invested into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador. Earlier this year, advisory council member Katarina Roxon and Chair Marie Ryan

were among the recipients who received our province's highest honour from the Lieutenant-Governor.

The Order of Newfoundland and Labrador recognizes individuals who have demonstrated excellence and achievement in any field of endeavour which benefits our province and its residents in an outstanding manner. Both Katarina Roxon and Marie Ryan certainly meet this description.

Marie Ryan is a long-time advocate for social justice and inclusion and has worked at the local, regional, provincial and national levels with organizations of persons with disabilities.

Katarina Roxon has won multiple medals in national and international swimming competitions, including a gold medal at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio, Brazil. She is also an ambassador for Para swimming and for Para sport, addressing youth and adults on the importance of sport for healthy living. Katarina is the youngest person to ever be invested into the Order.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I greatly value the contributions of Ms. Ryan and Ms. Roxon to the Provincial Advisory Council, and I am thrilled that their outstanding contributions to make our province more inclusive have been recognized in this very prestigious manner.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Marie Ryan and Katarina Roxon on being invested into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. On behalf of the Official Opposition, I also offer my congratulations to Katarina Roxon and Marie Ryan. Being awarded to the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador is the

highest honour within this province. It is reserved for individuals who truly excel in their area, whether it be academia, public service or, as in the stories of these two passionate individuals, the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I thank both Ms. Roxon and Ms. Ryan for their involvement on the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and encourage them to continue their advocacy efforts.

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, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. I'm delighted to stand and congratulate Marie Ryan and Katarina Roxon for being invested into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador, and was delighted to be there that day.

Each of them has contributed greatly towards making our communities and our society more inclusive. Obviously, the Provincial Advisory Council benefits very much from their participation. I also commend the Advisory Council and the minister for its hard work over the years for improvements to the *Buildings Accessibility Act* and for disability rights legislation in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to recognize steps being taken in response to the recommendations of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes.

The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador have informed the 40 schools that have been selected province wide to participate in the Phase 1 implementation of the task force recommendations, including a new Student Support Services Model.

Mr. Speaker, the school districts collaborated with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to determine the 40 schools across the province that will be part of this implementation, with consideration given to a fair balance based on demographics that included regional distribution and school size.

A number of committees, with representation from teachers, school administrators, district-level professional staff, professional staff from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and officials across several government departments, are working on policies and processes to implement recommendations within all nine focus areas of the Premier's task force report. This includes details around a new Student Support Services Model that will provide an allocation of reading specialists, teaching and learning assistants, and an increase in the allocation of learning resource teachers.

Phase 1 of the task force implementation will include in-depth professional learning for all teachers and administrators, beginning this month.

Mr. Speaker, this phase of the implementation has a determined timeline that will see full implementation of the Student Support Services Model in every school by September 2020, and will ensure that the implementation of all recommendations will be completed or well underway by 2022.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in acknowledging these important steps forward as we continue to provide quality education for students throughout our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We are happy to see progress being made with this important file despite the department not having a dedicated minister. The quality of our children's education should be paramount for all governments.

To be clear, this side of the House remains optimistic around the recommendations that have been outlined in the Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes. We are pleased to see that Phase 1 is beginning.

This is a department that is vitally important to the future of our province. Decisions made by the minister of this department have direct impacts on students, parents and teachers. There will certainly be many questions that we have of the government in the days ahead as it relates to the student support services model.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement. It is good to see this very important task force recommendation for a new student support services model being implemented in the first 40 schools. This September, many parents and teachers will be hopeful that the new teachers, instructional assistants and other resources will make a difference for all the children in these classrooms.

I'm very glad the budget supported this change, and I hope that as we move forward the resources are there to ensure the remaining recommendations are fully implemented with all the meaning the task force meant.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Commissioner for Legislative Standards today issued a statement which stated that the reports on harassment complaints, once completed, will be provided to the Premier.

I ask the Premier: To ensure that this process is completely independent, will you commit to change this process and request the Management Commission to engage an independent body with the specialized expertise to investigate these complaints?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question today. As you know, when the complaints were lodged we met with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, who under the jurisdiction could have come into the House of Assembly without any request. He really could have come in and talked to Members and dealt with this issue.

I sent an email inviting the Commissioner to come in and review the allegations and making sure – I think the media release, maybe, that the Member opposite is mentioning – allows for the independent process, making sure that all the resources that are required to do this review are available to the Office of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. These reports, as I understand, then would also go back to those who have filed the allegations for their use as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not comfortable submitting a complaint until the process for an investigation is changed to ensure the investigation is completely independent of this government.

Will the Premier do the right thing and commit today to change this process and support the engagement of an independent body to investigate complaints?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, number one, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards has the authority to come in without request. He's made that quite clear.

When you look at the independent Officers of the House of Assembly you think of the AG as an example. This is the same level. This office exists at the same level as the AG. This is the Office of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards which is an independent Officer – office of this House of Assembly which the Member opposite is aware of.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make it quite clear, that this Commissioner can come in at any time on his own accord and can use the resources of independent people. I've said from the beginning, if anyone that's going through this process is not satisfied with it, you should speak to the Commissioner who is independent from this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, the structure for that is under the House of Assembly Accountability Act and so on. It's not appropriate to question the Premier on that point. It's a question for the Management Commission.

Thank you.

The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: (Inaudible) ready to go but I really don't have a comfort level with this

process, especially in light of some of the discussions that have happened in the past 24 hours.

I ask the Premier again: Will you remove yourself from this process and ensure that the report is submitted to the –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Again, I would ask the Member to recognize the fact that the structure of the investigation is under the Management Commission which reports to all of us. The matter should be brought before the Management Commission.

Thank you.

Further questions, please.

The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, we seem to have a bit of a difficulty here because of the process that's been followed.

I ask the Premier: Did you submit the complaint yourself to the Commissioner or have individuals submitted the complaints?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Opposition – when you look at politics in this very serious issue, I have said so many times in this House of Assembly it is not up to me. I've left this in the confidence of the people and the allegations as they come forward. I've left this for them to file a complaint.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, I don't even know if there's a complaint filed. I couldn't tell you that. I appreciate the confidence. I did not go outside of this building and put people's names out there. It's not what I want to do. This is an independent process. It must maintain the integrity and the confidence of those who are dealing with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier may have not gone outside of this building and named names but one of his ministers did, Mr. Speaker. It's a serious matter that's under investigation.

Under the very act, the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* of this House, under section 34 the Premier may request, and when the Premier does it's the only section where the Commissioner reports to the Premier.

My question to the Premier is: Why did you submit a report to the Commissioner? Why did you not do the right thing and have it independent and leave yourself out of it?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interesting enough, the Member opposite suggests that Members of this Cabinet who are now no longer Members of this caucus; yet, one of his own Members stood outside this door and blocked the door and he still sit's in of his own caucus.

Right now, there are a number of options. I've met with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. As I said, the information that will come forward is in the purview of this House of Assembly. These were the two options.

As I said, if Members that are in – ongoing with issues with this review, if they take exception, I would ask them to speak to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards on their issues.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'll just point out, it's my understanding officials in the House looked into that circumstance that the Premier is referring to and found there's no

evidence to support any wrongdoing by the Member of the House of Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

On the matter that the Member is referring to, the appropriate action would have been for the Member who felt compromised to have filed a point of privilege, which would have precipitated an investigation by the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. That did not occur.

I would ask the Member to proceed, please.

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

You're right; there was no point of privilege raised. There was no issue raised through the processes of the House.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier relates to what is covered under legislation, whereby the legislation indicates that the Commissioner only reports to the Premier when the Premier requests an investigation.

My question for the Premier is: To ensure there is independence on a very sensitive and important investigation, why did he choose to immerse himself in the process when his advice could have been to go to the Commissioner and file your complaint, leave himself out of it so there would have been a much higher level of independence?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I met with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, these options were considered and the option through that meeting was to invite him in.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you, I am not interested in inserting myself in this independent review. That's not what this is all about at all. What I want to do is make sure that there is a very thorough review and those that are participating, all parties that are participating in this review will do so and the recommendations that will come out this, hopefully, will make sure that this House is a much better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, this is not something that any of us – I take this very seriously and I just want to make sure that the comfort level of all those that are involved, as they participate, that they are comfortable with the process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's not the first time the Premier has said that. He said that on the release on April 27: "It is extremely important that the complainant is comfortable with the process and that it reflects their wishes." We just heard from the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune who her, herself, just stood here in the House of Assembly and said she is not comfortable.

Premier, what are you going to do to make sure there is a comfortable process, as you yourself had committed to?

MR. SPEAKER: Excuse me, but I do believe that as per my earlier remarks in terms of the structure as to how the Commissioner for Legislative Standards can proceed is really a matter for the Management Commission, and I feel that would be a much better audience for addressing that.

The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Can I speak to that, Mr. Speaker?

I think we're probably on a point of order here now. I'm not asking or questioning the process of the –

MR. SPEAKER: I would suggest that you are, Sir, so I would ask you to return to another line of questioning.

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'm asking questions about the Premier who has immersed himself in a process.

MR. SPEAKER: Sir, please, my decision is final. I'd like to discuss the matter after Question Period, if I may.

Let's continue on, please.

MR. P. DAVIS: This is my line of questioning today about an independent process by Members of this House who may have complaints about the actions of the Premier or the government.

MR. SPEAKER: Again, Sir, I feel that you're challenging the structure that has been put in place by this House through the Management Commission, through the act, and that's really a matter for the Management Commission.

I would ask you to go to another line of questioning.

Thank you.

The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, this is certainly unprecedented for my experience where I'm shut down in Question Period.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier can he state unequivocally that the former minister never raised a single issue or concern with him – the former minister who spoke publicly yesterday has not raised a single issue or concern with him or his staff regarding the harassment and intimidation that she faced from her colleagues.

Can the Premier unequivocally state that none of that was raised with him? Let's see if we can get a straight answer from the Premier.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have made it quite clear yesterday that I've always supported MHAs, supported our ministers when they brought forward questions or issues and I'll continue to do so. I've done a lot of this in the last week or so, just like I've done in the last 2½ years, Mr. Speaker.

When Members, ministers or MHAs require support from me, Mr. Speaker, I've been there. There are a lot of questions that happen that come to me as Premier and as leader of this province. As those ministers, in some cases our MHAs, it's probably not appropriate for me to stand on this floor of the House of Assembly and

deal in specifics of what those meetings would be all about.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, I will not tolerate bullying, not tolerating harassment. We dealt with it very promptly in the last week or so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier state unequivocally that the former minister of Finance never raised a single issue or concern with him or his staff regarding the harassment and intimidation that she faced from her colleagues?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I think it was in the media yesterday about some processes. We did talk about that.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting today with the line of questioning of where we're going with some of the things that have been said publicly and on social media and how a couple of years can make a big difference. If you go back over social media you will see that Members opposite put out many releases, Twitter accounts, social media messaging about the very minister of the day that many people would consider to be intimidating.

Those are still out there. Social media – you just need to look right in the library. All of us, Mr. Speaker, from Members opposite have been, I would say, the target of many social media intimidation and (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

The Premier just stood for 45 seconds and never answered the question.

Can the Premier state unequivocally that the former minister of Finance never raised a single issue or concern with him or his staff regarding the harassment and intimidation that she faced from her colleagues?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any issues that were raised by me, by any minister or any MHA, I have dealt with them. I've added support where it was required, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Members opposite: Why is it you stand here today and you will not apologize for the harassment and the intimidation that you laid on many ministers through social media in this government? Why is it that you can stand here today – I have supported my ministers, supported their MHAs, and you stand up here today in Question Period when you, yourself, the leaders of the Opposition and Members of the Opposition, deliberately attacked Members on this side of the House with many disparaging comments that were made on social media, yet you stand up today and say that is wrong, or you still support that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier if he can state unequivocally that the former minister of Finance never raised a single issue or concern with him or his staff regarding the harassment and intimidation that she faced from her colleagues.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: As I said, Mr. Speaker, there have been intimidation and all we need to look at is where the source of that would have

been, and I can tell you there are lots from the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, when ministers, no matter which portfolio, have come to me, I've always supported them. And sometimes we've had great discussions from a lot of ministers about the impacts of the Official Opposition and the comments that have been made by them. They impacted people.

