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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:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just having a great chat about democratic reform with my colleague across the way.

Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 5, second reading of Bill 28.

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

**MR. BROWNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Happy Halloween to all, and to all out there who are watching at home and trick-or-treating and whatnot. I wish them all the best and a safe evening, and watch out for the children, of course. We don't want any goblins or ghouls running into any issues, Mr. Speaker, as they make their rounds tonight.

I'm certainly pleased to rise here today to speak to an amendment to the Newfoundland and Labrador *Arts Council Act*. As the minister said yesterday in the opening of the debate, this amendment is a routine matter intended to align this legislation with that of other Crown corporations and agencies of the provincial government, by removing section 14(1) of the *Arts Council Act*, which is a reference to the *Financial Administration Act*.

Mr. Speaker, today I will talk about our government's commitment to the arts in our province. Our government remains committed to the arts community in the province, and values the important role ArtsNL plays in providing arts funding. I am proud of our government's commitment to enhancing the recognition and support of artists throughout Newfoundland and Labrador through our *Status of the Artist Act*.

This legislation acknowledges the important contributions that artists make to our province, and government's role in supporting the creation of that work. It means a commitment from government to develop written contracts for professional artists, including work descriptions, terms of payment, dispute resolution mechanisms and rights agreements. It means honouring scale agreements and improved working conditions, Mr. Speaker – very important – and it means a continued dialogue on matters relating to culture with artists in this province.

To further build on the *Status of the Artist Act*, we are also committed to strengthening our support of culture by renewing the cultural plan. We've had a number of consultations; I believe it's 14 now have been held across the province, public consultations, targeted stakeholder engagement consultations. The minister and I have made a point to attend as many as we possibly could. It's very important – we haven't had a renewal of our cultural plan, Mr. Speaker, since 2006, so it is time, and those consultations have been well attended and well received within our cultural and arts communities.

By renewing our cultural plan this will offer further opportunities to explore government programming and funding mechanisms and offer ways to improve opportunities for artists in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it was just last evening I had the great pleasure to attend a concert by the Ennis Sisters last night with the support of other artists, Kellie Loder, Aaron Collis, Matthew Byrne, and it was all in support of mental health, the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Mental Health Association. It was a wonderful, wonderful performance, Mr. Speaker, and showcases not only our gifts of music, but our gifts of kindness. You'd find that anywhere throughout our artistic community, which is why it was so important to strengthen the *Status of the Artist* bill, why it's important now to make the necessary corrections to the *Arts Council Act*.

I also had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, on Sunday evening to attend a concert at Holy Heart by the Les Ms. Women's Choir, who will be travelling to New York next spring to

Carnegie Hall. That concert along with other choirs, including the Holy Heart Alumnae Choir, those choirs came together to support the Bliss Murphy Cancer Foundation and provided some \$6,200 to them.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very strong artistic community who not only keeps our culture alive, but also supports many important causes, whether that be cancer research or mental health and all of the other causes. We're very proud to support our vibrant, artistic and cultural community.

In developing the new Cultural Action Plan the provincial government consulted, as I've alluded to, with various representatives of the arts community. Fourteen sessions, as I also alluded to, were held throughout the province, with representation from visual arts, craft and music, to literary and publishing, to dance, theatre and film. And we spoke to each sector, which was terrifically important.

We were very encouraged by the feedback, discussion and dialogue from the cultural community, and our government believes this is a time for bold and forward thinking to look at our cultural assets and how we can enhance them. We have a truly vibrant arts community in Newfoundland and Labrador that consistently punches above its weight on the national scene, and one that makes a significant economic contribution to the province.

To recap the changes to the *Arts Council Act*, this again will put into practice how the Crown entity has operated since its inception. This is a technical change, remediating a section of the act that probably should've been amended quite some time ago to bring them in line with other entities across government.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a routine amendment, but certainly an important one as we continue to work with our cultural and artistic communities to support the great work that they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'm happy to stand and speak to Bill 28, which calls for an amendment to the *Arts Council Act*. The amendment – in some ways, this is a bit of a housekeeping issue. It doesn't significantly change anything about the Arts Council, which is now called ArtsNL.

They launched, a little over a year ago, a new logo and a new title for the organization. One that we are all extremely proud of, and have every reason to be proud of the work that the Arts Council is doing, and every reason to be proud of the arts and the culture community that has been such a major part of putting Newfoundland and Labrador on the map, both nationally and internationally.

And we can never underestimate the incredible benefits that our arts and culture workers bring to the province, to every community in this province, to every person in this province. Because the role of the artists in our community is not just to make pretty things, but it's to challenge us, to help us see who we are within our own communities, who we are within our nation, who we are as global citizens. But it is also to challenge us, to dare to ask us to look at who we are, where we are going, where we could be going and how we are doing that.

It's also part of entertainment. Something that lifts us out of our daily lives, and then brings us into a realm of possibilities that we often do not consider. That's the role of the artist as well: to elevate us all, to bring us to a space that we might not, as just regular people, go to; but, it's also that role of the artist to look at possibilities that we may never have considered.

So the amendment we are debating here today changes the wording in the clause that is meant to require an annual audit of the council's books by the Auditor General. Now, some people might think, oh, my goodness, the Auditor General hasn't been auditing the books, or people may feel this is being done because there's an uncertainty about how the funds are being treated. Not at all, Mr. Speaker. None of

that at all is in consideration of this particular amendment.

Currently, the clause says that the council must comply with the *Financial Administration Act*, and it has. It has fully complied with the administration act. But what was meant by that in 1980 the council tells us, is that it must have an annual audit by the Auditor General, which they have done. The council has done this every year since 1980.

Again, I cannot stress enough, Mr. Speaker, this is not being done because of concerns of irregularities. This is not being done because of concerns about how money is spent or how reporting is done. That is not at all in consideration in this amendment; but, as we know, the Comptroller General recently found that a wording – it's a bit strange because the act in the present day refers to departments and has onerous requirements.

Crown agencies are able to carry money over from one year to the next. They can manage their own projects and they have autonomy in many other ways. That's very important for the Arts Council, and because of that – I'll tell you why specifically it's important for the Arts Council; to be able to carry money over to next fiscal years because the Arts Council – we heard from the Arts Council that the original wording from 1980 probably had to do with the council seeking charitable status so that it could be tax exempt when it receives donations, charitable donations that it engages in fundraising.

This is something that government wanted the Arts Council to be able to do; to provide opportunities for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to donate or bequeath money to the Arts Council, to enlarge the fund of money that's available to our arts community. Again, because the people of the province are so proud of the work of our artists and our cultural workers and they want to be part of supporting it.

So what the Arts Council sought was a charitable status so that they could, in fact – also which helps in fundraising – issue charitable receipts, tax exempt receipts.

The fact that this outdated and inapplicable phrase that we are removing should remain so long in this legislation for a Crown agency, it speaks to the fact that the *Arts Council Act* probably needs to undergo a review in the next few years. That maybe we need to really relook at the whole active thing. Again, as we know, our acts should be living pieces of legislation that respond to the reality of the lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Arts Council again is now called ArtsNL, and it is at the hub of an extensive – people think of arts as perhaps a frill or a privilege, but not a necessity.

My background, I have come from the arts community. For 30 years I was a documentary filmmaker. Myself and my colleagues in the arts community so often – the projects that we have, whether it be the *Republic of Doyle*, whether it be *An Audience of Chairs*, the incredible feature film that has just recently won awards, almost every film – whether it be a commercial endeavour, whether it be an experimental film, whether it be documentary, whether it be a series, whether it be a feature film that is produced in Newfoundland and Labrador – more often than not, started with a small grant from the Arts Council, because we know that films start with the word.

It's often a writer working in their particular studio or at their kitchen table with a small Arts Council grant that is the beginning, the seed of projects like *An Audience of Chairs*, like *Maudie*, an incredible film that was produced and released last year that has won multiple awards all over the world, started with a small idea and a small grant from the Arts Council. So we know how very important ArtsNL is to the arts and cultural community.

Again, it's not a frill. Arts is not a frill. It's a very important part of our community, of our society, of our lives. ArtsNL is at the hub of an extensive labour intensive sector. The cultural industries – I'm so proud to be able to say this, Mr. Speaker. The cultural industries are economic generators in communities throughout the province. They account for up to – imagine, Mr. Speaker, this industry, this cultural industry accounts for up to \$400 million and more than 5,000 jobs in the provincial economy.

So not only is it often that small bit of money that an artist starts a project with, not only does it help them get rolling, but often the money from ArtsNL helps our artists and our cultural workers leverage other funds. Whether it's leveraging money from Canada Council, a federal arts funding organization, whether it leverages money from television stations, whether it leverages money from other foundations, often it's the first bit of money that also allows our artists and our cultural workers to seek funding from other potential funders.

It is a vote of confidence from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who say to an artist, a project or a group of artists, we believe in what you are doing. We believe it is important. We believe it is important to commit the money, the hard-earned money of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to your project. It is saying that we the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – because this money is allocated by a jury process of peers, and those people on juries who are allocating the funds are people from all over the province, also representing their communities. By allocating those often small bits of money, are saying we believe that what you are doing is important and we support you and we commit to this work.

So every dollar of government investment in culture and heritage generates \$3 in spending on goods and services, and that's even more in the case of a national TV series. That's an investment, Mr. Speaker. Where else, what other industry or what other kind of investment where you can see that every dollar generates an additional \$3? That's an incredible investment.

We know the important role that our arts and culture industries play in tourism, in hospitality, and we have seen the impact of the work of our artists in a number of communities all over the province, whether it be Trinity, whether it be Bonavista, whether it be Cow Head Theatre Festival, whether it be on the West Coast in Corner Brook, in Stephenville – the arts festival there – whether we see what's happening in many communities in Labrador, again, the impact of our artists on the economy and on the pride of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. So ArtsNL plays a crucial role in the arts community throughout the province. It is the chief source of provincial money for artistic

creation, which is the research and development phase of the cultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, it's also important that these funds and these resources are committed to projects that are not commercially viable, that is not their intention, that we invest money in those projects that are really on the edge, that really challenge us as a people. Those are important as well.

So everything from the blockbuster movies, to the TV series, to the independent short film that was never intended to be commercially viable, but a piece of art, to our visual artists, to our dancers and choreographers, to our novelists. Often the great novels that we have seen come out of this province started again with a small grant that enables the writer to put food on their table and pay their rent while they sit at their kitchen table or while they sit in their studio and write for four months. It's those kinds of investments that really we see flourish. And it's only when we support our artists in that research and development phase, in that initial phase, that we will see the benefits.

We know how important the arts and cultural industry and community has been to our province, but the grant for ArtsNL has remained the same since it was reduced in 2016 from \$2.1 million to \$1.9 million. So we see as well – I have been on a number of juries for ArtsNL before I was elected to this House, and how difficult it is – again, we are a jury of peers – to see that perhaps there is \$100,000 that we have to allocate in that particular session, but the number of applications from brand new artists, from established artists, might be \$400,000 or \$500,000.

To see juries see incredible, absolutely incredible applications for projects that are not only really interesting, but you know would be a benefit to the communities that the artists reside in, and to say what do we do? They're asking for \$4,000, but do we give them a thousand dollars, because there are so many really, really good projects, or do we fund fewer projects that are also so very good projects?

And it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because our private industry does not invest in individual artists in the beginning phases of a project because that's the riskiest time; again, that's that

research and development. So it's important that we do this work. It's crucial. It's crucial to the well-being of our people, to the well-being of our cultural workers, to the well-being of our province.

But those funds, because of our pride in our arts community, in what has been accomplished by our arts community, we are encouraging more and more young people to get involved. By doing so, we have a greater pressure on funding from ArtsNL, because we're saying this is a viable career for you and we, as a province, support it.

So we're encouraging people to come in, young people; we're encouraging diverse communities to come in and we're also saying to our established artists – and again, when we look at some of our established artists who do not make a lot of money – many of our artists are among the highest educated and among the lowest earners in the province. So they also, again, for the beginning of their projects, go to ArtsNL for support.

But their funding has not increased from 2016, so we have more people applying, we have the cost of living having gone up, the cost of supplies, the cost of renting studios, the cost of paying for other cultural workers to work on your project, all that has gone up. So the pressures on the Arts Council to be able to fund the projects that are so important to our community, the pressure is growing and mounting.

So in the ArtsNL, \$1.6 million is spent on programs and \$300,000 on administering them. Not a lot of money for administration. So I would like to just congratulate and commend Mr. Reg Winsor who's the executive director of ArtsNL and his staff for doing an incredible job, again under incredible pressure, for the arts community of Newfoundland and Labrador. They have so little money. Such a small percentage of their budget goes to administration, and these folks work hard because they know how important this is.

I'd also like to commend those who sit on the board of ArtsNL. Those are not paid positions. Those are people from all over the province, from Labrador, from Burin, from Central, from

Western, from the Avalon, from all over the province who come together to do the work of the board on behalf of the artists of Newfoundland and Labrador and on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Only about half of the eligible applicants for artistic creation grants are approved. I would think that maybe even that's a bit of a generous amount; I believe that it's even less than that. The average grant is \$4,000. Sometimes that's the only amount of money, the only amount of grant, that a writer may have to write the first draft of their novel, and we know that's months and months and months of work.

That amount is well behind the amounts other provinces give their artists for artistic creation. Again, what we're talking about often is that beginning phase and that phase of research and development. So, for a province, a province that is so proud of the work of our cultural workers, a province that gains so much from their work –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. ROGERS:** – why would we be a province that is well behind other provinces in those initial grants? I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that this government would see through how important these investments are, how valuable they are to the economy, to our well-being as a people and to the arts community.

It's been proven; it's not up for dispute. I would hope that this province, once again, will take a look at the budget for the Arts Council and realize that they can do better.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you to the Member.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly not going to take very long. I do thank my colleague here for the passionate speech. She certainly has a strong connection to the arts. She's contributed herself significantly

over the years, and I know it's something she feels very important about – as I think we all should, Mr. Speaker.

This particular bill, just to get to what it's all about, as has been said, it is sort of somewhat of, I suppose, a minor change but it basically allows a little more flexibility from a financial point of view in terms of ArtsNL not being restricted with government's fiscal year end and giving them the ability to plan for multi-years, giving the ability to carry over funding from year to year and so on to better align with the needs of the organization, to better align with the needs of the artists.

Built into that, while it does provide that flexibility, this change does, at the same time it also ensures appropriate oversight through the Auditor General, which they were doing anyway. They were doing it anyway. It's just basically outlining it here, putting it so there's no ambiguity.

It's here in this piece of legislation that they will be subject to audits from the Auditor General. As my colleague said, not because there's been any sense of anything being done untoward, not being done properly, but simply to ensure it's enshrined in the legislation and that people have the confidence that its money – because it is the people's money – is spent appropriate in this entity, the same as it would be in any other government entity.

We've seen issues, as we all know, with the school board. That unfortunate incident that has arisen recently. We can see how things can get out of control and how things can go wrong if the appropriate checks and balances and measures are not put in place. It just sort of buckles that piece up. As I said, at the same time provides a little more flexibility to ArtsNL in terms of how they plan their year, being able to plan multi-years and being able to work better with the artists and the needs of the artists and the projects as they come. So I will be supporting this bill in that regard.

Without belabouring the point on that, I think it is important that we do whatever we can as legislators to support ArtsNL. I know that not everybody in the province – it depends on who you speak to. There are a lot of people that have

this attitude that money put towards the arts is not a priority compared to other things like health care and education and so on.

I understand where some people come from, but I think it's also important to realize that there has to be a balance when we're funding different entities, different organizations, that there's more to living in a province, living in a community, than simply covering off the basic needs and services, and things like the arts are what make it a community. It's what turns it – it's the difference between a city or a town versus a community. It's really the arts that contribute to the community piece, the enjoyment of living in a particular community. Whether that be through the visual arts or whether it be through music, through acting and so on, all these things contribute to the fabric of our society.

Certainly, we have a very unique culture, a very unique heritage here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Depending on what part of the province you go to, there are different cultures. Obviously, there's heavy influence from the English, from the Irish, French; parts of our province were you have that French culture and French influence. Of course, our Indigenous peoples as well, and very rich cultures there.

As I said, you go around different parts of the province there are different dialects, there are different expressions. It's interesting, because some people – which is kind of sad when you hear your own people sometimes being critical of ourselves because of our various accents and dialects. I think it's wonderful. I think it's what makes us unique. I think it's something to be proud of, something to be celebrated. Those dialects, those expressions, it's what makes us unique.

Anything that we can do to enhance our culture, to enhance our history, I think we should be doing it. These are not always – unfortunately, these are not always commercially viable projects. A lot of the projects that get funded for the arts are not commercially viable, but –

**MS. ROGERS:** They weren't meant to be.

**MR. LANE:** And they were never meant to be. But how nice is it, when you think about it,

when you go for a walk around Quid Vidi Lake or you go for a walk through Bowring Park, or through Bannerman Park, or any of those areas, if it wasn't for programs like this you wouldn't be able to go through there to see all those beautiful statues and stuff like that that are there, that really add to the ambiance and speak to our history.

Even here in this building, on the grounds outside of our building, much of the history is captured through art, whether it be statues or murals or paintings or different things like that, and I think it's important to do that. It's important for our younger people growing up to understand where they come from, what their culture is all about and to celebrate that culture.

All of these things are culminated, really, through ArtsNL. That's the organization that's driving the bigger picture, if you will. Obviously, there are individuals throughout the province who do their thing, but the bigger picture is driven by that organization. It's important that we support them, provide them with the funding they need to do it; and, in this case, provide them with the flexibility, through this legislation, to be able to more effectively operate that entity for the benefit of us all as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

So with that said, I'll take my seat. And, as I said, I will be supporting Bill 28.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

If the hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation speaks now he will close debate.

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands for his contribution to debate, recognizing the arts that exist in Mount Pearl, and certainly very vibrant; as well as the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune for her very relevant and eloquent speech that was given

in support of this legislation; the Leader of the Third Party for highlighting the importance of ArtsNL as an organization and highlighting the contribution of the arts to Newfoundland and Labrador.

And the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, who is also the parliamentary secretary for Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, and all of his commentary and contribution around the efforts we have been making as a government to consult with the arts community through renewing our cultural plan and how we have elevated and passed legislation for Status of the Artist, because the Leader of the Third party talked about remuneration, and it's important that we recognize and remunerate artists for the work they do. That is very important to have fair and equal pay for the work that is being done.

This amendment, as everybody has highlighted, is about removing a reference in the act to the *Financial Administration Act*, but it's not removing any financial accountability to the Arts Council. They will still be audited annually by the Auditor General, and they have been operating in this form since its existence in 1980. So this a matter of being able to ensure that the act itself complies with how the Crown entity is operating.

ArtsNL is a very important organization to our province, Mr. Speaker – I think it has been relayed by all Members who contributed to the debate – in terms of what they do to support dance and film, multi-disciplinary work, music, theatre, visual arts and writing, and how they do their engagement. ArtsNL, they have a very good team of employees there. They have an independently appointed board that went through the Independent Appointments Commission, that's representative and reflective of the artistic community and the professional disciplines. They do a lot of incredible work.

I want to highlight that the work that they do to contribute to a \$450 million cultural sector that employs more than 5,000 people in the province is certainly not done alone or done without the support of governments across all levels. ACOA is a big contributor to support the artist; the Canada Council for the Arts, another big supporter. The City of St. John's is a very



important contributor to support artists here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our Cultural Economic Development Program within the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation; Canadian Heritage provides significant funding; the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recording, FACTOR; MusicNL provides funding; the Film Development Corporation; SOCAN Foundation; and Telefilm. There are many partners, both public and in the private sector that supports the arts.

One thing I disagree with the Leader of the Third Party is on private sector investment. We have a tremendous business community out there that is supporting the artist. We have Business and Arts, led by Pete Soucy there who is the executive director, that's doing incredible engagement to connect business and artists and to provide value and support them.

We also see where a number of banking institutions, financial institutions are supporting big literary prizes, like the Giller Prize. There are so many things that's been done from the oil and gas sector. When I was attending the St. John's International Women's Film Festival – one of the longest International Women's Film Festivals in the world – you'd see the investment from the oil and gas, from the mining, from others in the community. There's a tremendous amount of people who are supporting.

When I go to events at the LSPU Hall, from local law firms to individual businesses, people are supporting the arts and making these smaller productions possible. Because in Newfoundland and Labrador people believe in helping each other, and our business community and the private sector are stepping in every way, shape and form to support the arts. I certainly commend them in what they're doing.

We have seen more funding go into arts and arts organizations to support this. So ArtsNL has the decisions of the council as to how they wish to spend and allocate their funding. If they wish to spend it in sustaining funds to larger organizations, or in terms of in the creation of art, or how they leverage and work with their partners.

We have done an incredible amount of work to make our Arts and Culture Centres available; to work with The Rooms and make The Rooms available to work with artists to do exhibitions and displays and residencies; and support for our visual artists, to work with VANYL-CARFAC; to work with neighbourhood dance work. I was at the Festival of New Dance and seeing the type of dance that's happening here and brought here from all across the country. It is so amazing to see that.

I was at RIAC – an organization downtown – and seeing their gallery space that they have, and they've opened up an atelier for sewing classes to teach people the basics of sewing for free. These are people who came as refugees or immigrants or people in the community that want to be involved and learn that talent, to learn textiles, and they're going to have a fashion show.

This is what's really interesting, because I was at the LSPU Hall for the Anna Templeton Centre, College of the North Atlantic textile program, and seeing the type of work that artists, like Bruno, has done. They've been able to bring in and showcase – when I sat there – and I've been at other fashion shows – I said: This is what you'd expect in Montreal, but this is happening right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It was the same thing when I was MusicNL, which we give them \$350,000 a year. But we also do other initiatives in the department to support them, and to support exporting artists, and to do other things.

We had, down on the Burin Peninsula, Live at Heart. To see that activity and seeing people from Sweden and other parts of the world, and bringing that talent – Los Angeles, top producers and people being connected. Things are happening all over this great province. Whether we're looking at the Grand Bank Theatre and what it's doing; the Cupids Theatre, Perchance; looking at Rising Tide that has been doing this for 40 years; looking at Persistence which is focused on the feminist movement – we were one of the first people, our Department of Tourism, to support Persistence, to get them moving.

Then if we look at Carbonear and what's being done with the Princess Sheila NaGeira Theatre to focus on the importance of space, to give artists the venues, to see towns encourages and engaged, to want to make sure that the venues – and this is all about municipalities. The Rotary Arts Centre in Corner Brook and what David Smallwood and their group is doing. You have the same thing, as I said earlier, in Mount Pearl. There's vibrancy in the arts in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have it at all the Arts and Culture Centres.

Television and film, we have invested as a government, during very difficult times, we've been able to see the equity program for film go from \$2 million to \$4 million in last year's budget, and it remained at \$4 million in this year's budget. Actually, last year, we saw so much uptake and interest in film, what did we do? We put another \$1.4 million through Investment Attraction.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** \$5.4 million to deal with the activity and production, so it doesn't have to be just from one single funding partner where the arts is being supported. It is a holistic approach that is taken. That is why when we're renewing our cultural plan, we are taking very much a holistic approach as to what exists and what supports in government.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is doing significant work when it comes to the Cultural Connections program, Touring Program and getting culture into schools. So, I have to commend the minister on that.

When we look at film, because we are just off the heels of the St. John's International Women's Film Festival, then we have to look at where have we come in film. In 21 years since the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation has been created half a billion dollars in production work has happened in those 21 years.

So if you look at the last three years alone, since we formed government, the last three years, almost \$140 million in production work, of that half billion. It is growing significantly. There are

600 full-time equivalencies. We have a full-time film crew – the talent that exists – and a secondary crew, we're building that capacity and we're looking at all the ways in which we can invest and grow that. These are well-paying jobs that exist, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at film and you look at the talent that exists, there are people that are earning good salaries here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to get the message out there that in Newfoundland and Labrador you can be an artist, you can be a musician, you can do all sorts of creative work and you can make a good living.

I want to just dispel the disbelief, I guess, of the Member opposite, the Leader of the Third Party saying that artists are earning – they do not make a lot of money. Some artists do not make a lot of money, but that is not the case for the 5,000 people that work in the arts sector. There would be no way that the value of that sector would be where it's at. It's \$450 million to GDP. There are some tremendous benefits that are happening in film, television and music, and government is doing everything that it can to support the arts and see it grow all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** It's quite tremendous.

You know, to see what's going on in the Stephenville Theatre Festival, 40 years in operation and what they've done, the volunteers and the committee, just phenomenal work.

Cow Head, the Gros Morne Theatre Festival, they are expanding. They're building a multi-million dollar theatre project, being led as a patron – Brian Tobin, former premier, is supporting this and doing a capital fundraising campaign of millions of dollars to support this. Our government, the Premier has already announced a half-million dollars towards this project and their new home.

When Jeff Pitcher got up and said, we've been doing this – the artistic director, we've been doing this for so long. But this is about respect. This is about respect for the artist, and that is so important. For the professionalism and

everything that is happening in Newfoundland and Labrador, that these artists have that respect, and they are getting it in Gros Morne National Park.

That pristine product that is being offered will be there, because government is working heavily and closely with ArtsNL, with the arts organizations and with communities all across Newfoundland and Labrador to raise the Status of the Artist, to raise the profile of the profession to encourage more people to become artists and to enter artistic fields and creative fields because we can do this here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we are doing it right here.

Mr. Speaker, I've had opportunities when I've been in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and seeing the great synergies that exist in your particular district, where the arts community is engaging the North Coast – for the Member for Torngat Mountains – where art is being shared between Indigenous artists and being placed on display.

There are a lot of things that's happening at the O'Brien Centre for the Arts. Then we look at what's happening in Lab West at the Arts and Culture Centre and the different programming and supports that are being put into place to look at how we add more theatre, more productions.

I want to put a little point around the importance of engagement and interfacing our artists throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I'd be remiss if I didn't highlight The Rooms as being one of those key pillars that has been working with ArtsNL, working with artists and working with communities and organizations; having a Cultural Ambassador program that has been bringing in and engaging artists, writers. They had a book club. They would bring in writers like Rick Mercer or Mark Critch and others.

We had singers, musicians like Amelia Curran come to The Rooms and hold small performance series. This is a whole new level of engagement that The Rooms is doing to raise that profile of making sure that it has a broad connection with the arts community from all levels. They've opened up their theatre to show films. There's so much more capacity from ArtsNL to look at people who are doing those scripts, those small developments, to be able to have space and to have capacity at organizations.

We can only have the success if we're willing to work with all parties and work with the community, and that is what I've been doing as minister. I've been very engaged, going around Newfoundland and Labrador meeting with all these groups, these organizations, these committees.

My staff at TCII, a very small but mighty team, have been doing tremendous work in culture, heritage and art to make sure that artistic endeavours are front and centre, that our programs match and align, that we're connected and we do great work to support artists here in Newfoundland and Labrador and give them that ability. Because the beauty of having the Department of TCII is around the innovation that exists in the arts and the export potential that exists in the arts.