Where I want to get this House of Assembly to is we should, as 40 Members of this House of Assembly, we need co-operation. We need collaboration. What we've seen in the past is not good enough, we're expected to do better, we must do better and it will take collaboration and working together. We must learn a lesson from what we've seen in the last week or so in this House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the former president of the NLTA has spoken out about the dismissive behaviour of the former Education minister. This bad behaviour pattern has left the residents of the Mobile-Witless Bay school district wondering if decisions made while the minister was in that position were based on professional evidence, or based on a personal agenda. Both the English School District, the consultant's report, and certainly the school councils in the area thought the decision to cancel the school in Mobile was a terrible decision.

I ask the Premier: Based on all of this, will you review that decision?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the first comments I'd like to make is to let the hon. Member know that I am dedicated to what I'm doing as a Cabinet Member, whether it's one portfolio or two portfolios.

Mr. Speaker, I have had some preliminary briefing on the Mobile situation and the information that I've been given, my understanding is the tender has been let for that extension and construction has started and will continue to be. And the target that we're setting now is sometime late in 2018 for having that extension completed, to accommodate the growth and the number of students that are in that particular area. We will continue to monitor that and work to make sure that we have the best possible facilities that we can have in that particular area of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Respectfully I say to the minister, maybe you should be updated that the proposed extension is going to be out of space by '21-'22, so we're spending money and in 2021-22 we need a new school. You need to be updated on that, I say to the minister with all due respect.

When a parents' group met with the minister to discuss the issue of the new school, he referenced the fact: why would people want to live up there, they would all move to Galway. I brought this up here in the House of Assembly to the Premier.

So I ask again: Based on the performance, based on what we heard today, based on this minister, will you please meet with the students, the school district and the people of my district to have this addressed and to look at it once and for all?

The Minister of Finance wouldn't meet with us; the Premier wouldn't meet with the people up there. So I ask now, based on all this, can we have another look at this?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly thank the Member opposite for his information and for the history on the demographics. Again, the information that we've been provided within the department, the decision was made based on that information that there will be an extension to this school in Mobile and that would be adequate for the projected population increase and student enrolment over the next number of years, Mr. Speaker.

That decision was made based upon the information that the school board had given at the time and the information that within the department a clear understanding of exactly what would be projected for that area. The decision was made to proceed with the extension to that school. A tender has been let for that, construction is beginning and will continue through 2018.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the Premier. Based on what we know today and over the past several days, and what was brought to this House over a year ago by myself in relation to the commentary by this minister, based on commentary by the former president of the NLTA, based on comments by people in my district, I'm asking the Premier, based on all of that: Will you at least meet with the parents, the student councils, the English school district who wanted to support a new school, will you please meet with them and have a discussion to see if this decision was based on the right decision or based on other elements that have been discussed by the former president of the NLTA?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My understanding that I have in the very limited time I've been in that department is that the former premier did not meet with the group. They were in government at the time. So they

did not even get a meeting with the former premier.

Mr. Speaker, what we have and what we've done, we've taken the analysis, we've taken the information that was provided and we have looked at the projections, the numbers that were given by the school board, the projections for the student enrolment over the next number of years, and a decision was made that within the context of those numbers, that the best option, with the less expensive option, would be to provide the facilities that would be an expansion to the school. That was a decision that was made, Mr. Speaker, and construction continues (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I will not tolerate interruptions today.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

The former chair of the Western Newfoundland Waste Management board stated that the former minister of Municipal Affairs operated using back-scratch politics and dealing with him was a terrible, intimidating experience. These call to question the decisions by the former minister.

I ask the Premier: Will you call an immediate review of decisions made on the West Coast with regard to waste management by the minister of Municipal Affairs?

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

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

I'm certainly very happy to talk about this again as a resident of the West Coast and a person who met with the former chair, Mr. Don Downer, who I would note was Premier Tom Marshall's campaign manager.

What I would say is that Mr. Downer, in his interview, clearly states his bias towards the former minister. Now, the good thing, though, is that regardless of the chair, there's an excellent administrative body there that we believe are making excellent decisions on behalf of the people of the West Coast.

I've worked with them when I was in Opposition, I've worked with them when I was not the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I'll continue to work with them for the benefit of Western Newfoundland.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the 2017 Salary Details document, the Women's Policy Office has seven employees.

Can the minister indicate how many positions are listed in the 2018 Salary Details?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you very much for the important question, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite may be aware, and I would like to inform those that aren't aware, there is one position less this year with the deputy minister of Women's Policy Office now having moved shared responsibility with the Children, Seniors and Social Development Department.

Mr. Speaker, there have been some changes in employment at the Women's Policy Office. We are looking for some new employees as people retire and move to other positions, but I can assure you, and I can assure all the people in this in province, that we're dedicated to the essential work of the Women's Policy Office, the essential work of the Status of Woman and the essential work of equality for women in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: The Women's Policy Office, according to the government's own documents, now only has three employees. The deputy minister, two senior program and policy development specialists and an administrative officer have been removed from the budget.

I ask the minister: How can this department ensure a gender-based approach to policies, support the Provincial Advisory Council and the Violence Prevention Initiative with only three staff?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just for clarity of purpose here, I'd like to advise who it is comprised. We have very senior staff within the Women's Policy Office, including a manager of Economic Policy, a manager of social policy and, most recently, a manager of Violence Prevention. We also have two full-time senior policy people, policy planning and research analysts, as well as support staff, Mr. Speaker.

This work is very important to all of us in this province. Female equality in this province, I think, has been really something that this government has really focused on and will continue to focus on. We have a committee of senior Cabinet ministers, Mr. Speaker, moving forward on a lot of new initiatives.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune for a quick question, please.

MS. PERRY: In Estimates, we were told that the Women's Policy Office found savings due to reduced requirements for the Intimate Partner Violence prevention program; however, we were also told that a constable position, which is critical to this program, was vacant for some time.

I ask the minister: How long was this position vacant?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This initiative is critically important to the Violence Prevention Initiative that we have in the province and we're continuing to work through this. The position that the Member opposite is referring to is a position with the RCMP. They were recruiting, are recruiting and getting finalized to having a new position available. It is a position that we fund through the RCMP, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, it certainly is time to get back to the number of timely issues that have not been addressed in this House lately.

The most recent spill of toxic drilling chemicals offshore reported by the C-NLOPB was serious. There has been no independent assessment of the effects on the marine environment. Recently, government announced a plan to double offshore oil and gas exploration.

I ask the Premier: Now more than ever, will he implement Recommendation 29 of the Wells Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry calling for a powerful, independent and knowledgeable offshore safety authority responsible for worker safety and protection of the environment?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was an incident that has been reported by the C-NLOPB on Friday of 28,000 litres of synthetic-based mud that was accidentally released from the mobile offshore drilling unit, Transocean Barents.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious incident, which has caused the suspension of drilling for Suncor and for Terra Nova as they investigate. That investigation is continuing, so the suspension is continuing. The Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board is working with Suncor in their investigation to ensure that the monitoring is done, first and foremost, and as well then looking at the cause and how we not have that again in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, we definitely need an independent investigative body to deal with this, particularly with the doubling of exploration.

Mr. Speaker, the burgeoning aquaculture industry promises much needed jobs. It is important that this industry is environmentally sustainable so it can provide long-term secure jobs. The Newfoundland and Labrador Coalition for Aquaculture Reform is calling for a multi-stakeholder advisory committee to provide input on all issues related to aquaculture to ensure the development of this industry is safe, sustainable and can provide long-term, good jobs.

I ask the Premier: Let's get this right for the people, will he strike this expert advisory committee?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, we seek advice wherever it could be offered, especially those with knowledgeable opinions and information that could be provided.

One of the stakeholders that I have reached out to and depend on are trade unionists, members

of the FFAW, people whose jobs depend on aquaculture, who want to see, whose best interest it is that aquaculture be conducted in a sustainable, environmentally friendly way.

Mr. Speaker, trade unionists have asked me to ensure that this industry continues to grow, grows responsibly and grows for the benefit of jobs not only on the South Coast of Newfoundland, but on the Northeast Coast of Newfoundland and throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We support trade unionists.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

The Voisey's Bay open pit mine will be exhausted in 2022. If Vale does not go underground there will be no more work. When last asked about this situation the Minister of Natural Resources spoke about exercising financial remedies in the development agreement with Vale.

I ask the minister: Can she table what exactly are the remedies that she was talking about?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the people of the province know, Vale has done a global review of their minerals industry. We continue to encourage them to make their investment to go underground. We think it will be a good investment for them. It certainly is a good investment for the province. There is a development agreement. There are remedies, should they decide not to go underground.

The development agreement is actually on the Natural Resources website. I'm so happy to have a copy if the Member has had challenges accessing that website.

Thank you.

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 really happy to hear the minister talk about what is on the website; however, when we took down what was on the website with regard to the amended development agreement with Vale there was quite a bit of redaction.

I will ask the Minister then: Will she, in the spirit of openness and transparency, table an un-redacted copy of those amendments so that we can really see what these remedies are?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad the Member opposite has a copy of what is available because there are commercial sensitivities, of course, when we're dealing with these international companies.

Mr. Speaker, we're very hopeful on this side of the House that we would not have to use those remedies available to us under the development agreement. We're still working with Vale – hopeful they will go underground. They are doing, as I've said in this House before, streaming of cobalt. I think that's a very positive step forward, Mr. Speaker, for them going underground.

As they move forward with that streaming of cobalt, we'll continue to work with them to make sure they understand the value to them and to this province of doing so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Government Services Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Works, the Department of Service Newfoundland and Labrador, the Public Procurement Agency, the Department of Finance, Consolidated Fund Services, the Public Service Commission and the Executive Council.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further reports by standing and select committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

I'm happy once again to stand with a petition concerning universal public child care and after-school care program.

The reasons for the petition: Our licensed child-care system is a patchwork of private for-profit centres, non-profit community-based centres and family daycare, plus a small number of education- and workplace-based centres.

It is nowhere near meeting the child care needs in our province. Affordable licensed child care is

often in short supply in rural parts of the province. Even in St. John's there are long wait-lists for quality child care programs.

Child care programs have both social and financial benefits for society. Studies show that high-quality child care and early childhood education programs –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: – result in better cognitive, language and numeracy skills. They help economically disadvantaged children transition to school on the same level as other children.

For every \$1 spent on early childhood education, the benefits range from \$1.50 to \$2.78.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly as follows: To call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to take immediate steps to put in place a plan for a gradual transition to a universal, regulated and publicly funded and fully accessible child care and after-school care program.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on a couple of the points in this petition; one in particular that has to do with children starting on the same level when they go into kindergarten. It's great that we have all-day kindergarten but when children have not been in child care and have not had any kind of structured development prior to kindergarten, they're not on the same level when it comes to their reading skills, their numeracy skills and just the level of development that is necessary going into kindergarten with children who have been in child care. That's a fact.

One of the factors that stops that from happening is the different levels of income. If we had a publicly funded and regulated child care program like the rest of our educational system, then children would be going into kindergarten on an equal footing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, once again, I'm honoured with the opportunity to present this petition. These are the reasons for this petition:

The Adult Dental Program coverage for clients of the Newfoundland and Labrador Drug Prescription Program under the Access and 65Plus Plans were eliminated in *Budget 2016*.