So somebody can come with an idea, but like the Leader of the Third Party, somebody who does something in writing, maybe your next film, and that might then end up being exported all around the world. It may be played at the Cannes Festival. We've had people travel to international festivals and do signings, and the same thing with music. We're going to continue to do that great work because synergies exist.

This is not about just one budgetary line item within the department as to what our government supports and invests in the arts. On a per capita basis, our province, if it is not number one, it is number two in supporting the number of artists here in Newfoundland and Labrador with the value we provide artists. We are a tremendous province that has supported artists throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, and we will continue to support our artists here.

I hope that everybody supports the amendment and continues to support the good work that ArtsNL does.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

The motion is that Bill 28 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

**CLERK (Barnes):** A bill, An Act To Amend The Arts Council Act. (Bill 28)

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

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

**MS. COADY:** Now.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Arts Council Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 28)

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 28.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Warr):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 28, An Act To Amend The Arts Council Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Arts Council Act." (Bill 28)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

Sorry, the Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We don't have a lot of questions for the minister this morning but there are a couple we'd like to ask.

Did the department consult both the Auditor General and the Comptroller General on this change?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This was a recommendation coming from the Comptroller General, was to either amend the legislation to remove this FAA, that was an option, or the alternative would be to have ArtsNL comply with FAA. We had gone down the road that this is in compliance with all other agencies, boards and commissions in terms of how they are meant to operate. So removing the FAA reference only fits in terms of the compliance. So it meets the requirement of the Comptroller General.

The Auditor General would certainly not be passing a particular comment on this matter. The Auditor General would be reviewing the

financial statements and ensuring there is compliance and would put an opinion at that time, should there be non-compliance or not in terms of the role of the Auditor General. So this was a request that came forward based on a report of the Auditor General and that the Comptroller General recommended that this take place, we're complying with what the Comptroller General had asked, that's why this bill is before the House, and just for that reason only.

The alternative would be if ArtsNL were to comply with FAA, they would have to follow departmental structure. As Members opposite had talked about, if they had tried to pursue multi-year funding or projects if there was some additional funding left over in their budgets, that would be dropped and would have to be returned to the Treasury, should it not be disbursed or expended.

So this can allow them to make better decision making for artistic projects and start-ups, rather than rushing to certain fun things just to get things to happen unnecessarily. So based on the flow of when people are putting applications in and things like that, it only makes sense that it would go this route. That is the sole reason why this legislation has been put forward.

Thank you.

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

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Minister. So that's actually a good prelude to my next question. The current practice of the Arts Council wasn't in line with the current legislation. Is there any kind of penalty for their non-compliance, or we're just going through this process here now to rectify things?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** (Inaudible), so yes, as we talked about in 1980 when the *Arts Council Act* came into place, this is not a fact of a new issue. The ArtsNL, based on this reference in the legislation, they would have not been in compliance for the last 28 years. What happened in a review, this was picked up through the

Comptroller General to either align the legislation or amend the legislation. If we aligned ArtsNL, which was set up as a Crown entity, to be able to support the arts with its annual grant, it would have implications on their ability to do the multi-year funding or to carry over funds to support arts projects, and may lead to some decision making at ArtsNL to just expend funds.

They haven't been doing that; they've been operating out of practice of the *Financial Administration Act*, because when it was set up it wasn't intended to do so. Right now, because this has been brought forward and has been picked up by the Comptroller General and finding out that the law has not been adhered to, we have to correct that matter as legislators in the House of Assembly and ensure that ArtsNL, as to how they're operating, is in compliance.

On a go-forward basis, they will be able to still continue to operate as they have been, and they will now be in compliance with the passage of that legislation. So there is no formal penalty, to my understanding, on this for the past 28 years of their operations.

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

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. This is my last question. In the briefing, we were told that when officials found out that the current legislation contained reference to the *Financial Administration Act*, it came as a surprise.

So, have you reviewed the other legislation to see if there are other acts of corporations which reference the *Financial Administration Act* that will also need to be brought forward for housekeeping?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, and that's a very good question by the Member opposite, because we certainly want to make sure that all of our entities within the Department of TCII are compliant with the legislation. When this matter came forward, based on the Comptroller

General, we had to address this immediately, and we have been doing a review of our other entities, and certainly we know that the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador also has this reference.

So this is a matter that we will be working through for the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador as well, because it'll be a very similar matter in terms of ensuring compliance, although an audit of the Heritage Foundation has not produced that reference. We will be taking proactive measures, as well, to seek legislation to be drafted and to correct it as well for Heritage.

It's just good, standard practice to ensure that all of our Crown entities are in compliance with how they should be operating, and the Heritage Foundation, very similarly, they support our heritage structures throughout the province. I think in the past they may have supported some projects down in your particular district, like Sunny Cottage and the restoration, where they would do 30 per cent of funding. Some of their concerns are is that once you issue a grant, and if the work is not completely done in that fiscal year and it becomes a drop balance, if they were to operate by FAA, then they would be depending year over year on what their budgetary allotment is.

They're set up a little bit differently in the fact that they have the ability to go raise money through their foundation privately as well, and what they do across the country. But that is something that we need to address as well for that particular matter, and we will be taking proactive steps to do so.

Thank you for that question.

**CHAIR:** Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** An Act To Amend The Arts Council Act.

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**MS. COADY:** One moment, thank you.

I move, Mr. Chair, the Committee rise and report Bill 28.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 28.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Order, please!

The hon. the 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 28 without amendment.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole has reported that the Committee have considered the matter to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 28 passed without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**MS. COADY:** Tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Order 6, second reading of Bill 29.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that Bill 29, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act, now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Forestry Act." (Bill 29)

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Bill 29, amendments to the *Forestry Act* – the moment we've all been waiting for. This is the moment that this House has been looking to amend Bill 29, but this is not the original Bill 29 which is so conjured in people's minds. This is a good news story. This is a story about progress.

Actually, this is the antithesis to Bill 29. This is fixing a problem proactively. This is not having the House being forced to fix a problem. Before I get too, too wrapped up in my hubris, this is an important act because it allows us to modify, to reduce red tape, to allow further benefits to our forestry industry which is a very, very important industry to our province. It's an industry that is valued at over \$380 million in economic activity annually. It employs 2,300 people directly and employs indirectly 5,000 people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Bill 29 is an act of good news because what we're doing is we're reducing red tape. We are reducing the burden on businesses and getting decisions made faster. I will say upfront, and I think the consensus by all Members of this House, I suspect there will be unanimous support for this particular piece of legislation.

What this is, is simply reducing red tape. It's taking that which we do and do routinely, which has been overly complicated as prescribed by the original act, and now allowing for it to occur in a more streamline fashion. It simply removes the

requirement for the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to approve that which has been routinely done for many, many years under this act.

Let me explain what this act is not. This is not an additional tax. It is not an additional revenue item. It is not an additional burden on our forestry sector. It is simply taking that which has already been done, collecting a reasonable compensation for forestry protection activities conducted by the public, by the public purse, and collecting that money for those land holders that have acreages or land bases over 120 hectares in size. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think we will all consent that 99.99 per cent of this tax really applies to one single land holder: Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

Corner Brook Pulp and Paper currently has land tenure over a significant volume of Newfoundland and Labrador's forest, the Island of Newfoundland's forest. Therefore, given the fact that there is a public good to the public purse providing certain forest protections to that land base, it is only reasonable and consistent with our international trade obligations that that practice continues to collect a benefit for the public purse for the administration of those public fees.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, what Bill 29 does is it simply removes the requirement each and every year for that land tax to be determined, to have it approved or authorized by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. It grants the department and the office of the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources the ability to do that. There is no change to the structure of the formula on which the fees are based. It simply modifies it to allow that elimination of that red tape requirement.

Mr. Speaker, what a valuable opportunity it is for me to talk a little bit about our forestry sector with relevance to this act, because this act is about providing protections for our forestry industry, our forest resources. As a government, we have directed considerable resources at improving our forest practices. Everything from improving access to security of fibre through our amendments to our forest land tenure arrangements, our permitting structure. We now have operational ability, greater ability, to enter

into five-year forestry management agreements, 20-year agreements.

We've modified how allocations are made to ensure that wood fibre is allocated by those who are ready, willing and able to use it. We have a tremendous amount of fibre that is sitting allocated but unused that is preventing economic activity from occurring. That is an important consideration that we addressed with a Cabinet Committee on Jobs, Mr. Speaker. We have identified forestry as key component to our economic growth and we have directed a working group to develop strategies, plans and actions – more specifically actions – to be able to enhance our forestry output.

We have made very ambitious goals but realistic goals that when you put your shoulder to it, you can achieve ambitious goals and make them reality. We are going to increase our fibre allocations, our fibre production by 20 per cent. We're going to increase our employment in the forest industry, all through difficult times.

Now, what else this act is not, Mr. Speaker – I said it's not an additional tax. It is not like the tariffs that the US Commerce department put in place against our paper industry, our newsprint industry. That was a very difficult situation for our newsprint industry. This government, we were faced with a challenge, we rose to the challenge and we fought back against these unfair tariffs and we were successful as a government.

Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that these were very challenging times for our newsprint industry, facing taxes, tariffs, upwards of 32 per cent – tariffs of upwards of 32 per cent. The industry was feeling as though it was bunkered, it was surrounded and it needed a helping push.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, this government, we were there. We provided the basis. We assisted our federal counterparts, which were leaders in this initiative. But given the fact that the Newfoundland and Labrador newsprint industry was very uniquely under assault under the US Commerce department's tariffs on uncoated ground on newsprint, we really took a very deliberate and very serious effort to make sure that we did everything in our power to ensure



that the US Commerce department and the tribunal, which ultimately decided, had the full facts. Mr. Speaker, we were successful.

While we recognize that the industry has to be competitive, that it needs a land tenure system which is competitive, it needs an operating environment which is competitive, we are supplying all of that. We are making sure that forest tenure, access to security of supply is enhanced, is improved and strengthened for a longer term benefit. That's the changes that we made when we met just recently in Grand Falls with the hon. Members from Central Newfoundland and the Premier making those announcements with me. We improved our forest fibre tenure. We've improved the operating environment and we will continue to make improvements.

One of the things that I'll note is that during the course of the tariff arrangements, the tariff decisions that were made by the US Commerce department, one of the things we noted was that some of the ammunition, some of the reinforcement, that the complainant company used to suggest that the Newfoundland and Labrador forest industry, the newsprint industry, was not abiding by international trade commitments, they used the very words of the former PC government. They used the words of the former PC government in suggesting that the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper was bankrupt.

They used those words publicly, which was then taken by the complainant company to say in the course of their complaint, the complainant company, Northwest Paper, said that in order for any assistance to a private company to be legitimate, it has to be made on business terms, on commercial terms, and the overall creditworthiness of the company is to be a factor in whether or not that assistance was on commercial terms.

Mr. Speaker, when the former PC government made statements that the company itself was bankrupt or verging on bankruptcy, the US company that was the complainant, that created the basis on which the US Commerce department established a 32 per cent, in part, a 32 per cent tariff on Canadian newsprint, and in particular on Newfoundland newsprint, they

used the words of the former PC government against the Newfoundland industry.

Because when the former government said that Corner Brook Pulp and Paper was on the verge of bankruptcy, that's what was picked up by the company who said, how can a company that their own government – their own government – says is on the verge of bankruptcy, how can that company be creditworthy? And so the very words of the PC government of Newfoundland and Labrador were weaponized against Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you talk about a challenge, because we knew that not to be true. We said at the time of the loan to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper that was not true; that was not accurate. We supported that because it was on business terms. I have no idea why the former government said what they said, because Corner Brook Pulp and Paper is a solid, viable company that will be around for many, many years to come –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. BYRNE:** – and it will be supporting jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador.

But what I do know, our challenges as a government that we have today, is trying to fix the mess that was left by the previous government, not just on Muskrat Falls, but on things like the tariff arrangements that the US Commerce department imposed because a US company weaponized the words of the former government to say that that loan, that assistance that was provided to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper was not given on commercial terms because the company was not creditworthy, and the company was not creditworthy.

Do you know how they tried to indicate that or show that or even prove that? They said listen to the words of the former premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, Kathy Dunderdale. Listen to the words of the former minister of Natural Resources. Listen to the words of the former minister of Natural Resources and the premier of the province who said that company was on the verge of bankruptcy. Those words were weaponized and a 32 per cent tariff, in part, was imposed on a

Newfoundland company because of the words of our own government. You talk about having a challenge in front of you.

So what did we do, Mr. Speaker? We had to fight the legacy of the former PC government to support forestry workers in Newfoundland and Labrador and employees of Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, both inside the gate and outside the gate. We had to fight back against the US Commerce department, against the complainant company; we had to fight back against those ridiculous tariffs which were untrue, and to prevent that from going forward. The only way we could do it was to prove, as we said back then, as we said now, as we will continue to say, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper is a viable company, it is an important company, and it will be here for many, many years to come because they have a government that supports the jobs, the 5,000 jobs in the forestry sector.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. BYRNE:** So what we did, Mr. Speaker, is we proved that the original statements of the former PC government were incorrect, were not based on fact and should be dismissed. And we were successful in doing exactly that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. BYRNE:** That's an important component of the legacy of the tariff situation against our newsprint industry which has never really been told, that the own words of the PC government were weaponized against Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, against the 5,000 employees of our forestry industry. The very own words of the former PC government were weaponized and potentially cost 5,000 jobs.

Why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? Because our sawmills are so integrated, our forestry sector is so integrated that the existence, the operations of Corner Brook Pulp and Paper are synergistic with the operations of our sawmills, with the operations of our firewood industry – and what an industry that is. All of our forestry operations are so synergistic that when one link in the chain falls weak, all of the links of the chain fall weak. So what we do, what this government on this side does, we strengthen all links of the chain.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is so important to understand where you have been before you can develop a path to the future. That is so important because everything we do in our forestry sector, we take a look at what the consequences may be on tariffs, on our commercial, our trade environments with those who we trade with. It's so important to understand when you raise funds, when you distribute funds it has to be within the lens of what is acceptable and appropriate within an international trade context. It is tough enough when you abide by the rules but it's even tougher when the own words of our own former PC government are weaponized, weaponized against our own industry. And that's exactly what happened.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments to the *Forestry Act*, let's explain again what they are not. They are not an additional tax. They are not a modification of the tax. It is still equally as transparent as what it was in the past. What it simply is, it's simply reducing red tape. It's reducing red tape on what is basically a pro forma exercise of establishing what would be the cost, or what would be the appropriate fee provided to the public purse for the administration of lands and public protection provided to those lands.

Corner Brook Pulp and Paper – the reason why I emphasize this – is the single entity. There is one other entity which is a smaller land holder, which I'm sure the Opposition has already appreciated, is not of significant consequence to this, but it's really about one company and the forest protections that we provide to the company on company lands, and the remuneration that we get through the public purse in return.

It's a very uncomplicated piece of business because where it's red tape reduction, I'm confident it will meet with the unanimous support of all Members of this House. What this conversation can and should be about this morning is how do we do more things like that, how do we make sure that we increase the profitability, the competitiveness of our forest industry.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I will guarantee to be true is we will not let the actions of this government be weaponized against our own

industry as the PC government, the former PC government, did which nearly cost our province 5,000 jobs. And if anyone – including our colleagues in the higher Chamber – would like any information on that, I'd be more than happy to provide it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. LESTER:** Yes, thank you.

Your Honour, it gives me great pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 29. Yes, this is a big part of reducing the red tape in the forestry industry and throughout government. I'd like to remind everybody in this hon. House that I believe it's compliments of this red tape that we've seen three very, very good projects that were scheduled for Central Newfoundland go by the wayside and the Abitibi stand still stands there over-maturing and depreciating in value. So it is essential to remove the red tape. I don't know, given the content of the minister's speech, there seemed to be a fair bit of off-topic content in it. So I would hope that he would be able to get to the point and make a decision quicker, when it comes down to it, seeing that it will be in his hands.

The wood fibre allocation – the minister had referred to the excess wood fibre allocation not being used, yet we see three projects walk away from this province and look to set up elsewhere – for that very reason, that there was no wood fibre supposedly to be allocated to them.

Why is this continuously happening? You look at the Wooddale Nursery. I guess I got to stand and tout both roles at this time. The Wooddale Nursery now has split roles and split responsibilities and a split focus. It is now agriculture and forestry. If we are to look at expanding our forestry and keeping the high level of product and resource intact, we need the same commitment from government to focus on forestry. Yes, it's important to focus on agriculture, but forestry is also a resource.

Resources – and I'm going to quote an unnamed mentor right now, and I apologize if I misquote him. Basically, he says: If we cannot manage our resources for the future of our children, we have failed them. As it stands right now, we are failing our children. The forestry industry needs to be improved; it needs to be overhauled.

And yes, in certain areas of our province, the forestry industry is being managed very well; largely in part to a public advisory set-up that Corner Brook Pulp and Paper has, in which there are volunteer members on the board that oversee the practices and implementation of the practices in the forestry industry. Our forestry resources are being managed well under their direction, but that's just one specific geographic area, and one specific participant in the forestry industry.

The intent of this tax collection – through the briefing, I have learned – is largely related to the protection and provision of fire services. Given our climate is changing, and we see worldwide – I've recently seen, from space, generation of our planet about how much of our world is actually on fire at this very point, and it's absolutely astounding when you look at across the globe how much of our planet is in flames at this moment, and it's largely due to climate change.

We're having drier summers, we're having hotter summers, we're having less snow in the winter so we don't have that moisture content in the plant material, in the environment. So I would think that in addition to tax collection, which basically goes into the general revenue, we should start building a reserve for the years that we do have excess fire, excess need for protection, rather than having to burden that participant in the industry which is, again, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, with the whole 100 per cent of an extraneous year of fire and resulting service requirement.

You know, we really need to start to squirrel away a portion of the excess money into an account or into a reserve that basically they can expect their insurance that the forest resources of the province are going to be protected. The cost of that generally stays the same; we don't see any disastrous increase. That's why I brought up in the briefing that, yes, I support the initiative of taking the responsibility out of Cabinet and putting it into the minister's hands, but we need

a time frame as to when the minister has to make the decision.

In the agriculture industry, well, we've seen big delays in program implementation, and maybe there were other reasons, but I guess when you're at the top all those responsibilities fall to you; and being the minister, that wasn't very favourable that programs were slowly implemented. We need to know, the client being Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, they need to know what they're paying in tax in order to create a sustainable business model for that year.

So I think that we have to also implement a fixed date when the minister has to do decide on what rate of tax he will be assessing, and then those involved in the industry will know how much they're dealing with as they progress through the year, and it won't catch them off guard on December 31.

In relation – and I know this is very much straying off the bill and the intent of the bill, but because the minister commented on it so passionately, I think that in only fairness I have to reply to it, but not replying to it as a Member of the former administration, but as a member of the public, and that is the \$40-million loan that was given to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

I wonder, does the minister think that that loan should not have been extended to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper? And if it was not, the financial model that they were in at that time depicted that there would be no Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, so there would be no need for this bill today because they would not be in existence. Where would those 5,000 jobs be today?

And further to that, the reference and quote of the company was bankrupt, I ask the Member opposite: What kind of effect is our own Premier's words saying the province is bankrupt? What kind of effect is that going to have on our credit rating? How much more are we going to have to pay? That's a question I have to ask. I think unanimously, as a House, we should ban the word "bankrupt" from this House of Assembly because every time we say it, over and over again, people remember.

Government has to intervene. It has to be a calculated approach of intervention in business.

Basically we want to make sure that there is a viable future in a business. We can't just keep throwing cash at it. If we have to keep throwing cash at an industry or a business, that's a dead-end for our money and it's not a good investment for our province or our children.

When you look at a strategic investment of \$40 million that facilitated the ongoing operations of a company which basically is the cornerstone of the forestry industry, I think that's a very good investment. I'm sure the 5,000 people, the people of Central, the people of Western and all people of this province would concur on that.

Another concern that I had in the briefing was, as this tax is applied, I did have a concern with the agriculture industry. Basically 120 hectares is around the size of an average farm in Newfoundland and Labrador. With this 64,000 acres up for development, which by the way have always been here, there will be several farmers and several agricultural enterprises which will be taking advantage of this more than 120 hectares, so they will also be subject to the tax. My understanding from the department is that because it's part of an agricultural initiative, that they will be exempt.

While the minister may stand to correct me on that, I do appreciate that, as do all the producers of the province and of course all the people of the province because food security is topmost and, with an empty belly, we have difficulty doing anything.

We need to take the model of the public advisory committee and apply it more to a proactive approach in our forestry. You know, they have a great system of co-operation between lumber mills, pulp and paper and fibre, be it for firewood or pellets or whatever it may be, and that kind of co-operation is really advancing our forestry industry, but again it's in a very small geographic area.

Once upon a time, even in my lifetime, we had three very large paper mill operations and now we're down to one. If you look at the ratio of that, basically we have one-third of our forestry resource being actively harvested and managed, again largely due to the public advisory committee and the initiative of the harvester, and the end-user being Corner Brook Pulp and

Paper. Wood fibre and forest resources are not something that is going to be there, such as oil, underneath the seabed.

The reality is it's a living organism that we have to manage for the benefit of the people of this province, and that's not happening. We need more leadership from the government; we need more encouragement for businesses such as the three projects that walked away from Central Newfoundland. We need more co-operation for them so that, you know, starting a business – and forgive me if I insult anybody in particular – but starting a business is kind of foreign to a lot of people.

I understand that when you run up against a brick wall of bureaucracy, and you can see the way around it, government and bureaucracy really has to have their ears open and listen because we need to use these resources, we need to manage them. If not, Mother Nature will manage them for us, and that will be in the form of a forest fire, and that will add a further burden to the people of this province.

So, generally, we are supportive of this bill. I can say that I'm not supportive of many of the positions that the minister took in his straying from the topic, but I look forward to continuing this discussion. I'm sure my email will be flooded with people now with suggestions as to how this government can do better.

Thank you.

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

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm only going to take a couple of moments. Obviously, this is somewhat of a housekeeping matter. It is a reduction in red tape. It's not changing anything in terms of the current system, how the system currently works as it relates to fees charged to the production of our forest and the landowners and so on. It just simply puts it in the hands of the minister versus having to go through the Cabinet. That's really what it's doing. I have no issue with that, as there's no big change, and I'll obviously be supporting the bill.

Before I sit down, I would say to the minister I did enjoy his commentary. He's quite the thespian I have to say and maybe one of these days if he gets out of politics, he might decide to go in REVUE or something like that because, if nothing, I find him very entertaining. I find him very entertaining. I don't always agree with what he says. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't but there's definitely some entertainment value there for sure.

The only point I would make in one of the points the minister did make about the \$40 million and so on and the support that did go to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper is that, to my recollection, I believe all Members of the House unanimously supported what was done. Also to my recollection, I do believe the local MHAs who were Members of the other party at the time were actually involved in the discussion with the mill and the government of the day in doing it and actually supported the government in the House of Assembly and spoke to it at the time.

I think if anything was done, whether it was done right or wrong or what was said or wasn't said, anyone who was here, we all supported it. I think we all supported it for the right reasons because nobody wants to see that industry shut down and nobody wants to see those jobs lost. It doesn't matter what party or what side of the House you're on, I think we all would agree with that.

Anyway, with that said, in terms of the nuts and bolts of this bill which, like I said, there's not a whole lot to it, but it does make sense, it does reduce red tape and I will be supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. BRAGG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour today to stand and speak on Bill 29, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act. It's great to follow the minister's lead I guess in his galvanizing introduction of the bill to us and the

importance of this. This will be a red tape reduction bill. It's going to take it from the Cabinet to the minister's position, so it should expedite it.

My understanding of the bill is it's developed over a five year –it's a five-year cycle. It has to do with anybody who has a harvest area of over 120 hectares and, from all indications, there is only one currently in the province right now, being Corner Book Pulp and Paper.

This is definitely not a new bill; it's just a way to expedite the other bill. The importance of this bill is providing protection for the forestry, and I would think the biggest protection would be fire safety. A portion of the funds from this bill will go to purchase water bombers. Each water bomber, in my understanding, is about \$30 million for a water bomber. So it's not a cheap thing to purchase a water bomber, the maintenance ongoing of all that.

In my district, I think I have six harvesters that continue to work in the woods to this day. I'm sure they must feel pretty safe in knowing that the province is providing the protection under this bill so that they can go in and operate safely in the woods and should something go wrong, know there's something to come back.

I have a gentleman who I guess he's been in the forestry for a number of years; this man is the heart of soul of what I would think a forester would be. I think his allotment is somewhere around 2,000 cubic metres, Minister, if that makes sense, for a small permit.

This gentleman gets out of his house, every morning gets out of his bed, takes his truck, drives about two hours to his site where he cuts. He goes in on his harvester, he uses all his equipment necessary, he brings it back to the road – it's a one-man operation who works hard in this industry. This guy could know that we are providing safety to his sector and to his job site, I'm sure it gives him great relief. Because for me, a person single-handily going in the woods and doing that kind of work, he got to be committed to this industry. I look forward to this gentleman's continued years of success in the forest industry.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. BRAGG:** So I really support this bill. It's really important, I assure the minister, and when he clues up in his preamble, when it's all said and done, that you just can't ignore the importance of anything when it comes to safety and protection to anybody that works in any industry.

So, Minister, I wish you all the success in this bill, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

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 happy to stand this morning and speak to Bill 29, which is An Act to Amend the Forestry Act. As has been pointed out, the bill itself is pretty simple because it's putting into the act the formulation needed with regard to the annual tax rate that is put on the forest land that is productive in the province. The bill itself is basically a series of mathematical equations, so put our brains, going right back to high school, in action, in looking at these mathematical equations.

The important thing is the tax itself and the fact that right now it's Kruger, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, who has the lease that is affected by this. It's important that Corner Brook Pulp and Paper and any other company that might be put in place pay its way through a fair tax with regard to helping government cover the cost of fire suppression and insect control, which this is about.

In actual fact, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper shows itself as a good, corporate citizen. It realizes its role in paying for the services, such as fire suppression and insect control. I'm sure the government and the people of the province thank them for that, for being good, corporate citizens.

I note that we have not heard how much CBPP pays each year with regard to this annual tax. If

the minister had that figure, it would be a good one to know, as a point of interest for us as we pass this bill. Obviously, I will be voting for this bill, as will my colleague in our caucus.

The red tape part is not a big one, but the fact that decisions do not have to go through Cabinet, Executive Council, and could go straight to the minister certainly makes it more efficient with regard to decision making. I think that's the important thing because the way in which legislation – authority didn't rest in the minister but it rested in the Executive Council could mean a lag in time, for example, with regard to approval of the annual rate. Now, that won't happen and I think that's efficient, efficient for government and it's efficient for the corporation that pays the tax as well.