Many low-income individuals and families can no longer access basic dental care; and those same individuals can now no longer access dentures, leading to many other digestive and medical issues.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call on the hon. House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the Adult Dental Program to cover low-income individuals and families to better ensure oral health, quality of life and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition presented with signatures largely from seniors. Seniors are one of the ones who are mostly greatly affected. We all know that oral health, yes, it does contribute greatly to your physical well-being but one of the biggest issues facing seniors today is mental well-being. A lot of these individuals are challenged by social issues, not being able to get out. So not having proper oral health or dentures is a big thing for them, preventing them from interacting socially.

It's shameful that our seniors are going without basic dental care because they can't afford it. It's only creating a further complication when they have to show up to the emergency departments costing our health care system much, much more versus if we had addressed the problem before it got severe.

I thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

WHEREAS there are many parents of school-aged children throughout our province who live inside the Eastern School District's 1.6-kilometre zone, therefore they're not qualified for busing; and

WHEREAS policy cannot override the safety of our children;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to eliminate the 1.6-kilometre policy for all elementary schools in the province and in junior and high schools where safety is a primary concern.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition, I believe my colleague from Cape St. Francis introduced a similar one the other day. This past week, we presented a PMR on this one and unfortunately when the leadership of the former minister was changed, the context of our PMR was changed to not reflect what we had asked for.

It is pretty simple what we're asking for. We're asking for the safety of our children be put first and foremost and that policy and finances not be put ahead of the safety of these children who have to walk these roads on a daily basis to get to and from school through all times of the year, all weather.

Ironically, this past week, with all the occurrences that has gone on, I had an email from a constituent of mine who has been spearheading to get this policy changed. Her question was: With the former minister gone, will they revisit this policy? It was an interesting question and I said I'd bring it up. I guess by virtue of bringing up here today, I will throw

that question out there. I know it's more of a government policy but in saying that I did commit that I would bring it to the House of Assembly and to the floor, which I'm doing.

Mr. Speaker, I won't belabour the point. I've spoken about it many times and I'll continue it. I support the parents and all the school-aged children that are worried about the safety of their children. As the school year is winding down, the weather is improving, the pressure is off a lot of parents, this will come home again to rear its ugly head in September and we'll be dealing with this once again.

I believe this is a win-win for government to change this policy, to make revisions to this policy. Again, dollars and cents can't override the safety of our children.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

No further petitions.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I now call on the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune to introduce the resolution standing in her name. It is Motion 9.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move: BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House support the introduction of a legislature-specific harassment policy, similar in principle to the policy in effect in the Nova Scotia provincial legislature, where elected representatives and their staff are held responsible for inappropriate conduct;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House, through the introduction of a legislature-specific harassment policy, recognize all forms

of harassment including bullying, cyber-bullying and intimidation of all forms;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House develop this legislature-specific harassment policy through the Privileges and Elections Committee of this House in consultation with all Members and employees of the House and with independent groups who have experience and expertise in handling harassment complaints.

This is seconded by the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune to please continue her debate.

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

Let me begin moving the resolution today by talking about the last two weeks that have been certainly very challenging for us and no issue, I think, is going to define this particular sitting of the House more so than harassment. I believe this is a reflection of a significant shift in public opinion. Harassment, bullying and intimidation, they have all been dominating our workplace for far too long. We've been talking about it for decades, about the need to put an end to bad behaviour. But talk is cheap when progress is slow to come.

Last year, on the heels of the American election, as public discourse slipped deeper and deeper into the cutter, a movement began. With slogans like TIME'S UP and MeToo, this movement grew exponentially in response to a barrage of stories of harassment and assault. The movement spread into every sector of American society. It spread into Canada. It spread into the realm of politics in Ottawa, in Ontario, in Nova Scotia, and now, Mr. Speaker, it is here.

In January, our caucus wrote to the Speaker, including the Premier, urging an overhaul of our policies on harassment. In February, our new leader, Ches Crosbie, called for the implementation of a workplace harassment policy for the House of Assembly.

He said: “It is important that we hold our politicians, and their staff, responsible for inappropriate conduct. That is why I am proposing the introduction of a new, robust, workplace harassment policy for the House of Assembly.”

He said: “We need to create an environment where victims of harassment are supported, and that means implementing a meaningful policy, with formalized processes, to provide that support.”

He also said: “There are growing concerns across the country about the failure of harassment policies, within the political sphere, to protect those who suffer harassment and hold accountable those whose conduct is found to be inappropriate. It’s time to change that.”

I have great confidence, Mr. Speaker, that our new leader firmly believes in what he has stated and is very committed to making this a reality. His proposal included a non-partisan – non-partisan, which is very important, Mr. Speaker – committee of this Legislature, in consultation with the public, to develop this policy.

His commitment to introducing a Legislature harassment policy is part of a plan to restore confidence in government. He has talked about the need for democratic reform and bringing a greater measure of decorum and functionality to the House, as part and parcel of that.

We all remember hearing about *The Democracy Cookbook* edited by Dr. Alex Marland and author Lisa Moore. The book was serialized in *The Telegram* and its themes were posted around the lobby of Confederation Building. It’s accessible for everyone to read online if anyone hasn’t read it yet, and you absolutely should because there are many short chapters full of ideas for re-thinking the way we do things. There are many contributors but there is a cohesive message running throughout the book that it’s time to take ownership of our democracy and shape it in a way that reflects our values much better.

Face it; we don’t want our province’s children or their parents behaving as bullies. So let’s not tolerate bullying among the Members of the Legislature who are elected to represent them.

We have to set an example. Just as importantly, let’s create an environment that welcomes people who want to contribute to public life.

Talented people don’t want to serve if it means they will be bullied and humiliated in the spotlight on a daily basis. They’ll simply stay away, and that hurts us as a province, Mr. Speaker, because we need their contribution right here to deal with the challenges we face, identify opportunities and make our province stronger.

Addressing harassment is not just about making this workplace more respectful, it’s also about serving the people more efficiently and building a vibrant, resilient Newfoundland and Labrador. That’s our job. That’s what this hon. House is for. We need to get on with fixing what’s broken inside this House before we can properly fix what’s broken outside the door.

Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker, brought forward a policy in 2016 that is perhaps the best in the country. It raises the bar. It lays out expectations clearly in writing and requires everyone to read the documents and sign them. People are educated about the process, about what’s expected of them, about what’s intolerable, about where to go if there are issues, about what will happen when they do, about the supports available to them and about the resolution they can expect. Having gone through my experience in the fall and here again this week, none of this exists for us, Mr. Speaker, right here at present in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There is no guesswork in this process they have in Nova Scotia. That’s what we need here, and we need it now. The level of toxicity continues to be high, even this week, even today. We are exposing wrongs that need to be brought to light but we also need to turn down the temperature and raise up the level of mutual respect. We probably need counsellors, Mr. Speaker, to come in here and talk to all of us, to hold up a large mirror and teach us how to engage with one another in a way that from now on will be more respectful.

Today’s resolution is not a veiled attempt to score political points or embarrass anyone. It’s a sincere attempt to change our working environment. It has three simple provisions.

First, let's develop a policy specifically for this House and everyone who works here. The Nova Scotia example is a good model.

Second, let's ensure the policy includes all forms of bullying and bad behaviour. Let's cover all the bases, now that we have the opportunity. Let's make sure we do this right.

Third, let's direct a committee of this House to consult and engage people who have experience in determining what's best. The Privileges and Elections Committee already exists and its mandate includes matters like this. All parties are represented and the committee has the power to engage people. Things can happen right away through this process, Mr. Speaker.

I know that resolutions like the one I'm bringing forward here today are not binding, but if we are all supportive of this initiative and this motion here today, there is no reason why we can't turn the page this very afternoon within a few hours, Mr. Speaker. Let's make it an all-party initiative.

I call on all my colleagues to give this very serious consideration and to use your own judgment in making your decision on how you vote today. It doesn't matter that my name is on the resolution. If we do this right, then it's a win for all of us, all Members, all parties and all of the people we are elected to serve.

This House has often been called a kindergarten. That's an insult, Mr. Speaker, I think to kindergarteners because children of that age are far more accepting and forgiving. We need to learn from them how to get along, despite our differences. In our system of government, parliaments are adversarial. Providing vigorous opposition is an obligation some of us have to bear, but that doesn't mean we can't be respectful and honourable and even empathic toward one another.

Perhaps we need to add a place on the Order Paper for saying nice things about our opponents at some point in each day. Can you imagine what a better place this would be, Mr. Speaker? Whatever we do, we need to find ways to behave with more courtesy and civility; basic stuff, Mr. Speaker, that we expect in every other workplace yet we fail ourselves here.

Maybe we need photos of the province's children posted on the walls of this Chamber to remind us about the people who are out there counting on us, the people who may be watching us, that they are impressionable and very precious, and we owe them our best behaviour even when we're riled up about something.

It's picturing all the faces of those little children and those beautiful little girls and young boys that expect us to pave a better way for their future that's given me courage in the last two weeks, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps, if we tone things down here, tone the rhetoric down and improve our behaviour, perhaps that's going to make politics a bit boring. Perhaps the theatre element won't be as exciting, but I would rather get excited about our province growing, flourishing and creating opportunities for people.

This week, as we debate decorum, families are packing up and moving away for jobs. They need us to deal with our harassment issues now so we can focus more clearly on dealing with the challenges pressing down on them. Yes, this is a leadership issue but every single one of us has to shoulder this responsibility.

We are called on to be leaders in our district. Let's be leaders for our districts. If enough of us step up, this House will change; that's a fact. But we have to step up and we have to step up together. I'm ready. I have talked with Members of every single caucus here who are ready. We've debated this many times in this sitting and we voted unanimously that this is a priority.

Yet here we are and the events of the last two weeks have unfolded as they have, so the debate so far hasn't gotten us to the place we need to be. The question I pose to all of my Members and all of my colleagues here today that you vote with your own hearts, your own morals and your own values. I say to you how about it – how about directing the Committee to start this process?

There are good Members on the Privileges and Elections Committee, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure they'd be eager to hear from all of us. There are experts and advocates in society who are ready to map out the direction we ought to take.

Mr. Speaker, I've had teleconferences with Equal Voice as recently as this morning. There are many entities out there willing to help us. Some of them have earned their stripes leading conflict resolution in other toxic workplaces. They can help us heal our broken system and weave new kinds of relationships. They may even suggest democratic reform initiatives that will lead to a healthier democracy.

Whatever we do, Mr. Speaker, we have to find a way to create an environment here in this hon. House that invites the brightest and best people in our province to step in and make their own contribution, to offer their talents to making Newfoundland and Labrador a truly better place for each and every one of us to live and for our children.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to hearing what all of my colleagues have to say here in this hon. House today. I'm certainly looking forward to our vote at the end of the day. Because right here, right now, the opportunity to change history, to change the way parliaments work and to bring us into the 21st century is before us, right here, right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

As I begin, just for those who may be tuning in, we are debating a resolution that was brought forward by the Opposition.

“AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this honourable House develop this legislature-specific harassment policy through the Privileges and Elections Committee of this House in consultation with all Members and employees of the House and with independent groups who have experience and expertise in handling harassment complaints.”

I applaud the Member opposite for bringing this forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: I thank you for the opportunity to stand today and speak regarding this private Member's resolution on legislature-specific harassment policy.

The Member opposite pointed out in her remarks, and she didn't quite use this term but I'll use it, we're at a tipping point and I'm very pleased to be able to witness this tipping point, Mr. Speaker. I think the debate and discourse over the last two weeks in this House and outside of this House on harassment, on bullying, on intimidation have been very important discussions.

As I've said many times in this House of Assembly, it's not acceptable. Any form of violence – and I consider intimidation, harassment and bullying to be a form of violence – is not acceptable. I think we're in a changing world where we are now stepping, in some ways, into the sunlight on this issue.

I can tell you as a business leader, as a person who has been involved in politics, who has been a leader in her community, I can say that I am very pleased that we are now debating this, now discussing it, now having, I guess, really a spotlight shone upon it, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get into the substance of my remarks this afternoon, I want to praise my colleagues on all sides of this House for stepping forward and talking about this issue. I want to thank them for making sure that we are having a discourse and a conversation about this. Making sure that we are at the point where we are saying this is no longer acceptable and we have no tolerance anymore.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: It's difficult. I've been absent the last couple of days on business for the province, but I've sat here thinking this is very, very difficult for those that are coming forward. It's very difficult for the Legislature. It's very difficult for the people of the province, but this is where we can really make a difference. So let us all stand together to make that difference.

I love the phrase TIME'S UP because I think today that's what we're all saying in this

Legislature; all of us, men, women, legislators, all of us are saying TIME'S UP.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Oprah Winfrey said this, and I'm quoting here, I think it was really good quote: "Step out of the history that is holding you back. Step into the new story you are willing to create." Today, we are creating that new story for politics in this province and, hopefully, for society, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, this is extended beyond these walls.

As parliamentarians, all of those in this House, we have a responsibility to be the leaders in our communities, to be above reproach. I really believe that, Mr. Speaker. I think that we have a responsibility to be examples in our community, and especially to the young people. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to model good behaviour, to model the behaviour that we want to see in our children.

I've said this time and time again over the last number of days: Would you want your children to be subjected to any kind of harassment or bullying? The answer, of course, is no – of course, is no. So we have to model that. We have to listen with kindness. We have to debate with decorum. We have to – I don't like to use the word argue but it is argue, but with accountability for what we're saying. That's what we're talking about here today, Mr. Speaker.

My colleagues have been speaking, not only for this Legislature over the last number of days; they've been speaking for everyone in this province. That's why I am so proud of those who have stood up, those who have stepped forward and those who have continued to debate this very issue. I salute them and I thank them for that.

The issues of violence against women, in particular, harassment and indeed all forms of bullying have been increasingly been brought to light and more and more the incidents and experiences of women and by men are being openly discussed and that's thank you to the TIME'S UP and the MeToo movement, the campaigns that are really driving societal

change, and I thank all of us for continuing that discussion.

Mr. Speaker, as move through some of the comments this afternoon, the Member opposite in her opening remarks talked about a model; there are models of harassment policies across the country. I know we have a Code of Conduct in this province that needs to be modernized. I think that it's incumbent upon all of us in this House to really place the workplace values that we want to see. I think things like respect, empowerment, accountability, co-operation, honesty, openness, collaboration and caring really should be our mantra in this House, really should be what we stand for.

I know each and every person that sits in this hon. House is here by best intention. They've offered themselves, they've stepped out of their businesses, they've stepped out of their offices, they've stepped out of their homes to come forward to say I want a better province and I want a better tomorrow for my children, my grandchildren and the generations to come.

We know the value and the importance of our great province. I love the phrase from the Ode: where once they stood, we stand. I love that phrase because I reflect upon my father and I reflect upon my forefathers who helped build and shape this great province. I know all of us in this House today are reflecting on our families that came before us and our families yet to come.

When we talk about improving the way we conduct ourselves, improving the way we conduct ourselves in this House in doing the good work of governments, the good work of Oppositions, the good work of making sure that we are leading the charge for this great province, I know in everybody's soul here today they want to do better, be better and we can be, Mr. Speaker – we can be.

It's not just a discourse that's happening in this Legislature today; it's happening across the country. There are models that we can – I know the Member opposite talked about Nova Scotia. I'll just, for the sake of the discourse this afternoon, talk about some of the things that the Nova Scotian harassment policy contains.

The policy applies to every Member of the House of Assembly, every staff person and every contract person within the precinct. It defines the workplace as any place where the business of the House of Assembly is being conducted, all offices, all locations and situations.

In this policy, harassment means any behaviour, act, conduct or comment, whether sexual in nature or not, whether occurring at one time or reoccurring basis by a person to whom this policy applies, directed at, offensive to another person to whom this policy applies that would be unwelcome or cause offence or harm, would demean, belittle, intimidate, threaten, distress, humiliate or embarrass, would affect a person's reputation, would endanger someone's job, would be a discrimination under the Human Rights Act, would be bullying defined under the Education Act, or cyberbullying for that matter.

The purpose of the policy in Nova Scotia, which I think is – the Member opposite mentioned, I'll mention it again – a model that we can look to when we, as a House, start to look at the new policies that we need for this Legislature to prevent harassment between persons, to encourage early identification of harassment complaints and encouraging people to come forward, initiate early resolution of harassment situations in set out processes, formal and informal, and establish a resolution process that is complaint driven, and there are remedies.

The Member opposite talked about how important it is for independence. I hear her, and I heard the discourse during some of the questions that were being asked. I sit as a Member of the Management Commission, Mr. Speaker, and I think it should be a topic within the Management Commission as to how we conduct our business within this House. I'm sure that will be coming forward. I'm sure there will be lots of discussion over the months and weeks and days ahead.

Mr. Speaker, effective June 1, there will be a Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – the Premier and the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board brought in a Harassment-Free Workplace Policy committed to providing a safe learning and work

environment for everyone, but especially girls and women.

Earlier this year, as I said, the Minister of Finance announced an upcoming implementation of a strengthened, modernized Harassment-Free Workplace Policy. As this House knows, but I'll say it for those listening or for people reading *Hansard* to understand that we all debated this in a private Member's motion brought forward by the Member for – my apologies – Windsor Lake. It's a new district, I always stumble over it. A very important private Member's resolution talking about improving and updating legislation around this very important issue so that it's not just for this Legislature, not just for this government, but, indeed, all businesses in the province. That work is underway, Mr. Speaker; I think it's very important.

The new policy will provide unprecedented support for provincial government employees in our province who've experienced harassment at work. Combined with this, there is training that will be taking place. It will bring greater awareness of workplace harassment. It will increase accountability for those in authority. It will establish timelines for formal investigations and will include a comprehensive complaint resolution process.

All very important points that I think as we move forward with this new consideration of how we conduct our business and our work within this Legislature, how we conduct – what's our code of conduct? What's our code of practice? What is the new means and methods of making sure that harassment, bullying, intimidation no longer exists, are no longer the standard course of business in politics, that are no longer acceptable in our society, that are no longer acceptable in our workplaces. So bringing that support, bringing those resolutions and changing the discourse around how we conduct ourselves, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very, very important.

I'm coming to the close of my time here today, unfortunately, but I wanted to quote another famous person, Amelia Earhart. She said: "The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity."

May we be tenacious as we move forward; tenacious in ensuring a workplace free of harassment, intimidation and bullying; a workplace that has, as I said earlier, respect, empowerment, openness, accountability and courage as it's mantra, as it's values, that supports one another to build a great province, to continue to build on a great province.

As I said earlier, I often reflect back on my father, and I often reflect on the strength and his contributions to this province, but I equally reflect back on my mother and her contributions. I'm sure everybody in this House, every single person sitting here, all of us want to make our past generations proud but we want to build a better society and a better opportunity for future generations. Our opportunity is today, Mr. Speaker, today. Our opportunity is to take that tenacity that we all hold and drive for a better society.

Mr. Speaker, I support the Member opposite in this private Member's resolution and I encourage all Members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address the private Member's resolution from my colleague, the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, today.

Before I read my notes, I guess on a personal note, being elected to this House in 2015, for me to say the last two weeks have been surreal is probably an understatement. In saying that, on a really personal note I guess, some people relish – or you might think there are positives of it, me personally, I had a lot of difficulty with this, not as an elected representative but as a husband, father, son. I have a lot of important females in life and I have a lot of important people in my life both males and females.

My mind went back to a lot of things over my own life, my own shortcomings sometimes, and

it gave me a lot of time to reflect, pause and reflect. It was a very difficult few days personally, because I started thinking about what we all aspire to be and what's happening with all of us. There was a time when, as a young person, if you became a Member of this House it was a pretty prestigious role. It is a prestigious role.

My colleague, when he did his maiden speech the other day, he said: I'm not an important person but I do a very important job. I think that's true for all of us. I think we all set out with that in mind. I do hope all the – regardless of whatever else happens in the outcome of what has gone on in the last few weeks, I hope we come out of this better, stronger and united.

We all come here to do this for the right reason. We all come here to do this for our constituents. The love of politics – me personally, I've always loved politics. I've always loved helping people. It was a huge honour to be elected in my district and it's something I'm very proud of. In this last week it's something I'm probably not as proud of as I should be proud of.

We bring these private Member's motions in, we debate, we have our back and forth, but at the end of the day I do hope we come out on the other side of this stronger individually and as a group, and bring more honour back to this House, Mr. Speaker.

For the folks tuning in and wondering what's happening in their House of Assembly, we are simply saying today time's up, let's identify solutions to get the fundamental problems fixed. The resolution we brought forward has three provisions:

First: "BE IT REOLVED that this Honourable House support the introduction of legislature-specific harassment policy, similar in principle to the policy in effect in the Nova Scotia provincial legislature, where elected representatives and their staff are held responsible for inappropriate conduct" In other words, let's look to the Nova Scotia model and develop a harassment policy for our House.

Second: "BE IT FUTHER RESOLVED that this Honourable House, through the introduction of the legislature-specific harassment policy,

recognize all forms of harassment including bullying, cyber-bullying and intimidation of all forms” In other words, let’s make the definition of harassment broad enough to capture a wide range of bad behaviour.

Third: “AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Honourable House develop this legislature-specific harassment policy through the Privileges and Elections Committee of this House in consultation with Members and employees of the House and with independent groups who have experience and expertise in handling harassment complaints.” In other words, let’s do it through consultation, all parties, all Members working together, with the advice of people with the experience and expertise. Let’s get this right, Mr. Speaker.

The Privileges and Elections Committee is already a functioning committee of this House, with Members identified and supports it needs to do this work. A lot of things have been said in the past few days about the things that have happened in the past, the recent past, the not-so-recent past. We need a proper mechanism to look at those things.

We also need the proper mechanisms, policies and procedures to guide us as we move forward. Three months ago, our new leader Ches Crosbie called for the implementation of a workplace harassment policy for the House of Assembly. We needed it then and we need it now.

Here is what he said: “It’s important that we hold our politicians, and their staff, responsible for inappropriate conduct. That is why I am proposing the introduction of a new, robust, workplace harassment policy for the House of Assembly.

“We need to create an environment where the victims of harassment are supported, and that means implementing a meaningful policy, with formalized processes, to provide that support.

“There are growing concerns across the country about the failure of harassment policies, within the political sphere, to protect those who suffer harassment and hold accountable those whose conduct is found to inappropriate. It’s time to change that.”

The proposal we are bringing forward today reflects the proposal that Ches Crosbie brought forward in February. It directs a multi-party committee of this House to develop a new policy in consultation with Members, staff and experts in dealing with harassment and preventing it. The outside lens is critical. This is about restoring confidence in the way this House operates.

A decade ago Mr. Justice Green addressed this crisis of confidence caused by the mismanagement of finances in the House. The latest crisis of confidence focuses on harassment. It calls for a dedicated process to improve on the system we have. There’s been a real sense of uncertainty in recent days about the steps that need to be taken to address the complaints of harassment. People aren’t sure where the process will lead. It feels ad hoc. That’s not good enough. It’s not fair to the complainants or the accused, or members and staff who work in this workplace, or those who are charged with conducting the investigation and bringing forward the recommendations. Nova Scotia is miles ahead of us on this.

They have developed a solid policy with clearly defined mechanisms to address harassment and avoid harassment. It’s a model we may be able to implement here. It’s worth examining, with the collaboration of members and staff and experts.

The Nova Scotia policy can we viewed online on the website of the Nova Scotia legislature. It is lengthily and appears to cover all bases, taking out the guesswork. The Nova Scotia House of Assembly approved the policy on May 19, 2016, two years ago, so they have had some time to test it. It’s called the Nova Scotia House of Assembly Policy on the Prevention and Resolution of Harassment in the Workplace. Let’s look at some of the provisions.