It's important that we do raise this money because it is important that we do protect our forest land. The insect control services and fire suppression are essential pieces of work, and government is doing the right thing in taking tax from the corporations for that.

We have always wanted, in this province, a sustainable forest industry. Protecting the land through insect protection and insect control and also offering good forest suppression services and the preventative side that goes with forest fires that becomes extremely important as we maintain a sustainable industry.

We have many opportunities still in front of us with regard to the diversification of the forest industry in this province. Right now, we are facing challenges. There have been things that have happened that I think have been setbacks. The fact that we have the Abitibi land sitting there not being exploited, not being used, that's bad. I want to hear better plans with regard to those lands. We've seen a number of false starts regarding the potential for biofuel industry in Central Newfoundland and on the Northern Peninsula of the Island. And we have government paying the insurance bill on the mothball Holson wood pellet mill in Roddickton. A lot of things just sitting there, no money being made from them, no growth happening in these areas.

We do have some good things going on, small, in the sawmill in part of the industry, for

example. We do have a number of commercial mills, but the majority of the province's lumber production, which was just over 60 million board feet, is produced by seven larger mills. Most of the other mills are pretty small, generally with fewer than – no, I'm sorry; that stat is wrong. My eye went too far down my page.

The domestic sawmills are extremely important to the industry. They're producing a maximum of 6,000 board feet of lumber annually, but they have little impact on overall lumber production. Generally, those domestic mills combined produce about 2 to 5 million board feet of lumber each year. So, nearly one-half of the lumber produced in this province is sold to markets in Mainland Canada and in the United States. We hope that continues, that trade with the US will continue allowing that to happen, with the remainder sold in the local market. So, these sawmill industries are important, but they're a small piece of the pie.

We also have value-added products, which are important. We have wood manufacturing going on in the province and we have about 100 companies producing an array of products. A lot of people don't know this. I didn't know it myself really until I sat down and read about it. Then I realized yeah, I know it; I do know that we have small companies in the province producing, for example, kitchen cabinets and doors, exterior and log siding, custom furniture, stair treads, roof trusses, so we do have a fair bit of value-added production going on.

Again, these companies are generally small in size – now I'm getting my statistic correct – with fewer than 15 employees each and they're located in both rural and urban centres. They're very important. Some of the companies are linked to local sawmills where they utilize local species such as white and yellow birch, black spruce, and eastern larch in their manufacturing process.

Others utilize exclusively imported species or a combination of local and imported. So, we actually do have a lot of things going on that sort of slip under the radar; we don't really pay attention to what at the time is going on all around us. For that reason, it is so important that we protect our forest land so that not only these

industries continue, but that we can increase industries. I would like hear from the minister about new plans with regard to diversification, new plans with regard to increasing the opportunities that are there and certainly hoping that we haven't given up on the whole issue of biofuels.

The recent volatility of the oil prices and the desire to reduce carbon-neutral fuels has led to a new interest in the development of new wood fuel products, and people in the province especially facing Muskrat Falls are looking at the desire to use wood products as well for heat.

The industry hasn't really gotten off the ground yet, but we all remain hopeful that this industry can be further developed in a sustainable manner, and that is the important thing: in a sustainable manner. So, all the more reason why government is bringing this bill forward, making sure that we continue to raise taxes on the lands that are productive and continue to protect our lands so that we can support what's happening right now and increase what we need.

I would point out that looking at the biofuel sector is a really important one. I'll be happy to vote for this, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, if he speaks now, he will close the debate.

**MR. BYRNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm delighted to receive such strong endorsement from all Members of this House to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's forestry activities. This is a welcomed pronouncement of the strong support that the House holds to our Way Forward, to our strategy of developing not only our agricultural industry, our aquaculture industry, but another key component of my department, which is the forestry sector.

I heard very strong endorsements from Members of how important the forestry sector is, but also in their questions they acknowledged the good

work that is occurring. They acknowledged the structural impediments that existed in the past, they acknowledged that we have identified those structural impediments, and they acknowledged that we are working to resolve them.

For example, a question was asked about whether or not we have fibre that's readily available; can we get that fibre out into the hands of those who would use it? Mr. Speaker, what I informed the House was that we recognized that incumbent forestry permit holders, the vast majority of which utilize their permits to their full extent, have variations within a particular season given to circumstances, marketplace circumstances, production circumstances, repairs and maintenance issues that they may experience. The vast majority of forest harvesters harvest their timber allocations; some, however, do not.

What that does is creates a pool or a bank of forest of fibre that is unavailable for those that would otherwise use it. So we've made a modification effective January 1. We're going to modify our permitting system. It's really based on a use-it-or-lose-it philosophy, which has been endorsed by the forestry sector, those that want to have access to forest resources. Because part of the challenge here is that while – and it's been rightfully pointed out – we have a surplus of fibre in Central and on the Northern Peninsula and in Labrador and other places, but while we have a surplus of fibre, we have impediments to getting that fibre permitted and out into the hands of those that will use it.

One of the issues that were raised is whether or not we can really bring home a major new user of our forest industry. One of the projects that I've been involved in is just exactly that. I would note that while unfortunately there were some that did not meet with immediate success, and that was highlighted by my Official Opposition critic, I would also have to point out to my Official Opposition critic that before me stands a list of applicants and proposals for forest-fibre allocation and utilization that have fallen short.

Vattenfall, for example, in 2010-11, requested a 500,000-ton pellet plant in Central Newfoundland. That fell flat. Holson Forest Products wanted a new pellet plant in 2011 in Stephenville. That fell flat. Holson Forest



Products looked to revitalize the Roddickton pellet plant, which never got off the ground itself. That fell flat in 2012.

J.D. Irving came to Newfoundland in 2015. The former PC administration was unsuccessful in soliciting J.D. Irving to come to province. EURO INVEST looked to Roddickton to establish a pellet plant in 2013; that did not meet with success.

We had River Basin Energy. We had several companies, prospective companies – in fact, Mr. Speaker, between 2007 and 2015, I'm looking at a list of 14 failed efforts for major forest fibre companies to utilize –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How many?

**MR. BYRNE:** Fourteen failed efforts between 2007 and 2014-2015, which really is quite remarkable. So for them to stand up and use, as a bridge, as to what needs to happen then let's look at Roddickton – a \$20 million project to which the government gave \$10 million.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MR. BYRNE:** Ten million dollars and couldn't figure out – with a \$10 million shortfall after having awarded \$10 million to a known project that would cost \$20 million to develop, they gave upfront \$10 million, and they never bothered to say: So what about the other \$10 million? And they couldn't figure out why the project didn't succeed.

That is the benchmark that we are dealing with from the Opposition. So with that said, I will say nothing further except to voice the infamous word: Rentech. Rentech looked for a pellet plant and sawmill in Central Newfoundland in 2013 and 2014. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member – if the former PC government would like to explain to this House: What the heck ever happened to Rentech? I'd love to hear the explanation.

So with that said, Mr. Speaker, we conclude this second reading. I appreciate the hon. Members comments, the attention over the House to this important issue. Bill 29 is about improving forestry practices, improving forestry administration and management in this province, and I'm delighted to hear, as I think I've heard,

unanimous support for the government's initiative.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

The motion is that Bill 29 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act. (Bill 29)

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

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Forestry Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 29)

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 29.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Warr):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 29, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Forestry Act."  
(Bill 29)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

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

**MR. LESTER:** Given that the costs of these protection services are largely unpredictable, how is government going to calculate the projected cost and how will they make up the shortfall if, indeed, we do have an erroneous year or forest fire or insect infestation?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

What industry, all industries, always seek is safety, security and consistency. They need certainty in their operations. So one of the things that have been established in the *Forestry Act* for quite some time for the forestry tax is a formula; it is not based, necessarily, on an individual year's circumstance. In fact, it has been rounded out in the past. But I will point to the amendment, which the annual tax rate will be based on, which is clause 63.1 where it points out that:

$$T = \frac{(C_{ij} + C_{ij} - R_{ij})}{N \times L}$$

You got that?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**MR. BYRNE:** That's good.

So, with that as the explanation, Mr. Chair, I will concede that the objective here is not to balance specific costs in any one specific year, but to determine what the normal course of action is for forestry fire protections, various protections and to apply that as a fair rate to apply on a hectare-by-hectare basis for those that utilize the resource.

With that said, Mr. Chair, that consistency is important, and that is what exactly this amendment supplies.

Thank you.

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

**MR. LESTER:** I thank you for that mathematical explanation, but am I understanding correct that the participants in the industry, largely Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, they are 100 per cent responsible for the coverage of services for the whole entire Island? Is that correct?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** No, Mr. Chair, the hon. Member has it wrong. They're required to pay on a basis of the hectarage that they currently occupy, which they have tenure over. It's non-public lands. That's the purpose of the forestry tax. Of course, we have stumpage fees on Crown lands, so this only would apply to those land tenure holders that have land tracks greater than 120 hectares. Therefore this is unique to this, so it's an application of a fee which, by and large, estimates or is appropriate that this is what the costs would normally be.

Is it an exact figure? Is it precise to what the costs are on a hectare-by-hectare basis? No, it is not. Is it precise on what the exact costs are on

an annual basis? No, it is not. But over the course of several decades if not generations, if not centuries of forest practices in Newfoundland and Labrador, we have determined that and the companies agree, and I think the hon. Member would agree, that the former government agreed and this government agrees, that this formula meets the test of what a reasonable fee would be for public resources to be used for the protection of private interests, and that's what this act is all about.

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

**MR. LESTER:** I believe everybody in this House recognizes that our climate is changing so drastically and that's going to put increased pressure on both insect and possible forest fire. Are there thoughts of putting a contingency from one year to the next so that our industry wouldn't be overburdened by excessive tax?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** I'm not sure exactly what the hon. Member is requesting because if it's the official position of him and his party that what we should do is collect a surplus fund from the industry on the basis that there may be some expenses in the future, I think it would be argued by the companies, by those that would be so impacted by a hypothetical surplus contingency fund to be used in the case of a potential eventuality, they would suggest that that would make the company uncompetitive.

So, what we would rather do is apply a fee, a tax, the compensation, based on what we know to be historical reality, based on our historical experience, and reflecting on the fact that yes, the hon. Member does make a good point that climate change is impacting our environment, our forest resources, and could potentially have an impact on increased volatility and vulnerability to forest fires.

I would note though, however, that in the example of this past year, forest fires were actually down. I think that what we have built in, the contingency that we've built in, is already reflected in this formula.

If the Member is advocating putting in place a separate, higher contingency fee to be applied against the forestry industry on the basis that there might be a future demand, I think if he consulted with the forest industry he would find that that would be negatively viewed by the industry because it would be a hypothetical fee and would make the industry somewhat uncompetitive.

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

**MR. LESTER:** The minister just acknowledged that in the past couple of years we've had less forest fires than normal. That would mean that the tax that was assessed on that land was in excess of what was needed to provide these services, so those funds just went into general revenue.

Given the fact that we're operating on a very tight budget, a zero-based budget, what's going to happen when we return to normal levels? Where is that money gone that was collected that wasn't needed?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Chairman, the Member makes a false premise in his statement. He said that he is aware and he has concluded that there was a surplus of funds that went into general revenue. I'm not sure exactly how he based that, that assertion. I know that there was a question that he asked during the course of the briefing as to whether or not, in any particular year, if the fees that were collected, if they were in excess of what was spent, what would happen to the surplus money. The answer is, yes, it would go into general revenue.

There's a core point or a critical point that needs to be made here: We are spending the money. We need silviculture activity. He highlights catastrophic events as being the driver of this, and of catastrophic events, the number of catastrophic events on the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper land tenure in any one particular year is reduced, how does this impact on the overall consequence to the envelope, to the amount of money that's collected and spent. What I suggest to the hon. Member is that our efforts toward

silviculture, road building, other public services, public goods that are supplied, we are rarely, if ever, in a situation where we actually have a surplus. We spend the money because it's good for forestry.

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

**MR. LESTER:** In the briefing I did pose the question to the individuals present in reference to agricultural development. Many farmers will actually go out and clear and harvest more than 120 hectares of timber each year in their initiative to expand agricultural production, and it was indicated at that time that farmers would not be subject to that tax.

Could the minister confirm or correct me on the position?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** As seized by the hon. Member's questions that I am, I may have missed a bit of a nuance, but I'll answer this. Mr. Chair, farmers' agriculture, as the Member is aware – he's probably received some benefits from this himself at some point in time, which is rightfully so – we supply a significant amount of money for land clearing. If land is cleared for agricultural purposes, the landholder, which receives the land at a very, very preferential rate of close to \$4 a hectare, they have the opportunity to be able to sell any of that timber on that land itself (inaudible).

As the hon. Member knows, we supply potentially up to \$3,000 per hectare for land clearing and if there is an expense to be incurred there, please, we all need to bear in mind that the amount of assistance that's provided by public resources for land clearing for agricultural purposes, I think the hon. Member would agree is available.

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

**MR. LESTER:** My actual question was: Will the farmers who are clearing more than 120 hectares of timber, thus harvesting the timber,

will they be assessed the same tax under this forest protections initiative?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Chair, if that is the case, that there are 120 hectares of land which is cleared in any particular year, the fee will be applied if there are forest practices that occur on that tenure.

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

**MR. LESTER:** One word only, are they exempt or not, farmers?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** If there was forest mitigation measures that are applied by the public for that tenure, under the regulations there will be an applicability. I'm not aware that that is the case under this particular regulation.

**CHAIR:** Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

**CLERK (Murphy):** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Clause one we did.

**CLERK:** Okay.

Clause 2.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act.