Section 2 is titled Context and it reads like this: “Everyone has a right to be treated with respect and has a responsibility to treat others the same way. It is in the best interests of everyone to foster a workplace that supports respect and dignity and prevents harassment by promoting awareness of and early informal resolution of harassment complaints.

“To prevent harassment all communications and interactions should be professional and respectful. Showing courtesy and politeness can go a long way to preventing misunderstandings that could be perceived as harassment.

“Behaviour considered harmless by one person may be considered offensive by another. Individuals should be sensitive to how others react to their remarks and behaviour. Body language is important: non-verbal behaviour, such as facial expressions, posture, tone of voice or silence, may indicate that another person is not comfortable with the behaviour.”

Section 3 defines Workplace as follows: “The workplace is any place where the business of the House of Assembly is being carried out including, but not limited to; all offices, premises and locations that are used by persons identified at Section 4 of this Policy as their workplace; all premises where the business of the House of Assembly is being conducted; and all locations and situations, including business travel, conferences and work-related social gatherings, where House of Assembly-related activities are carried out.”

Section 4 is called Application and here’s part of what it says: “This Policy applies to every elected Member of the House of Assembly (MLA); every staff person, be he or she permanent, contract, casual, intern, page or other, whose salary or remuneration is paid from the Legislative Services budget of the House of Assembly; any contract staff person whose salary is paid from budgets other than the Legislative Services budget of the House of Assembly and who works at the workplace defined under Section 3 including security staff; and volunteers who work with MLAs.” – in Nova Scotia, of course.

Listen to the definition of harassment in section 5, Mr. Speaker. “Harassment means any behaviour, act, conduct or comment, whether sexual in nature or not, whether occurring on a one-time or recurring basis, by a person to whom this Policy applies, directed at and offensive to another person to whom this Policy applies, and that the person knew or ought reasonably to have known would be unwelcome and cause offence or harm; would demean, belittle, intimidate, threaten, distress, humiliate

or embarrass; would affect a person’s reputation; would endanger a person’s job, undermine job performance, threaten economic livelihood or interfere with one’s career.”

A lot of those comments sound familiar to some of the comments we’ve heard in the last week, Mr. Speaker. As you go on, it strikes you that way, there’s no doubt.

“Would be discrimination on account of one or more factors listed in the *Human Rights Act*; would be bullying as defined under the *Education Act*; or would be cyberbullying as defined under the *Cyber-safety Act* or under another Act.”

Consider the purpose in Section 6, it shows just how extensive this policy is. “The purpose of this Policy is to encourage open communication to ensure that the workplace is free of harassment and that persons in the workplace are respectful of each other; prevent harassment between persons to whom this Policy applies; encourage early identification and reporting of harassment complaints; promote and encourage both informal and formal reporting of instances of harassment; initiate early and informal resolution of harassment situations, whenever possible; establish a resolution process that is complainant-driven, that is one where it is the complainant’s choice as to whether the complaint brought forward is informal or formal and it is also the complainant’s discretion to bring an end to the complaint process at any given time in the process;” – that’s a pretty important clause, too – “ensure that any allegation of harassment is taken seriously and provide procedures for the speedy and effective resolution of allegations; make everyone aware of each person’s responsibilities; ensure confidentiality throughout the complaint resolution process, unless otherwise provided for in this Policy; and provide, in situations where harassment is found to have occurred, remedial, corrective or disciplinary measures, up to and including termination of employment in the case of staff or in the case of an elected Member, a referral and motion by the Internal Affairs Committee to the House of Assembly.”

Section 7 guarantees confidentiality. It also requires that “Within 5 business days of receiving the Policy, each person must

individually sign and return to the person providing them with a copy of this Policy, a form acknowledging receipt of the Policy and confirming they have read the Policy.”

It further states: “The Chief Clerk or the Chief Clerk’s delegate shall develop and offer appropriate orientation and ongoing training sessions to all persons to whom this Policy applies, to assist them in understanding the respective duties and responsibilities and, in particular, in applying and complying with this policy.”

I’m just skimming. The actual provisions are actually even more detailed than this, Mr. Speaker.

Section 7.7 states: “Informal resolution should be attempted prior to the submission of a formal complaint except where the complainant refuses to participate or has been advised, by the person designated in the Policy to receive the complainant’s complaint, not to participate in the informal process.”

Section 7.9 states: “The parties to a complaint made under this Policy have the right to be informed, to be heard and to obtain an impartial decision.”

Section 7.10 states: “A complainant and a respondent can each be accompanied by a support person at all steps of the informal or formal complaint process. For the purpose of this Policy a support person is a personal friend or confidant.”

Section 7.11 requires timelines. “All complaints should be dealt with in keeping with the time lines under this Policy and any remedial, corrective or disciplinary action should be implemented expeditiously and consistently.”

Section 9 defines the person and “The Complainant makes the complaint to” – and it varies according to the person the complaint is about. It also provides a mechanism for circumstances: “When a complainant lacks confidence that the person designated to receive the complaint will process the complaint fairly or give it the attention it deserves.”

Section 10 describes in detail the actions that the person receiving the complaint must take; the actions for all other persons or bodies that are involved in the process, the guesswork is eliminated and the details go on for pages.

Section 11 defines procedures step by step, Mr. Speaker. Informal Resolution, step 1; Filing a Formal Complaint, step 2; Acknowledging and Filing of a Formal Complaint, step 3; step 4 – Review of a Formal Complaint; step 5 Investigation; step 6, Decision; and step 7 is the Appeal, if needed. It defines what happens next in the House of Assembly. The report, the sanction motion and so forth.

There are general provisions that cover such matters as costs and reviews of the process itself, the storage of information and so forth. It ends with an easy to follow flow chart. It appears to be a good policy, superior to what we have right now and certainly something we need. Until we can find a process like this and work out the checks and balances, Members may be reluctant to move forward not knowing what to expect.

Let’s set the Privileges and Elections Committee to work on this immediately and develop a process that will work for us. Let’s deal with harassment systemically and create a welcoming environment so people we need working for people in this House are not scared away.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s my privilege to stand on Wednesday on this private Member’s resolution. I want to thank the Member opposite for bringing this to the floor of the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the decision will be about how we deal with harassment, how we deal with conduct of MHAs in this House of Assembly. There’s been a suggestion that we refer to other jurisdictions and take this work to a committee of the Privileges and Elections Committee, a committee that has been around this House of Assembly, around this Legislature for quite

some time. The thing is, what we're trying to get to here is to improve the decorum, to improve the conduct, raise the integrity of this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few days there is no question that people around the province are watching. People are talking and people are listening. There are a lot of questions that have been raised. People are talking about accountability. People are talking about integrity. People are talking about conduct of Members, what happens on the floor of the House of Assembly and people expect better. People expect a higher standard of accountability. People are asking, what does accountability mean? People have a right to ask those questions.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, when you look around, to all of us as Members, there is time for some self-assessment, there is time for self-reflection. Self-assessment and reflection at our own actions is part of the accountability process but it's also part of how we improve the conduct of Members and how we improve the decorum and what happens on this floor.

Mr. Speaker, we can talk a lot and say some fancy words, and words do matter, but it's the actions of the individuals that can lead to poor conduct, as words can as well. I would suggest and challenge from time to time that's appropriate for every single Member of this House of Assembly, do that self-assessment of each of us, our own self-assessment.

It is okay sometimes to look in the mirror and ask ourselves: Does our own actions represent truly the integrity, the expectations of people across our province, people who are watching and people who are listening to us as leaders in this House of Assembly? We should never lose sight of the privilege that we have to sit in these 40 chairs in this House of Assembly. It's a privilege that's been given to us by people in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, we know that the world we live in is far from perfect. We also know the individuals that live in our world are all far from perfect, but, as Members of the

House of Assembly, one of the things we do is we interact with people on a daily basis. It's our constituents. It could be through our phone calls. It could be through text messaging. It could be through email. It's those interactions that matter, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the conduct and the integrity of people in this House of Assembly, it's important for us to continue to co-operate to bring improvements because things evolve. What might have seemed okay 10 years ago is not okay. It was not okay 10 years ago but people now are more empowered to speak up and speak out. We have evolved to a better place but we have a lot of work to do.

When I talk about the interaction with our constituents, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't end there. We have interactions with our own staff. We have district offices where we have CAs that are working. Our constituency assistants are working those offices on a daily basis representing us. We interact with them, making sure we take care of the needs and provide the services to help them to get to those services. As MHAs it is critically important how we engage with our own CAs. It's important we do that to maintain integrity with our constituents, but with our own staff as well.

People have reached out to me in recent days as they've watched this unfold in this House of Assembly. I can tell you there are still people out there living in fear and are not comfortable in coming forward. Mr. Speaker, that has to change. How we interact with our own staff is critically important. We have executive assistants for those that would – in leadership roles. It's critically important we maintain that integrity, that balance between work and life. Mr. Speaker, people are watching.

I ask every single Member in this House of Assembly, does your actions truly represent the words? It's important to self-assess. It's important to reflect on our own actions. People must be free to work without fear of consequence. Ask yourself. I encourage every single Member to look in the mirror, ask yourself.

This issue is far too big to be political, Mr. Speaker. This is not a political debate. Every

single Member of this House of Assembly, every single Member, it is time to self-assess. It is time to reflect on where we are. People are indeed watching.

It's only those that sit in those chairs that are free to – you can't be judgmental, Mr. Speaker, but we can improve the work environment that we live in. It is time to be accountable. It is time to assess our own actions. We must change. We must change the environment we live in.

I ask you to put yourself in the shoes of others. Put yourself in the shoes of those we interact with on a daily basis. Switch chairs with your CA for a day. What is it like to be an EA? What's it like to be a staff member? What is it like to be a constituent? How are you interacting with all those people?

We are in a position of influence. It's the 40 Members of this House of Assembly who can change the way we interact with those that work with us in the future. It's an important step that we must take, but that first step starts with us in this House of Assembly.

Do we measure up to the benchmark that we are setting for others? We must, we must. We cannot tolerate bullying or harassment in any form. We cannot brush things under the rug.

I was just asked: Why is this different than former and other administrations? Other administrations were afraid to talk about it. They would not allow it to happen publicly. It would not happen before. People have spoken up. I've encouraged people to come forward and start a review process where we can create effective change. That is what I want to do. That is what we all want to do.

Mr. Speaker, this administration, under my leadership, we will deal with the issues, but we must also consider as we deal with the issues the frame of reference. What is the frame of reference? What might be timid to one – what might not seem like a big issue for one individual can be tempered to someone else. It can be very different. Depending on your frame of reference, depending on the perspective that you come from, it can be very different. What someone might think is tolerable, is intolerable

for someone else. Look at the frame of reference that we engage to people we represent.

Mr. Speaker, in the last few days many people have reached out, many people that would have worked and interacted with people from many years ago. So people are watching what we're doing. They are expecting us in this House of Assembly to bring improvements to making sure that this workplace is a safer workplace.

It is also important that we – it is to the point where we can encourage others. We can encourage more women to enter politics. I said publicly quite a bit in the last few days, that based on the proceedings we've seen here in the last few days, most people are telling me this is not the environment they would want to put their self forward to, to seek election, to take one of those seats that we see here in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, think of a world where people do not step up into this Legislature, where people do not see it fit to put their names on a ballot and seek election. Think of that, Mr. Speaker. We have to improve. It's okay to self-access, it's okay to reflect.

There are people for years that would not bring their issues forward. There are people today that are dealing with physical strains, actually physically strained by the work, by the interactions. The mental impact on people's lives based on their experience has to change.

I can assure you, from my perspective, this is not about politics. This is truly, genuinely wanting to make a difference for those that will come behind us, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of options available to us. The Members opposite have put forward a private Member's resolution, which is important. While I'm not going to get stuck on what the specifics would be, what I want to get to is a solution. What I really, genuinely want to get to is improving this system.