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Deputy House Leader.

**MS. COADY:** I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 29.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 29.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** The hon. 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 29 without amendment.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters referred to them and have directed him to report Bill 29 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Now.

**MR. SPEAKER:** When shall the bill be read a third time?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill 29 ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, given the time, I would move that we recess until 2 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER:** In accordance with paragraph 9(1)(b) of the Standing Orders the House is recessed until 2 o'clock this afternoon.

**Recess**

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Trimper):** Order please!

Admit strangers.

Today I would like to welcome, and it is truly my great honour, the Chief Justice of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Honourable Deborah Fry, who will be recognized today in a Ministerial Statement.

A great welcome to you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today for Members' statements we will hear from the Members for the Districts of St. George's - Humber, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Lewisporte - Twillingate, Fogo Island - Cape Freels and St. John's Centre.

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

**MR. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this fall I had an opportunity to join a group of volunteers organized by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, as they did a beach cleanup on Sandy Point, on the province's West Coast.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is Canada's leading land conservation organization. They secure properties and manage them for the long term. They lead and inspire others to join in creating a legacy for future generations by conserving important natural and biologically diverse areas. For the past five years, the Nature Conservancy has been leading an annual beach cleanup on Sandy Point, where they own 67 acres.

Sandy Point was once a thriving community, but when the peninsula became an island due to coastal erosion, the people of Sandy Point resettled to nearby communities. Remnants of Sandy Point's history can still be seen today, including foundations, cemeteries and the old dock and breakwaters.

In conclusion, I congratulate the group of volunteers on the work that they have done on Sandy Point and the Nature Conservancy of Canada on the work they are doing in this province and indeed throughout Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. WARR:** Mr. Speaker, to quote a "welcome to" community sign in my district "the heart of a community lies within its people," could probably best describe most, if not all communities, that we have the privilege to represent.

June 27, 2018 the community of La Scie said goodbye to one of its most cherished residents who personified the heart of their community, Neil Ward. Neil lived a remarkable and rewarding life full of incredible memories that he shared with his wife Dana; children Zachary, Shelby, Chelsea; and granddaughter Ashlynn.

Neil gave freely of his time and energy to anyone who needed it, without exception. He coached minor sports, as well as president of the Minor Hockey Association. He served on the Town Council of La Scie, the Harbour Authority, the Recreation Commission, and various other committees.

Neil was passionate about many things: golf, his love of nature and hockey. His proudest moment was raising the Herder Memorial Trophy in 1993-94 as a member of the La Scie Jets. He was a family man and shared his work life with his brothers Roy, Doug and Terry, operating RNDT Fishing Enterprise until his exit from the fishery.

His legacy as a good friend will be remembered by all those who were fortunate as I was to call him a friend.

I ask all hon. Members in joining me in offering condolences to the Ward family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte - Twillingate.

**MR. D. BENNETT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The spirit of community and volunteering is very evident in the Town of Birchy Bay. Over the past few weeks, I had the opportunity to participate in two great community events. On October 13, the community hosted the 24th annual fall fair which included a street parade, craft fair, an auction, duck race, along with a variety of fun activities for young and old.

Like most community events, including fall fairs, they're never complete without a delicious spread of home-cooked meals and desserts prepared by outstanding volunteers. The fall fair was greatly supported by residents and visitors who all had an amazing time.

Then, on October 27, the town celebrated the vast contributions of their volunteers with an appreciation night. Volunteer committee members from the firemen and firettes, sport and recreation, multi-purpose facility, fall fair, and Over the Top Museum committees were treated to a dinner, entertainment and presented with gifts of appreciation for sharing their hard work and dedication which makes all communities thrive.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to please join me in congratulating the Town of Birchy Bay and thanking all volunteers in their community and throughout our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAGG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the opportunity to rise and inform this House of the great things that are happening in my district. A few years ago, a group of friends got together and went for a game of golf. What started out as a single outing grew into an annual tournament.

This idea stemmed from the sad passing of one of the organizers, Guy Perry, who passed away from cancer. After Guy's passing, the other organizer moved to PEI where he continued to host the tournament.

I'm happy to say the tournament came home to New Wes Valley this year. The Perry Cup, named in memory of Guy Perry, is home to stay. To make this event even more remarkable, a \$10,000 scholarship was donated by family and close friends and was created for Pearson Academy. A portion of this money will be awarded annually to a student who best demonstrates Guy's community spirit.

I would like to thank Guy's wife Phyllis, Jeff Burry, Kevin Howell, Reg Tulk, Terry Stagg and Steve Gillingham for keeping this tradition alive.

I ask all Members to applaud these people who turned a day out into a lifelong dedication.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Before I introduce the next Member, I would like to recognize that in the public gallery today we have Justin Tobin and members of the MUN Hillel Jewish society who have joined us for the following Member's statement.

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Monday evening I attended a candlelight vigil in Bannerman Park to honour the victims of the horrific shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh last Saturday. It claimed the lives of 11 Jewish people and wounded six while at their place of prayer on the Shabbat.

The MUN Hillel Jewish student group led us in the lighting of candles and chanting of prayers. People from all walks of life gathered with members of the Jewish community under the leadership of the MUN student Hillel group. It was a solemn gathering of solidarity.

Today and every day, we must all resist and challenge anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, hate and violence in all forms. We must ensure our classrooms, our workplaces, and all parts of our society cultivate acceptance and inclusion.

I commend the work being done here in our own community by anti-violence coalitions, the anti-racism coalition, our teachers, our unions, human rights activists, and faith communities who work hard to make our communities inclusive and safe for all. It is what we all must do.

To our Jewish community here in Newfoundland and Labrador: we mourn with you, dear friends, and pledge our support. Shalom.

I ask all Members to stand together now in a moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** I thank all Members.

Thank you.

Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, on June 22 of this year, this province welcomed its first female Chief Justice of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Honourable Deborah E. Fry.

Justice Fry built her career in the Newfoundland and Labrador public service, serving in many roles, including as Clerk of the Executive Council. She was a Supreme Court Justice, most recently serving as senior administrative Justice of Family Division prior to being appointed Chief Justice for the province. Having served in several roles in the justice system throughout her career, she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Court of Appeal bench.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important occasion, not only for the legal community but also the entire province. The role of Chief Justice is held in

high esteem in our justice system, and Justice Fry will be a source of inspiration to young women and girls who aspire to work in law, and who hope someday to rise to the position of Chief Justice.

An independent and impartial judiciary has always been one of the cornerstones of our democracy. I am confident Chief Justice Fry will bring the same professionalism and thoughtful approach to the role of Chief Justice as she has had to the numerous positions previously held in both the public service and in the legal system.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Chief Justice Fry on this prestigious and well-deserved appointment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly don't need prepared written remarks to respond to that, having had the advantage of knowing the Chief Justice for quite a number of decades. I can certainly be the first to say that all the sentiments and accolades expressed in the minister's statement are entirely appropriate and well-deserved by the Chief Justice, and I join the rest of the House in expressing my appreciation at her appointment.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

I am delighted to congratulate the Honourable Deborah Fry on her appointment as Chief Justice of Newfoundland and Labrador. She is not only an inspiration to women and girls who want to practice the law, but to every woman and girl in the province.



Chief Justice Fry brings a wealth of experience to this crucial role. I am sure I speak for all of us in this House when I say we have every confidence she will fulfil her position with thoughtful and just rulings.

Thank you, and bravo, Chief Justice Fry.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, earlier this month the provincial government launched SkillsPassNL – free online training courses to help increase employability, productivity and regulatory compliance. As the regulator, Service NL’s goal is to help individuals and businesses gain a better understanding of their requirements, in an effort to help them better prepare for inspections.

Courses in food services and tobacco and vapour retail industries are currently available. Individuals currently employed in these areas will be able to make a more positive contribution at their place of employment through the knowledge and skills they will gain through this online training.

For people seeking employment, the completion of the online training will provide them with industry-specific knowledge that should help increase their employability. For employers, the courses will provide a better understanding of the regulatory environment under which they operate, allowing them to better meet the requirements and continue to operate successfully.

Mr. Speaker, *The Way Forward* places great emphasis on better services and better outcomes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are also committed to enhancing government-wide service delivery by moving toward a digital service delivery model.

In keeping with these objectives, we entered into a four-year partnership with Bluedrop Performance Learning to develop SkillsPassNL. Additional courses will continue to be added, as

they are developed. We encourage people to sign up at [servicenl.myskillspass.io](http://servicenl.myskillspass.io) to take advantage of these free course offerings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Mr. Speaker, we welcome initiatives that provide individuals in our province with an opportunity to improve their knowledge, skills and employability. As the minister stated, SkillsPassNL was announced earlier this month and it will be very interesting to see what sort of uptake it has and what the outcomes of the program will be.

While government is continuing to move toward a digital delivery model for services and information in the province, the reality is that this can cause difficulties for people who are unable to access Internet services. So I encourage government to strive to ensure that reliable Internet access is available to all our residents throughout our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

And thanks to the minister for the advance copy of her statement.

The move towards online training in the service sector should help environmental health officers and others in their educational role, helping business comply with regulations. However, I point out to the minister, there are cases where online service delivery cannot replace services provided in person. For example, online mental

health counselling cannot substitute for in-person counselling for many mental health conditions, and I trust the minister will take this kind of thing into consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions

**Oral Questions**

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

In 2016, the Liberal plan when coming into office was to have yearly deficit reduction targets. The target for '17-'18, the current year, was \$800 million. Just recently, the government's audited financial statements showed that the deficit is \$910 million.

I ask the Premier: Why are you failing to reach your deficit reduction target, and what is plan B?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, if you remember back in 2015, the work that we began started at a \$2.7-billion deficit forecast. Just after the election, we were told that deficit would've been anticipated to be about \$1.1 billion or less.

So, Mr. Speaker, we started from a very shaky foundation, but I will say that we've made tremendous progress. Our forecasts are intact. If the Member opposite would just read the information that was publicly available to the Leader of the Opposition, continue on with his trend of so-called policy and honesty in politics, all he had to do was read the information that was put out by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, we're making significant progress. Much of the differences were around severance, payment of severance, some of the issues around

pensions at Memorial University. The information is publicly available. So I ask the Leader of the Opposition (inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, I think that the people of the province, three years into a mandate by a government, expects that government to take extreme ownership of the problems they must deal with –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. CROSBIE:** – and not be blaming them on others.

Premier, in Budget 2016, the then Finance minister proposed to reduce expenditures by 30 per cent over three years. The audited financial statements for 2017-'18 shows you are missing your targets.

Why is that?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well the Leader of the Opposition started his question by taking and saying that we are now in power, we are now the administration dealing with the financial situation of Newfoundland and Labrador. I would accept that, and we have. We are continuing to make significant progress.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition, why is he failing to accept responsibility for why we are where we are? Why don't you accept responsibility? Ignoring the fact that you and your party put this province in the mess that it's in. Accept the responsibility. Apologize to the people of our province. Stop waffling. We will continue to do the work with the people of this province creating partnerships with our federal government, other provinces, Mr. Speaker, to get this province's finances back on track.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** There are independent authorities, Mr. Speaker, who take the financial situation of the province, as it is today, with greater seriousness than some on the other side of the House.

The former Finance minister was not the only person to raise concerns about the government spending. On October 27, 2017, the Auditor General said: Newfoundland and Labrador spends in excess of 21 per cent more per capita than the next highest province. This suggests that the level of spending in the province is the primary issue creating deficits.

This advice was given over a year ago, and I ask the Premier: Why have you not acted on it to bring down expenditures?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition started his question by saying that independent people are talking about the situation that the province is in.

Well, Mr. Speaker, make no wonder, make no wonder, because the very Leader of the Opposition is saying that this province has no future. It's his own words saying that there's no future for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House do not feel that way. This province has an optimistic future, it's in good shape.

When it comes to the level of spending, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to compare where we are in holding the expenditures in Newfoundland and Labrador compared to other provinces, and while he's mentioning that, why not tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador be honest, tell them where you want to make your cuts.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

If I may, time for the daily reminder. I will not tolerate heckling interruptions. Creeped up very quickly, I will jump on it. Watch out.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, because of the government's inaction in addressing deficits, Moody's said in March that: "... expenditures actually have to decrease every year," by "1.4 per cent, in order to get back to balance." – and called this real austerity.

Why is the government not taking the advice of experts?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the advice of the experts are telling us right now that you're giving us stable bond rating. As a matter of fact, it was only just a few months ago the Leader of the Opposition said he was on a trip to New York and he was going down to meet with people and they were expecting our rating agency to put us in a downward position. Well, that didn't happen. Your forecasting is something like the weather in this province, I say, Mr. Speaker. We have put in place a seven-year forecasting model. Our deficits are going down.

He spoke about the former minister of Finance when it was his very party that he's representing, Mr. Speaker, made videos and put them out there on social media. They shamed the very minister of Finance that we had in place at the time, and now he is making those comments today. Where do you stand? Do you support the videos that were (inaudible)?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** This question is for the Minister of Finance who may be more forthcoming, we over here hope.

Minister, multiple sources are saying that this province has a spending problem but yesterday

you said we're changing things, we're improving things, things are getting better.

How can you say this when families are struggling under the Liberal government's tax burden and we continue to lose population?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking of spending problems that we are dealing with, I refer to the Leader of the Opposition by a comment that he made just a little while ago and said that the Muskrat Falls Project should be allowed to fail. He said this is a risk that happens normally in business, allow it to fail. Is that your position when you talk about investments in Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? I didn't agree with it in 2012, your colleagues did, and we are fixing that as well as all the other issues.

Mr. Speaker, we have put in place a seven year forecast to get this province back on track. We are meeting our targets. People are going back to work. When you look at the investments in health care, in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, we are making good progress. He wants to start making cuts by the sounds of it. I ask the Leader of the Opposition, what is it you actually plan to cut? Be honest.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, I may be more in touch with the feelings and sentiments of the public than many Members here, having just gone through a by-election. It is my belief from that –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. CROSBIE:** – that the public wants to hear the truth when questions are asked not rhetoric.

To the minister: Given that the province is on track to raise several million dollars more in oil revenues than originally anticipated, is the government coasting on oil rather than doing its job of controlling spending?

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you what we're going to do with oil revenues that that government didn't. We're not going to let it burn a hole in our pockets wondering how we're going to spend it as fast as we can.

Mr. Speaker, we have a debt in this province that's been left by that administration. I'd like to know where the Leader of the Opposition stands when he says he's going to bring in balanced budget legislation. That means, based on last year, \$900 million – he would've cut spending by \$900 million. Based on his desire to cut insurance taxes, Mr. Speaker, another \$123 million. That's a billion dollars on an \$8 billion budget.

What 15 per cent of public services do you intend to cut?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, hon. Members opposite – Ministers opposite appear to know my brief better than they know their own.

Despite the Minister of Finance's comments yesterday, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, business barometer for Newfoundland and Labrador, shows a loss of confidence in October. The main limitation to growth was lack of domestic demand driven by high tax and regulatory cost, and high insurance cost.

In the face of this information, our call to eliminate the sales tax on auto insurance is better

public policy than a graduated reduction to 10 per cent. Can the minister explain why that is not the case?

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, we are taking a balanced approach here; something that the opposite side didn't do.

He talked about experts. He mentioned Moody's in particular. Mr. Speaker, Moody's said the largest contingent liability on government and the people of this province today is Muskrat Falls – something that that administration put in place. Clearly, 35 per cent of this province's debt is as a result of Muskrat Falls – something that that administration put in place, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I'll tell you, we are looking at a balanced approach. And as we can afford to reduce the burden that is put on the people of this province by that administration with a \$2.7 billion deficit, the province not being able to make payroll in January of 2016 – as a result of them, we will reduce the tax burden.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, \$3.7 billion of the debt the minister refers to happened on his watch.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. CROSBIE:** The next question is for the minister responsible for The Rooms. The minister has informed the House it is his practice to authorize hiring actions at The Rooms. I ask the minister if it is also his practice to authorize the issuance of request for proposals by The Rooms.

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to again highlight for the House the practice of how hiring happens

within the Department of TCII and within The Rooms Corporation. It is very similar.

In order for any hire to take place, the head of the department, whether it's a deputy minister or the assistant deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister would sign off on a request for staffing, it would go to the deputy minister, the same way at The Rooms, it would go to the CEO and then it would come to me for signing. That is to start a hiring process. Nothing can happen until a request for staffing action is signed.

When it comes to the RFP – I've answered this question in the House, and that is not something that I had any involvement with. It would be under the responsibility (inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister will recall a controversy last February over the terms of an RFP to an agency of record to perform marketing services for The Rooms. A key message document for the minister produced under an Access to Information request dated March 1 for this document – these messages are dated March 1, 2018 and I'm going to quote from that.

It states: "Minister Mitchelmore was not aware, and did not authorize a Request for Proposal (RFP) by The Rooms. The Minister does not oversee the day to day operation of The Rooms." "The Rooms CEO has the authority to undertake an RFP process with autonomy and without approval of government."

Apparently, Minister, this does not apply to hiring people at The Rooms.

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to Crown entities, The Rooms Corporation has a CEO. The CEO is responsible for the day-to-day operations of The Rooms. That is complete fact and they have the authority to go out and issue a request for proposals, and they are overseen by the board for their performance.

When it comes to hiring and the initial stage of starting hiring for any person, any position, The Rooms and TCII, they are the same. The CEO would have to submit an RSA, request for staffing action, to me as minister to start a hiring practice, to go out and start the interview, go out and start a contract, the same way that TCII would have to do. It is no different. I do not –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** As the minister will recall, the terms of this particular Rooms request for proposals prohibited conflict of interest and gave as an example that, “It would be a conflict of interest for The Rooms to work with an AOR that represented a lobby group protesting Muskrat Falls ....”

Would the minister clearly state in this House whether such a stipulation is proper for The Rooms or any other Crown corporation or agency?

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Mr. Speaker, when the RFP was issued by The Rooms to procure an agency of record, they had put that out, an RFP. The RFP was in compliance. There were multiple submissions. They had an independent body that reviewed the process.

The reference of the Member opposite, it was in a guideline or a posting of a Q&A, which did not factor into any of the decision making and the CEO of The Rooms had apologized for this particular matter and did not factor into any

award of The Rooms process. A fair, open and transparent process for the RFP was followed, as per government policy.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Minister of Health and Community Services said there have been no changes in criteria for assessment for personal care homes.

Can the minister explain how this is the case when we are hearing something totally different?

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

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

Once again, for clarity, there has been no change. There is, on average, a two- to three-month wait for a personal care home. The majority of these are people waiting for a personal care home of their own choice. Across the province we have an average personal care home vacancy rate of 17 per cent, highest in Western at 21 per cent.

Just for clarity, there has been no change to the criteria which are the same as the ones that crowd put in before.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just so I'm clear, so the practice that has been followed for the last decade, that didn't cause any problem for those wanting to access Level 1's that was in play, has since been changed on

your direction to the regional health authorities to enact a policy that now is causing havoc for people. I just wanted to clarify exactly what we're saying here.

What services does the minister have in place to ensure that those individuals who would have been previously assessed at a personal care home will be taken care of? What supports will be there for these individuals and their families?

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

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

I think I'll start by addressing the preamble to that. There has been no change in the criteria. They are the same today as they were six months ago, as they were six years ago. They are applied evenly and consistently.

As far as subsidies are concerned for Level I, which seems to be Mr. Kirby's interest, Gerry Kirby, we have had 26 in October, 24 in September. They are being issued. The only people who are waiting in numbers are those who have a home of their own choice, not any other reason.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Social isolation and depression not only affect the health of our seniors, but will also lead to greater medical issues and more ER visits.

What's the minister's plan to address these concerns, and are you concerned that costs will increase because of more ER visits?

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

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

This question was asked yesterday and, because of 45 seconds, it was a little difficult to get into any great detail. What is happening is we are working actively and very 'engagedly' with the personal care home operators groups to develop a new level of care of framework.

In addition to that, we are also discussing with them concepts around how to manage social isolation and inclusion by offering programs through personal care homes for non-residents. This has been very enthusiastically received and is a way we can support, as Health, industry within our own province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has been touting this home-first policy, which sounds great in principle, but we're hearing from the industry and particularly what we're hearing from families and seniors it's about a home-alone policy here because there are not enough supports here to provide the proper services that are necessary.

Does the minister believe that individuals assessed for personal care home services should have to wait because there no more subsidies? How will the minister ensure these individuals and their families that care for them will get the care that they need, that they are waiting for?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Mr. Speaker, there is misinformation out here and the Member opposite does a grave disservice to the people of this province by persistently repeating it. There are subsidies available: 26 went out in October, 24 Level I's went out in September. What we have done to deal with the kind of issues the gentleman has referred to is when people have a higher level of care they are placed in priority of need, Mr. Speaker, no other reason.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So we know there are people still waiting to get in at Level I in these personal care homes. We know that. People have said that to us, there are applications in the process and they're not being accessed.

How long will these individuals have to wait to get the care they need?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Mr. Speaker, there is a 17 per cent vacancy rate in personal care homes across this province: 17 per cent in Central, 17 per cent in Eastern, 21 per cent in Western, 9 per cent in Labrador-Grenfell. There are spaces.

People wait on average 2.8 months, which is exactly the same as this time last year. It may vary and go down as low as 2.4. The reason the bulk of them are waiting is they are wanting to go in a specific home; not the first available or another one. They are waiting and are prepared to, and are supported at home while that happens, Mr. Speaker.

The gentleman opposite is fear mongering.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Are you considering giving the \$40 million tax credit incentive to other companies in this province related to the production of cannabis?

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to dealing with cannabis as it became a legalized substance across Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador, this government has taken an approach that we want to develop an industry here to get the benefits, to create jobs, to create R & D, to create supply chain, rather than what the Member opposite is proposing about importation and having jobs elsewhere – no economy, no economic development.

When it comes to being able to generate the most revenue for our province, what we've done is we've taken an approach to provide the right incentive that is no cash out of the taxpayers' pocket. It puts all the risk on all companies, and it creates the greatest return for Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a good deal, and we will talk about other (inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Your time has expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Forty million dollars not going into the Treasury; \$40 million that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians don't get in the Treasury. It's basic.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** So I'll ask the question again to the minister: Are you considering a \$40 million tax credit incentive program to other companies in this province related to the production of cannabis? The same question a second time. Could we have an answer, please?

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely, we would look at considering these types of deals for other companies. It makes perfect sense when it comes to developing an industry here in this province that is zero risk to the taxpayer. It takes no money out of the Treasury. The company is investing. The



company is creating all the jobs and returning the greatest return to Treasury.

If we didn't have it we would be importing and there would be the lowest return. We're getting far more in return. We get five times as much revenue when it comes to Canopy for online purchases, twice as much for at their own stores, and six times as much revenue when it comes to their cannabis producer. So a great opportunity for us in Newfoundland and Labrador to develop an industry.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has defended the \$40 million rebate process and deal based on the fact that Canopy was in a position to meet the demands of the local marketplace.

Did Canopy provide warranties or guarantees to that effect? Because as we have seen since the performance on October 17 indicates they are already in breach of their agreement with the government.

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to supply and the supply agreement with Canopy, they've agreed to supply us with 8,000 kilograms of cannabis annually – not within a week, but annually.

They have been supplying us and our stores, and this will generate revenue. Without a supply agreement in place – I don't know what the Member opposite would do or what their government would do if they were sitting in government, but we have been able to secure a supply. Without an agreement in place, we would be in a very precarious position to provide any of our retailers with product.

There's a shortage throughout Canada but we are addressing that, and we are working to make sure we have other production facilities and that we develop our industry here to have maximum

growth and maximum return to our Treasury. What we have done is a good deal: no risk to the taxpayers, maximum jobs and benefits.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader, for a quick question.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister just indicated they have breached the contract because they can't make the supply. The Finance Minister has indicated the province has missed out on revenues due to product shortages. Revenues will not be as large as they would have been because of supply.

I ask the minister: Who will make up the shortfall in those revenues?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Finance.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, supply has been down. The demand is obviously greater for the product than anybody across the country had anticipated. This province is not the only province to see a shortage of supply, Mr. Speaker. We would have been in far worse shape if we didn't have a supply agreement with Canopy Growth.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, as the supply level improves and supply is able to meet demand, we will see improved revenues as a result of the demand that's obviously there that nobody had anticipated. Maybe the Member opposite has some connections with the illicit drug market and could have told us better numbers.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Your time has expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of TCII fully admitted that he personally orchestrated the hiring of Carla Foote for a high paying position at The Rooms. While it's true that ministers typically signoff on hiring recommendations made by their senior executive, it is very unusual for a minister to take charge of a hiring process by excluding, overruling –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. ROGERS:** – or forcing the hand of their executive.

I ask the minister once again: Will he tell the people, what specific role did the CEO of The Rooms and the board of The Rooms play in hiring of Carla Foote?

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said before in this House of Assembly, when it comes to The Rooms, the board itself has been appointed in a merit-based process. The CEO position is one that will be going through a merit-based process through the IAC. When it comes to the operations and hiring, The Rooms CEO is responsible for the day-to-day operations.

What had occurred here is that – since Bill 56, we've been doing an operational review of The Rooms to break down silos and to do consultations with the Human Resource Secretariat, with The Rooms board, with the CEO to look at the flow of activities and responsibilities. It was determined that two executive level positions would be created, and that was approved by The Rooms board.

I can continue on after (inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

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

On this last day of Autism Awareness Month, we find that the wait-list for a child to receive an autism assessment is now 18 to 20 months. Children need the diagnosis to access services. Parents know that delayed treatment can harm a child's development, so some are paying up to \$1,000 for a private diagnosis in another province.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: What will he do immediately to eliminate the long wait time for a child autism assessment?

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

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

It is an area of concern to us, and it's been highlighted. It will be addressed in the Autism Action Plan, which is an action plan for autism from birth right through adulthood, not just simply for young children. I hope to be able to have the final draft of that in the next few weeks, and then we can bring that forth and share it fully implemented.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

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

Time is of the essence because the wait times have gone up in the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, adults with autism also need an official specific assessment to qualify for services but it's not available in our health care system. The cost of a private assessment is high and few medical professionals are available to do it.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to helping adults with autism access a proper diagnosis to qualify for services?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Access to services, Mr. Speaker, is one of our key priorities and always has been.

As far as autism is concerned, the Member opposite raises an excellent point. We have challenges and we've identified them. We have specific teams working on the transitioning youth, from 16 to 25, to deal with those folk who transition out of the supports in the education system.

Again, we're looking at a disability focus – a functional focus for our supports for adults at home. This will all be part of our Action Plan. And I hope, as I say, to have the final draft of that within the next three weeks and then it will be shared with the province, as well as the other Members.

**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.

Again, this fall, there are children with autism who are not in school because the school has not been allocated enough student assistant or instructional resource teacher hours. All children have a legal right to attend school.