We will be supporting the Privileges and Elections Committee. The process we enter into

should include engagement from all Members of this House of Assembly which will ultimately land up at some point, in all likelihood, within the Management Commission involvement as well.

Mr. Speaker, the important thing is that we put in place the policies that will allow Members of this House of Assembly to work in a harassment-free environment, to make sure they can go to work and other staff can go to work feeling safe. We want people to return home to their families on a daily basis knowing their work is important, knowing they've made a contribution to the people of our province, and we can do that.

We can do that in collaboration and working in co-operation on a non-political issue because let's not forget, this is not the first time in the history of any jurisdiction that this has happened. This has been around for far too long. It's the Members who exist right here on this floor of all political parties that can make a difference. Yes, sometimes it takes courage to self-assess. Sometimes it takes courage to look in the mirror and ask yourself but we must do that from time to time, Mr. Speaker, if we want to make sure the Legislature is indeed a safer place to live.

Mr. Speaker, it is about making change. So I see this as an opportunity for all of us to be able to start that change. I look forward to getting this in Committee. I look forward to having a great debate, like suggestions and work that will be done within the Committee and eventually getting new policies in place that will reflect the workplace, reflect the code of conduct.

We have a Green report that was established in 2007. The code of conduct we currently work under was in 2008. The harassment-free policies we will be bringing in for our public sector workers will be in June of this year.

Mr. Speaker, we are on the right road, but it will take co-operation and collaboration, and probably some courage from people in this room to get the job done. I am more than willing to start that process. I want to start this process on behalf of all the Members of this House of Assembly, recognizing that we sit in our seats,

the privilege given to us by those that have elected us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Here we are Wednesday, and it sure feels already like a week. It's been a very interesting time in our House of Assembly. It's been packed and it's also been extremely, extremely, extremely difficult for some of the Members of our House of Assembly, for some of their families. I say has been, but it continues to be, I am sure. It's been a confusing time as well, and that really points to what happens when we don't have proper procedures and processes in place; or, even if we do, people aren't completely aware of what those might be, how difficult it can be.

I commend my colleague from Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune for presenting this private Member's motion, and I'm sure all of us will support this. There's no reason not to, Mr. Speaker. There is every reason to support this. We all know this is the right thing to do. We all know this is the right way to go. So often, as said in this House, our rights are never given to us, they are hard-earned. They are hard won and oftentimes those who are activists are the ones who do the work often at great personal sacrifice.

I would like to commend those in this House and my colleagues who have stepped forward. It has taken courage. It is my hope that whatever personal sacrifice has been spent to do this that they are paid back in multiples by being able to feel they have, in fact, effected some change.

It's unfortunate that it often costs great personal sacrifice and courage but our rights are never given to us, they are often hard won. To have political change, whether it be in our civil society, whether it be in the Chambers of our House of Assembly, whether it be in our

workplaces, there's often resistance and it takes us a long time to do it.

I'd also like to commend those in the women's movement who have done this kind of work for years. I would particularly like to commend those in the labour movement who have been great leaders in making safe and harassment-free workplaces a priority for workers all over the world.

I'd also really like to commend the labour movement here in Newfoundland and Labrador for the great work they have done in developing policies and procedures, in doing research, in doing the really hard work that has created a foundation and a basis from which we can go forward as a Legislature in looking at the issues of harassment and intimidation on any level. We benefit by the great work they have done. The work they have done with passion and compassion, with expertise, and the women's movement as well who have done so much of that work.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, all this work and pressure from a number of areas will bring us to the point of having the best anti-harassment and anti-intimidation policy on the planet – I would like to say on the planet – because we have so much to draw from. We have people who are passionate about it here in our House, and I know we are ready to do this.

I just finished reading a new article by Drew Browne, who is a political commentator and writer. Drew was doing his Ph.D. in political science. He put that on hold for a while. He's doing political writing and political analysis, writing for, among other publications, *VICE* magazine. He wrote a new column today about what's happening here in our province. I encourage people to read it.

Drew is sometimes hard-hitting. He's very smart. He can be pretty cheeky. Sometimes that's what we need in terms of looking at what's happening in our province from different perspectives. He presents to us a very interesting prism, and a prism refracts light so you can see things in different ways. One of the lines from that article, he said: "Our political system is built out of personality conflict, not policy dispute."

Really, that's what we all want to be doing. We all want to be doing the work of policy. We all want to be doing the work of policy debate, of policy dispute, not personality conflict. That's not where we want to be. We want to be able to move beyond that.

We've heard a lot about this, this past week and a half, which it feels like months. It feels like we've been at this for months. The reality of it is that we've been at this for years. We really, really have been at this for years. Now we've come to a time, a critical moment, where it's time to really act and to do things.

Our Premier has asked the Commissioner for Legislative Standards to examine the current harassment allegations to see if there have been any violations of our Members' Code of Conduct. That's a process we have right now. There is still some confusion about that. There's still some confusion of exactly how the Commissioner for Legislative Standards will approach this. Will he bring in an outside expert, an expert who has – because it is an area of expertise, the issue of harassment and allegations. Often there is a gender issue as well that's at play.

When we look at our Houses of Assembly, our legislatures, whether they be across the country or also across the globe, there is a gender imbalance in most legislatures. Sometimes then the issue of gender and power imbalance really comes to play. That takes a certain level of expertise to be able to address all that.

The Commissioner will provide an opinion back to the Premier, as per section 36 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* and it is the appropriate interim measure, perhaps, but we need a stronger and more directed and complainant-driven process for dealing with harassment of one MHA by another.

We're not talking about what happens here in the House because that's also the purview of the Speaker to keep decorum and to ensure that what happens in the House is not personality conflict but really is policy dispute. We need to protect the areas where we have real vigorous debate on policy.

I would like to commend Speaker Perry Trimper for the work that he has done to ensure that we have a better decorum here in this House. Not because it's just nice to have it but because it facilitates our work and that's the important thing, that we're able to do the work that we need to do, get on with the business at hand so we can work on behalf of the people who've elected us. There is a lot of work to do, we all know that.

There are a number of policies that are already in place in a number of jurisdictions in the country and I would like to just point out a few of them. I have them here at my desk and I'm sure that many of my colleagues have already perused them. Some folks have talked about Nova Scotia. Here I have an anti-harassment policy from Saskatchewan. That's a pretty new one and then there's one from Alberta.

We also know that Ontario was presenting one, the Government of Ontario, but that was a culmination of the efforts of all parties in their House, who came together to develop one, to propose one. That was before their House but then the inconvenient issue of the provincial election interrupted the process. So that has not yet been debated before their House. That's put on hold until after their election. It will be interesting to see, in fact, what they propose.

I'd just like to point out some of the issues that Nova Scotia is looking at. Theirs came into effect in 2016 and it's a House of Assembly Policy on the Prevention and Resolution of Harassment in the Workplace. It applies to all offices, premises and locations where House business is carried out, including travel and work-related social settings.

That's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because a lot of us sometimes are attending conferences at the same time or we may be visiting in each other's districts. So it's important to be able to take it outside of the jurisdiction of the House in terms of physical plan of the House.

It applies to MLAs, to staff employed by the House of Assembly including political staff – here's another interesting thing – and to volunteers of MLAs. That's something that we need to take a look at as well, that this also applies to volunteers. We're looking at everyone

that an MHA – well, theirs are Members of their Legislative Assembly. They're looking at everyone that they have work to do with whether it's paid work or whether it's volunteers.

They clearly identify what harassment means and the policy, as I had mentioned, doesn't apply to debate in proceedings in the House of Assembly or Committees. Again, we rely on our Speaker to handle those issues and our Committee Chairs as well to handle those issues, that's so we're free to do the work that we come together to do on behalf of the people of the province.

The aims and principles – this is Nova Scotia again – is asserting the right to be treated with respect, encouraging early identification and reporting, establishing a complainant-driven resolution process, ensuring confidentiality and providing sanctions. There are sanctions associated with this as well.

There is a detailed list of who each person should report to depending on who the respondent is. If the respondent is a Member then they go to the Whip, or the House Leader if the complaint is about the Whip. So there's someone to complain to. For most other respondents, the complainant goes to the Clerk or to the Speaker.

The ideal situation is they like to see things resolved through an informal resolution effort. If that doesn't work out, a formal complaint is made to the Office of the Ombudsman who will do an investigation and make a report. If there are grounds for a complaint against a Member, the person who originally received it will recommend remedial, corrective or other measures, or refer it to the Internal Affairs Committee.

Now, I read this one from Saskatchewan and it just highlights how difficult, how personally difficult, it is to make a complaint. It is so tough. It is incredibly tough. The Assembly of Saskatchewan adopted their anti-harassment policy in 2017 and the Board of Internal Economy later adopted a directive specifying that the policy will apply to harassment between Members. So they're looking specifically at between Members, and it does not apply to anything said by a Member before the

Legislative Assembly or any of its Committees. Again, that's the purview of the Speaker and the Committee Chairs.

The principle states that: Every Member shall commit to contributing to an environment free of personal or sexual harassment, a Member shall not harass another Member and an environment free of harassment allows all Members to excel in their public duties.

That's what we want. We want to be able to just be free to do the work that we have to do.

I'm running out of time here, Mr. Speaker. There's a whole list of who reports to who and then the complainant's report against the Member, the complaint is given to the Member and it's tough; it's really, really tough. I keep thinking: Gee, I'm not so sure I'd want to go through this process. That's why it's so important that we have very clear procedures on how to proceed with a complaint so it's clear to the complainant, it's clear to the accused and they know exactly what they can expect and they have a say in the resolution of this conflict.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues who came forward this week in a very, very difficult situation. I believe we are going to be able to resolve this. I believe it's a challenge but it's not insurmountable. I look forward to developing solutions to this challenge that's facing us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand for the next 15 minutes and also put some of my views, I guess, and experiences into the record of the House of Assembly on this really important debate that we're having here this afternoon.

The Member who just spoke before me said it's been a long week and people are tired. I would have to agree with her. It has been a long week. Myself, and we don't want to apply a gender

thing always, but maybe as a female more so. I've had my family reaching out that live across the country in different places: Are you okay?

The Premier was right when he spoke and said people are watching. It is one thing to say we're going to do something but it is another thing for us to live by those actions. We've all heard the saying many times that action speak louder than words. It's not what we say. Sometimes, oftentimes, what we're doing is so loud that people can't hear what we say. That's why it's important for us to lead by example.

Just for the purpose of those who might be watching, what we're debating here this afternoon is a private Member's motion asking the House to support the introduction of a Legislature-specific harassment policy. Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's anyone on my side of the House or on the other side that wouldn't support this, anything that makes a workplace a more respectful environment to work in.

Mr. Speaker, I was thinking as I was sitting here listening to the speakers, my mind went back to a couple of falls ago, maybe, when the Premier was with me up in my district for an event. It was a very snowy, late fall day. I think that conversation was because of some things that were playing out in social media. Nobody's talking about when you put your name forward in public life and the beating you can often get in social media, because there are keyboard warriors and they're not held accountable for the things they say.

Those are very difficult things that impact lives as well. I remember that day, saying to the Premier: Before I put my name forward into public life, I felt I was a respected member of my community, a mother, a daughter and a wife. I remember him – I don't know if he remembers, maybe, because he don't forget much – tapping his hand on the steering wheel and saying: We have to be – some of my colleagues will know, I've said this to them – able to live in a way that the public can hold us to a higher standard. I remember the Premier saying that: We have to live in a way that the public will hold us to a higher standard. It's a very important discussion we're having here today, Mr. Speaker.

My time is going to go so fast and I'm not going to get out everything I want to say which is the same story, different time on my feet, but I'm going to talk for a couple of minutes about the government that I'm a part of and some of the initiatives that we have undertaken to date, striving to create a work environment for all employees where they are safe and free from harassment, Mr. Speaker.

All of us, Mr. Speaker, I believe will stand up here and say harassment in the workplace cannot and will not be tolerated.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the minister for the Status of Women, made reference several times to our parents and our grandparents and those who blazed the trail and came before us, that we have a responsibility now to do right by them.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all, most of us, are proud of where we come from. I'm certainly proud that I come from – we joke and say: I come from good stock. We want to make them proud. My grandmother used to say: Live a good life because your name will go further than you ever would.

I think it's all relevant here today, Mr. Speaker. Those little things we were taught by our parents and grandparents, just because we're into the Legislature, we don't become oblivious to those things. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have lively and spirited debate in this House and that's important.

I want to mention for a moment being in Cabinet, which I've experienced since July 31. When you're in Cabinet, Mr. Speaker, that can be a difficult job. You have your constituency to represent still as an MHA. You have your ministerial portfolio. You have a tremendous responsibility at that table, Mr. Speaker, to make decisions that will impact the entire province. Sometimes you might have a little to and fro, but, Mr. Speaker, it always must be done in a respectful manner. The same thing at the caucus table. I am very pleased, Mr. Speaker, with those tables that I've sat at and my experiences to date.

Mr. Speaker, what are we doing? What are we doing today, as the sitting government, to prevent and end harassment and violence against

women? In February of this year, our government announced a newly strengthened and modernized Harassment-Free Workplace Policy for departmental government employees. Mr. Speaker, that will come into effect, as my colleague mentioned, earlier on the 1st of July.

The policy, Mr. Speaker, incorporates all 15 recommendations from a report done by Rubin Thomlinson; all 15 recommendations. Key elements of the policy are “a full-time Harassment-Free Workplace Manager solely dedicated to managing all aspects of the policy and its procedures, including the coordination of harassment investigations. This manager will receive all complaints and will function as an independent facilitator of the resolution process; and the manager will also act as a resource for individuals who have questions or concerns.”

Mr. Speaker, there will be an employee awareness program and mandatory training focused on prevention for all employees under the policy, mandatory training.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, shared some information recently about a book. I'm going to go buy the book, the truth about your canary or my canary, *Trust your Canary*. He better write it down, I'll get the wrong book.

Mr. Speaker, that book talked about, as I understand it, looking at yourself and then reflecting on how others might see you. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, how we see ourselves and how others might see us are not always the same.

The Premier just talked about the discussion that we're having in the House today causes us all to reflect because if there are people in the workplace that do not feel comfortable, it is absolutely essential that they feel comfortable in coming forward, that they know there's a process in place and that they know it will be dealt with.

By the same token, Mr. Speaker, and this is my views I'm speaking to now, I also don't think people should feel pressure to come forward. That is an individual choice.

The Harassment-Free Workplace Policy, Mr. Speaker, I have pages and pages of what is covered under that and I'm afraid I'm not going to get to some of my other things, so I'm moving along from that. If anybody wants more information, I'd be happy to have that discussion after.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to highlight a few things my colleague, the Minister of Justice, has brought forward that I consider to be very progressive.

Expanding the definition of family violence to include psychological and emotional harm under the *Family Violence Protection Act*; funding a new sexual assault response pilot program to provide free, independent legal advice on criminal matters to help victims make informed decisions about the court process; and, most recently, we'll all remember, commitment to introducing new legislation to help battle against what's being dubbed revenge porn in an effort to deter the non-consensual sharing of or threat of sharing private images.

Mr. Speaker, there are many positive things, I believe, to date. Can we do more? Can we make improvement? Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have heard me say many times, the biggest room in any house is the room for improvement. Absolutely, we can make improvement.

We have established a ministerial committee on violence against women and a Minister of Justice committee with stakeholders on violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, I was really pleased that budget '18 saw increased funding for eight women centres through the province, a Multicultural Women's Organization of NL and provided operational funding to the Safe Harbour Outreach project.

Mr. Speaker, just last week, myself and the Premier announced multi-year funding for phase one for 22 communities, and the eight women's centres were also on that list. We just increased funding for the NL Sexual Assault Crisis and Prevention Centre. All very important initiatives as we move forward.

I'm pleased to be sitting with a team today, a Liberal government that brought in the first violence prevention initiative that saw fit – those are the people I sit with today. This is something that impacts all of us.

I remember, and I only thought about this today, one of my other colleagues said this debate is making us all recall different things. I remember when I came in here as an MHA in Opposition back in 2013, there was a Member sitting in the government who took to social media again and again and again and again. Really, it was like a defamation of my character.

It was one thing to have the debate in the House, but I remember my husband and my daughter was in town at the time, I remember waking up on a Saturday morning in a hotel and seeing all of this Twitter stuff from an MHA in government that now works upstairs, but he did apologize. I'm going to get to that.

I reached out to him. I said you're affecting me, you're affecting my husband, your affecting my daughter. We did not sign up for this. I just want to represent my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: He said, what do you want me to do? Mr. Speaker, I have to give him credit. I don't think he knew how damaging he was. I was feeling really, really down. It impacted – do I want to be in this environment.

Nobody wrote my notes for me today, Mr. Speaker. No one gave me a script. I'm just telling it kind of as it's coming to me.

I said, would you apologize publicly? He did it twice. I thank him for that. I haven't had any trouble since with that individual, but it's an example of how we can think it's all a part of the legislative debate. You go too far and you don't know how much you're impacting someone's life. So it's important, Mr. Speaker, for us to have a process, for us to be able to speak out, for us to know that we are supported.

Mr. Speaker, like many people, I've been following the media this week where I could. The one thing that caught my attention last night in the media before I came in here to Estimates

was the reporting of how commonplace, sadly, harassment is in the workplace, whether it's government, whether it's the private sector. It's ubiquitous, Mr. Speaker. I reflected on that last night. We see it in our schools, which is why we have a safe and caring schools act.

Most of us, Mr. Speaker, spend a great deal of our lives in the workplace. Many of us spend more time with our co-workers and our colleagues than we do our families. It's the nature of the business. When you're being here in this Legislature it takes a lot of time away from your family.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the reasons why it is imperative that we create an environment that encourages those experiencing harassment to come forward; that has in place effective options for informal and formal resolution; a process – and I cannot stress this enough – that respects the privacy of those involved; that holds harassers accountable and empowers victims to come forward.

Harassment affects workplace productivity. It affects mental health. It increases absenteeism. Mr. Speaker, we all know examples of – I'm very concerned in this social media age of how people feel (inaudible), how it affects their mental health.

I see my time is winding down. There has been a lot of reference today to the Nova Scotia policy, Mr. Speaker, a lot of beneficial things there, but I want to remind Members in my final minute of something that's in the Nova Scotia policy. It says: "All persons associated with a complaint including witnesses are responsible for limiting discussion of the complaint and the disclosure of related information to those people who need to know." – responsible for limiting that discussion.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of workplace harassment is a very serious one and an important discussion to have, but I, myself, question the approach of the Opposition of making political hay this past week with an issue that is a very serious one. I feel, to a large degree, we've had a case of re-victimization happening right here on the floor of the House of Assembly.

There's a reason why victims' names are protected in such proceedings. I just feel the way this was approached, it was more about scoring political points than advancing the conversation, which is a shame, but, Mr. Speaker, this is something very serious, we take serious. We support this PMR today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's indeed an absolute privilege to stand here today and represent my district on this very important topic that we're talking about here today. I agree with everything the minister said until her last 30 seconds or so, because this is not political. This is about people.

I applaud the people who stood forward here this week and said there is a problem. I applaud them for coming to the House of Assembly and saying there is a problem.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I've been one of the longest Members here. There are a lot of Members here who have a few more years than I do, and I've seen it. Is this the first time bullying was ever here in the House of Assembly in my 10 years? No. It has happened years and years ago, but do you know what? Society is changing. People are not tolerating what went on. Is that the right thing to do? Yes, it is. Is it the right thing to bring it here to the House of Assembly if it's makes a change? Yes, it is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'll always remember the first time I came to the House of Assembly and how intimidated I was to get here to the House of Assembly.

For the first couple of years, I had everything wrote down and practiced three times the night before I came in and said my speech. Today, I

wrote a few words down and know what I'm going to do.

I can remember my first speech when one Member walked by and unhooked my microphone just before I was ready to get up. My two legs were shaking, the change in my pocket was making noise and I was intimidated by the noise that was here. It was scary, but do you know what? I always go back to why I came here. I came here to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the people in the District of Cape St. Francis. I am sure every Member here does the same thing. I hope we're all here for the right reasons.

I grew up in a household, Mr. Speaker, and I'm so happy I did. I'm very fortunate. I am so fortunate that I grew up with a mother and father. They earned their respect. They didn't ask for respect but they earned respect in their community.

My father was a mayor. The first mayor ever of the Town of Flatrock. My mother was a public health nurse for 32 years, and to watch what she did, no matter if it was a person at home who had a disease, such as cancer, I saw her leave at 12 o'clock at night to go and sit with that person. The respect – and that's what this is all about. It's about the respect of individuals.

Harassment and bullying, whether it's – in so many different forms today. It's about lack of respect for individuals. That's what this House of Assembly – I come in here every day and I will argue with Members on the opposite side.

I will go to the Minister of Transportation and Works and try to get my road paved down in Torbay. We may argue back and forth and whatever happens at the end of the day, but I hope he respects what I do because I'm representing the people in my district. That's what we do here as legislators.

I saw a lady get up here a little while ago and talk about an unfortunate incident that happened to her son. My heart went out to her. For her to get up and do what she did in this House of Assembly that day was absolutely amazing. I applaud her for doing it because it was amazing what she did.

There's no place in society anymore for what we call bullying or intimidation. It doesn't happen. Did it happen before? Did it happen three years ago? Did it happen when I first got elected here? Yes, it did. It definitely did. I'm not saying it's this side or that side or whatever, but politics is a dirty game sometimes. It's a very dirty game, but do you know what? It's going to change because society is not going to allow it to continue to happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I applaud the people that got up and spoke out. Maybe I should have spoken out 10 years ago, or seven or eight years ago when I saw it. I should have spoken out because it's not right. No matter if it was today, yesterday or 10 years ago, we should never have tolerated it. We live in a society today where we hope everybody has learned a whole lot more. We hope people are standing up.

I know there are different movements we'll see all over the world, and it's not only women. It's young people, young men. There are different genders. We all have to stand up, but it's important that people stand up for individuals too.

I can only imagine how hard the last couple of weeks have been on Members of this House of Assembly because of the media and everybody else hounding them. The pressure on those people is unbelievable; an unbelievable amount of pressure. Will I do it? Will I not do it? Maybe it's time for me to stand up but if I do stand up, I'll be standing up for everybody.

Again, I thank you for doing what you did. Thank you very much for doing it. We all should stand up and make sure – but at the end of the day, it's all about what people in society see, especially outside.

There was an interesting conversation last night. I went to a place and they said: What's on the go in there? What's on the go in the House of Assembly? I tried to explain it to them what was on the go in the House of Assembly and they didn't take it. I tried to say: Do you know something? We have an obligation to people in society, to lead by example. I think this is the place where examples should be led.

They said: Well, fellows roaring at each other. I said: No, that's not how it works. I said: It's been a part of politics for years that people threaten, they tell you you're not going to get something if you don't toe the line on this or you don't do this, you don't do that. The person looked at me and said: In this day and age? I said: Yes, in this day and age that happens, because that's what this is all about. This is all about people who feel – it's about the victims.

I'm a big guy, I'm a big man. I can handle a lot of stuff, but I'm a very soft fellow too now when it comes to anything. I can cry with the best of them, but it's a sad part of society when people pick on the weak and people they think they can intimidate. Because some people you can intimidate and some people you can't intimidate. That's what this is about.

This is about standing up for people. The mental anguish and the mental feelings people get when they're – whether it's a project you're looking for and you're trying to do the best for your district and you're trying to do the best for this, and then there's this thing held over your head that if you don't go here or you don't do this or you don't do that, you're not going to get it. That's wrong. It's been wrong for a long, long while.

We're here today to make up a right. We're here to change the policy and hopefully we're going to change, not only what happens in this Legislature – I go back to a commercial. I was coming in this morning, I'm sure you all heard the commercial. This young lady, she said she was 40 years old and she ran into a junior high, and he didn't realize he was her bully. She ran and gave him a hug and realized that she was bullied. When she went to school he made that person's life terrible, and 40 years later they come together and give each other a hug.

Do you know what? That's what's wrong with society today. There are a lot of bullies out there, a lot of people who intimidate people and they don't know that they're doing it. They don't realize what affects they are having on individuals, what affects they are having on people who have to go home, got to do different things, the affect that has on people. We have to make people aware. It's important that people become aware of what is happening.

I listen to people talk about Twitter and Facebook and stuff like this. I go on Facebook, I look and see whose birthday it is today and I wish them a happy birthday. I don't put up anything political. I put up a few pictures of my two grandchildren on Facebook. I don't do Twitter. I'm not into Twitter. I don't even know how to get into Twitter. Guess what? I don't want to get into Twitter. I don't want to be in that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: That's who I am.

So what I'm saying is society has changed. There are ways now that people can – I heard of something this morning, they were talking about some kind of Twitter account that you don't know who is there, don't know anything about it, but they can say whatever they want.

What an awful way to intimidate people. What a way to put something out that other people are reading about another person. It's gross. It drives me nuts. Guess what? I'll never be on Twitter. I'm not going on Twitter. If that's the case, stuff like that, social media, it should never be there.

We all got to get together as individuals and understand that society is changing and the time to speak up is now. That's why leaders should speak up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Everyone in this room should be a leader. We're all leaders here so we should speak up.

The day of harassment and bullying is wrong. It shouldn't happen. It shouldn't happen anywhere. Can you imagine – I can remember going to school, I can remember in our younger years and there'd be one or two kids in the classroom that would be picked on. How wrong was it? I have two little grandchildren now, I don't want them picked on.

We don't tolerate it in here and we don't tolerate it in our offices and the in corridors. The workplace for an MHA is not just the House of Assembly. A workplace for an MHA – and I laugh because sometimes they'll say to me: Oh,

you're finally going to work when the House opens. I laugh at them and say: You don't know what we do. My workplace consists of 24-7 because no matter if it's a person that calls me at 11 o'clock in the night, I have to be respectful to that person. Not roar them out and say: What are you doing calling me at 11 o'clock in the night? I do get calls at 11 o'clock in the night because I think everybody got my cellphone number.

Anyway, I do get calls but I have to be respectful to the people that I represent and I hope I am. I'll go to different functions in my district. I go to lots of functions in my district. Will people accuse my party or something we stood up for, or government in general, that I'm wrong? They'll argue with me and say: We haven't seen you, you don't this and you don't do that. I always try to be respectful of that person because they're entitled to their opinion. They are all entitled to their opinion.

When I come into this House of Assembly in the daytime, I look over across the hallway. I look over at every Member over on the other side and I hope that I earn their respect by being respectful to them, but in turn, I hope that they're respectful to me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: That's what a workplace is all about.

Mr. Speaker, I have so much stuff written down today that I haven't even gotten through 1/10th of it.

I just wanted to talk about changes and changes that we need to make. The changes we need to make are we have to set an example to our children, to people in society. When we see stuff – and like I said today, I applaud the people who stood up. They stood up because they were being intimidated and they were being bullied. This is not passing judgment on anyone. There'll be an investigation and everything else, but I think whatever comes of this, the House of Assembly will be a better place for everybody to work.

As we go on, and I know I'm not going to be here forever or whatever, but I know that I want to see this House have people here who have the

same values that I do. In order to have the same values, we have to have very respectful people here. People are not going to want to run for office if they feel they're going to be intimidated, harassed and everything else.

It's so important. We play a major role, we play a big role in how people act and how people live in our province. We are the legislators that make laws. We're the people who will decide funding for a new school, a new road, a health care facility. We're the people who make a lot of changes.

I'm very proud of my 10 years, so far, as a Member of the House of Assembly, on both sides of the aisle. I'm very proud of what I've done for my district, but we all have to make sure that we do it for the right reasons and we all have to be respectful.

That's the biggest word I want to use today is to show respect for one another. I've sat around a caucus table. I've never sat in Cabinet, but I've sat around the caucus tables where caucus is not always in favour. Will we disagree? Yes, Sir, we'll disagree because sometimes you will stand up for people and you'll have a difference of opinion. If we all have the opinion, we're in the wrong place because difference of opinion is what makes everything else go right.

Mr. Speaker, there's no place anymore for bullying and intimidation. There's no place anymore in the House of Assembly for it. There's no place in society for it, whether it's on the playground at school – we have educators who are looking at what's on the go here and maybe they're deciding to make changes at school when they see stuff. Do you know what the biggest thing to happen here is? There was intimidation here and people needed to stand up. It never happened until we had the people that we should have stood up for, they had to stand up first.

That's what the problem is today in society. We have to be more vigilant to make sure that when we see things happening that we don't believe in and we don't think is right, that we stand up for the weak – not the weak, that's not right, for individuals, because you're not weak if you're getting intimidated. That's not the right

statement at all, but we need to stand up for people.

I'm proud to be a Member of the House of Assembly. I always will be proud to be a Member of the House of Assembly. I can tell you one thing right now, I'll respect every person in this place but I hope everybody will return the same to me because that's what we all deserve.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Out of respect for the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune and her time, I'm only going to take a couple of minutes, but I do thank everyone for leave just to say a couple of words.

Mr. Speaker, I will certainly be supporting this bill. I think it's a long time coming; definitely needed. I could repeat pretty much verbatim what the Member for Cape St. Francis seen. I've seen it all. I've been around, not as long as he has been, but I've seen lots of activity over the years that ought not to have happened. I'm glad to see it's going to be addressed and I encourage the government to get on with doing just that.

I challenge all Members, I challenge all parties, as we make a commitment as MHAs to improve our behaviour, our decorum, how we treat each other, by extension I think we all have a responsibility. I know we can't control other people, but we do have influence over other people and we need to be talking to people around us as well, whether it be our CAs, EAs, people in the offices, people in the party, because some of these fake Twitter accounts and stuff like that that's been going on over the years and the bullying and harassment on social media, have emanated from those sources.

We have a responsibility – it's no good to stand up in the House of Assembly and say we're going to make these changes, we're committed and then through the back door we're going to allow people associated to us, to our district

associations, to the party, to be doing the dirty work behind the scenes.

I certainly encourage all parties and all Members that as we make this commitment, that we make the commitment to deal with that. We all do have some control over that as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune speaks now, she'll close the debate.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say thank you to each and every one of my colleagues, as well as each of you who spoke here today. I think today can be a historical day especially if, when we stand, we all vote unanimously in favour of this motion. I'm very pleased to say, based on the commentary I've heard from all speakers, that does seem to be the case. So I anxiously looking forward to the vote. I'm very happy to hear there's going to be support from all sides.

I was scrummed earlier today, so my apologies, I was absent from the room for a while, and I was asked if I still intend to file a complaint if a better process is not followed. Mr. Speaker, I do want to reiterate that the particular process as currently outlined leaves some concerns. I stand in solidarity with the Member for Windsor Lake and believe that we need a better process and, hence, this process that we're outlining today I do believe is that process.

It may take more time but it's far more important that we do this right than rush it. If we are able to go through the Management Commission with the proper process, such as this one outlined, I certainly will have a better comfort level with this whole process. I think everyone else would as well because it's just removed from government and there's a level playing field for all.

It's not only, they say, okay to be independent, you have to be perceived to be independent, Mr. Speaker, and sometimes perception is reality. It's just raising the bar. I think it would be a

good process for all of us. I certainly don't understand why there would be any opposition to it.

If we vote, Mr. Speaker, here in favour of this motion today, we can get the process underway immediately and file our complaints accordingly and have very strong confidence that the process we're following is the proper process. That really is all we ask.

My colleague talked about the to and fro earlier in the House of Assembly, and sometimes in here we can get all riled up, sometimes it's good banter, but sometimes it gets too harsh, goes too far and I think if we were all honest, we would say that it's shameful.

My first time in the House of Assembly – I'm going to tell my own story now – I was shocked, disgusted and terrified at the tone, even the tall tales sometimes. Now, 10 years later, I can be just as bad or worse myself in the rhetoric of the debate sometimes, Mr. Speaker. And if I were to be truly honest, when I got here in 2007, I really did not like it here. I figured that I'd ruined my life. I had quit a wonderful job working with some wonderful people to come into, what I felt, was madness. It was nothing like I'd thought it would be and it worked nothing like I thought it was supposed to.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the people I spoke to about it at time still sits in this hon. House today. I recall the government offices were on the third floor then. We were both walking up the stairway and he explained to me that what happens in the House of Assembly is what the public wanted. A little bit of theatre to keep it exciting because otherwise it would all be so dry and dull, that it was merely a parliamentary tradition to keep it lively here.

That's how it was. I accepted it for how it was, tried to learn the process and fit in as best I could, but as the last two weeks have revealed I, myself, am one of many in this hon. House who have had concerns about bullying and intimidation tactics in politics. Not just alone in the last two years, although they've been particularly challenging for me, personally, but it exists. It exists in parliaments and it always has.

At the time last fall, when I had a particularly unsettling incident, or a culmination, I guess, of an unsettling incident, I got so concerned about it that I spent a few days on the Internet trying to research – because, at that time, I seriously contemplating lodging a complaint. I researched what was happening in other legislatures. I couldn't find any precedence, Mr. Speaker.

On Wikipedia, I was able to find a definition of bullying for many types of workplaces, but there wasn't one there for parliaments so I wrote my own, Mr. Speaker. I said to myself: I wonder what such a definition should be? How would we, as parliamentarians, write them?

Mine would include one: speaking to another Member in a tone intended to humiliate, degrade or intimidate; two, exerting threats of repercussions by means of reduced or no funding allocations, no opportunity for promotion or being expelled from caucus. The latter would be especially problematic in instances of large majority governments, because in majority governments that whole push and pull of power is much stronger. In a minority government such mechanisms would be harder; and, three, the ever looming risk of being thrown under the bus by colleagues if you're unwilling to conform to viewpoints or disobey a whipped vote.

That would be the definition I would write. It's one of the things I put to paper in my time of frustration last fall, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say, personally – and I think many of my colleagues share this sentiment – I feel very, very bad about what has been happening in our hon. House these past two weeks. It has been a very hard time.

While I had taken matters into my own hands regarding my own issues last fall and achieved some resolution, it was my sense of duty to do the right thing when I saw my colleagues in turmoil over the last few weeks. When asked for help, I responded the only way I could. I have to do the right thing and I have to tell the truth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: But it hasn't been easy, Mr. Speaker. I feel bad for everyone involved, on all sides of this.

I'm not a vindictive person, which is probably why I struggle so much when I see it in others. I have the capacity to forgive, and I believe forgiveness is the first step in healing. Watching my colleagues tell their own stories brings a tear to my eye, Mr. Speaker, because I feel their pain.

I have no motivation in any of this, other than to make this a decent workplace for all persons, regardless of gender. This is about leadership, our leadership as parliamentarians. We need to move beyond this horrible time, put independent mechanisms in place – and I truly believe the Nova Scotia model is a fabulous way to start – and together we can all create a better day, not just for those present here in the House of Assembly now, but for all future parliamentarians to come, Mr. Speaker.

I truly hope I can count on the support of all my colleagues to concur that we need such a mechanism and that we move expeditiously to put such a mechanism in place to deal with the crisis before our House of Assembly, and to ensure that we actually do create a better day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): 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.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: It being Wednesday, and in accordance with Standing Order 9, this House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 o'clock.