I ask the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development: Will he ensure that all schools have the teacher and teaching assistant allocations they need for the students with autism? And they need those allocations now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for the question. I can assure the Member opposite that we have the resources in place. I know she's probably making reference to one specific area. I have checked on that, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, in these schools, the resources are there. We have IRTs, we have student assistants in place and we make sure that we provide the services that are available. If, in fact, from one year to the next year there are increase demands that's on the services, then the school board makes these allocations, depending upon the resources they have, to ensure that every student is given the optimal opportunity to have a proper education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The time for Oral Questions has ended.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, previous in Question Period – and I rise on a point of order, section 49, specifically raising the point of not to use offensive words against any Member of the House. I asked some very serious questions of the Minister of Finance. In his response, he referenced the fact of I having involvement in illicit drug use in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what we've gone through over the past six months in this House and some of the things that were heard, for a minister of the Crown to stand up and to ridicule another Member of the House on a serious question. I'm far from perfect. I have a wife and family; I've two teenagers. That's not acceptable, and I ask for you to rule on this and put an end to this in this House, once and for all.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** I ask the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board if he has a comment.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I fully withdraw that comment. The Member is right; it was out of my character and he didn't deserve that comment. I fully apologize.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you very much.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Tabling of Documents.

### **Tabling of Documents**

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As per section 9 of the *Transparency and Accountability Act* I wish to table the Marble Mountain Development Corporation annual report for 2017-18.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

### **Notices of Motion**

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that further to the motion adopted by the House on Wednesday, October 23, 2018, that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on a date to be announced in the House by the Government House Leader following consultation with the House Leaders for the Official Opposition and the Third Party, in order to receive the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, for the purpose of answering questions and providing clarity on the process of

the recently tabled reports inquiring into Members' Code of Conduct:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards be provided up to 15 minutes to offer opening remarks and that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards be permitted to have up to two support staff accompany him, if he so chooses, but support staff will not speak; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a maximum of 400 minutes be allocated for this debate.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to Standing Order 11(1), I give notice that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 1; and further, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1), I move that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, November 5.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you very much.

Further notices of motion?

I do not have time for petitions so I will now – I'm sorry.

Petitions.

### **Petitions**

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

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** You have (inaudible) seconds, Sir.

**MR. LANE:** At a time when people of Newfoundland and Labrador are dealing with high levels of taxation, increased unemployment rates, increased food bank usage, increased bankruptcies and many are being forced to choose between food, heat and medications, Newfoundland Power and Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro are continuing to seek

numerous power rate increases through the Public Utilities Board.

Once the Muskrat Falls Project comes online, these rates are predicted to further increase significantly to unmanageable levels for the average citizen of our province. While the government has indicated they are working with Nalcor to mitigate rates, they've provided no detailed plan as to how they intend to do so.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to publicly provide all of the potential options for rate mitigation and develop a comprehensive, detailed plan to deal with current and impending power rate increases. This plan is to be provided to the public as soon as possible to allow for scrutiny, feedback and potential suggestions for improvement.

Mr. Speaker, again today I have about 60 names or so. These are, once again, primarily from the CBS area; some people from Paradise and St. John's as well. I'm presenting this on their behalf.

I think the petition is pretty self-explanatory. We all know that this is definitely on people's minds. While I do appreciate the Premier and government saying that we don't have to be concerned, we don't have to be worried about the power rates, that isn't cutting it in people's minds and they're looking for some clarity as to specifically what the government intends to do to mitigate rates.

I don't need the minister to stand up and remind me I voted for it; I did. And I supported it, as did two of her colleagues in Cabinet, and I'm not afraid to say that. Things went wrong; we all know that. We're listening to the inquiry intently. We're getting very angry, I'm sure, about what's coming out of the inquiry. At the end of the day, regardless of what happened, what the best intentions were, and how things went wrong, we have a problem now, it has to be dealt with and the people want to know how the government intends to do just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

I apologize to the Member. My time clock is advanced already; I apologize. We had some time left.

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources for a response, please.

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

The Member opposite has tabled this type of petition in the House and I have acknowledged that it is a very concerning moment for the people of this province around electricity rates. The Premier has addressed this very issue to say that even though the Member opposite and others and the Opposition voted in favour of having Muskrat Falls, and voted in favour of placing the entire burden of Muskrat Falls – even though only 40 per cent of the energy of Muskrat Falls comes to the ratepayers of the province, they voted in favour of doing that, Mr. Speaker.

On this side of the House, we're working very hard to ensure that the burden of Muskrat Falls is not placed solely on the ratepayers and taxpayers of this province. The Member in his petition asked for as soon as possible, and that is what we're working toward is a plan to make sure that the project that was sanctioned – and, Mr. Speaker, all of us are listening to some of the things that are coming out of the inquiry. All of us understand that information was not forthcoming to some people who thought they were voting – sorry, who thought that they had all the information. Mr. Speaker, I listened this week about a \$500 million error that was made.

All I can say is, on this side of the House, we're working diligently, day in, day out – day in, day out – to make sure that we have a plan in place to address the problems that we face on a project we inherited, is not finished until 2021, Mr. Speaker. We'll have it long before then.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further petitions?

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada, and minimum wage workers earn poverty incomes; and

WHEREAS proposals to index minimum wage to inflation will not address poverty if the wage is too low to start with; and

WHEREAS women and youth, and service sector employees, are particularly hurt by the low minimum wage; and

WHEREAS the minimum wage rose only 5 per cent between 2010 and 2016, while many food items rose more than 20 per cent; and

WHEREAS other Canadian jurisdictions are implementing or considering a \$15 minimum wage as a step towards a living wage;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to legislate a greater increase in the minimum wage to \$15 by 2021 with an annual adjustment thereafter to reflect provincial inflation.

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

Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat curious when the minister responded to me yesterday when I raised this issue and he stated that in fact the minimum wage had increased by, I believe, was it 15 cents or 75 cents, or 65 per cent over a long period of time. Still giving us \$11.15 an hour for minimum wage workers in the province.

Now, minimum wage workers have done the math. They're constantly doing the math. They're doing the math about how they're going to pay for rent. They're doing the math about how they're going to pay for food. They're

doing the math about how they're going to pay for transportation to get to their minimum wage job. They're doing the math about how they're going to pay for the clothing they need to do their minimum wage job.

They do the math and they know. They know, Mr. Speaker, because what government has been saying is they're going to increase minimum wage to inflation, but the minimum wage we have in the province is among the lowest in the country. We will never, never catch up, and we all know that. Minimum wage earners know that as well, and the minister should know that. He should know those increases are not covering the incredible increases in the cost of living that minimum wage earners are faced with, and it's women, it's our young people. People who on their backs our economy is built.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development for a response, please.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll give my colleague a little break today. I'm happy to stand and speak for a minute here in response to some of the things our government is doing to help people here in Newfoundland and Labrador that we would consider in the low-income bracket.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2018 invested more than \$280 million in more than 100 poverty reduction initiatives –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MS. DEMPSTER:** It's \$280 million, Budget '18, up from \$270 million in 2017, up from \$250 million before that. Mr. Speaker, the most ever in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. Are we there yet? Are we where we want to be? Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

We inherited quite a fiscal mess. It amazes me every day that questions come from the other side – and I sit here, it's hard to take it. Nobody

talks about the monster in the room, this 35 per cent debt that has been put on the province related directly to Muskrat Falls because proper homework was not done; nevertheless, we continue to work with our community partners. We continue to work with the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, this government, in the most challenging financial time in the history of this province, we put \$122 million aside in the very first budget for seniors and low-income people; 155,000 families are benefiting from the income support, 47,000 seniors are benefiting from those benefits, and we'll continue to do what we can to help the most (inaudible).

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further petitions?

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** This being Wednesday, I now call on the Member for Burin - Grand Bank to introduce the resolution, standing in her place.

Motion 3.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

**MS. HALEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very honoured to stand before my colleagues on both sides of this hon. House to move a motion on a subject that is of grave concern, and one in which I believe as parliamentarians we can, through our discourse and actions here today, use to further the already significant progress we have made in dealing with mental health issues in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I need a seconder.

**MS. HALEY:** Stephenville - Port au Port. The Member for –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you very much.

Please proceed.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

**MS. HALEY:** Thank you.

Especially our youth, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get to today's resolution, with Remembrance Day on the horizon, I want to acknowledge our veterans and how many of them have to deal, and continue to deal with mental health issues such as PTSD, Mr. Speaker. We owe our veterans every support we can provide, and thankfully now that is being recognized.

I now move on to today's resolution, Mr. Speaker.

I, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, seconded by the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, move:

WHEREAS stress among children is estimated to have increased 45 per cent over the past 30 years; and

WHEREAS in 2016 intentional self-harm was the first leading cause of death in Canadians aged 10 to 14 and the second leading cause of death in Canadians aged 15 to 19; and

WHEREAS initiatives like #BellLetsTalk have shown that overcoming stigma around mental health is essential in ensuring people are comfortable seeking help; and

WHEREAS this government established *Towards Recovery: A Vision for a Renewed Mental Health and Addictions System for Newfoundland and Labrador* as part of *The Way Forward*, to modernize the approach to promoting mental wellness across all populations; and

WHEREAS following the release of the Premier's Task Force Report, "Now is the Time," this government developed an Education Action Plan which reflects the importance of student mental health;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House will continue to increase social and

emotional learning in our schools by focusing on mental health education and awareness.

We are living in a complex world, a fast-paced world where progress isn't measured by contentment and satisfaction, a sense of belonging and self worth, but rather by whether we as citizens of this province, as citizens of Canada are able to keep pace with the technological advancements, status symbols and materialism that seem to be driving us in our quest to move ahead.

We have technologies today that weren't even envisioned a couple of decades ago. Technologies intended to make our lives more comfortable, to provide us with more leisure time, to get information from here to there more quickly, to get us from here to there more quickly.

Technology has shrunk our world, Mr. Speaker, and there are certainly many positives to living in a world where we have an opportunity to interact so seamlessly, but it also means a world where business people fly in and out of exotic locations without taking the opportunity to even notice their surroundings; where tourists see sights through the lens of their always present cellphones doubling as a camera; where customs and cultures are reduced to the status of a commodity to be toyed with before moving on to the next.

For adults manoeuvring their way through the maze of today's reality, we are pushed and pulled and pressured like never before, Mr. Speaker. That all important phone call that is taking five minutes longer to receive than we had expected is bringing us untold stress. We have forgotten that we did quite fine without that cellphone a few short years ago, Mr. Speaker.

We survived well without living our lives under the microscope of social media; however, though, there are days when we would love to, we would never wish away those modern trappings. I dare say that when we see today, we won't hold a candle to what the future will hold, Mr. Speaker, things to make our lives easier and more pleasant but all too often have become major stressors.

Consider, then, the world in which our youth find themselves. If we, as adults, are finding it profoundly difficult to cope with this brave, new world, imagine this world through the eyes of a teenager or that of a preteen. They, too, are often caught trekking their way through a jungle of temptation and confusion. And often, the busy schedules of the adults in their lives leave little time for support or guidance.

I am pleased to say there are initiatives to help our youth combat mental health disorders. Earlier this month, the provincial government, in conjunction with the Strongest Families Institute launched I CAN, Conquer Anxiety and Nervousness, a new e-mental health program designed to support young adults ages 18 to 30 who suffer from anxiety, Mr. Speaker. This program is already paying dividends, with 92 per cent of participants in the province saying the program helped them resolve their issues. We have to meet our youth where they are, and where they are is in a technology-driven world. So electronic programs, such as I CAN, are certainly relatable to our youth.

Of course, there are other online programs of which our youth can avail. BreathingRoom is an 8 week self-management program to manage stress, anxiety and depression. MindWell is a 30- day mindfulness challenge, which our province is the first to launch in Canada, also aimed at reducing stress – plus many other online resources.

On the Burin Peninsula, there has been a heightened awareness of mental health issues, following several suicides in the area. I'm very pleased that the Minister of Health and Community Services spearheaded work to ensure the issue was addressed by implementing Roots of Hope. After one year, we are seeing huge results as both adults and youth have somewhere to turn and have their issues addressed in a timely manner.

Province wide, the *Towards Recovery: The Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan* are providing positive results. This program reaps its success from a collaborative approach from all stakeholders. As well, earlier in the month, the minister launched a Youth Mental Health and Addictions Services questionnaire, Mr. Speaker, which is available online through engageNL.



This questionnaire will provide the department with a lens to identify areas of concern, and ultimately address those concerns.

So there are many positives being done here, but when you hear statistics showing that self-harm being the leading cause of death among youth age 10 to 14, and a second leading cause among youth age 15 to 19, when you hear that stress has increased an estimated 45 per cent among youth over the last 30 years, you come to realize we can never satisfy ourselves with where we are. We must continue to seek new answers for dealing with what we acknowledge now as a widespread problem, which provides the reason for today's private Member's resolution, Mr. Speaker.

The programs we have implemented are indeed beneficial and even crucial in our attempt to deal with mental health issues. But the reality is they often place the onus on the sufferer to seek help. They are often, by their nature, reactive, Mr. Speaker. This is not to downplay their importance. As I said, those programs are proving to be valuable assets in tackling this problem.

But now we must seize the opportunity to be proactive. We must reach those youth who are reluctant to come forward with their issues, who are still stymied by the stigma that continues to shroud the whole issue of mental health problems. Despite a more transparent and open society, teenage years will probably always be marked by insecurity and anxiety as adolescence leaves young men and women trying to discover who they are, trying to determine their place in this world, Mr. Speaker.

Nor should we forget the competition exists not just in the world of the adult, but also the world of the youth. Competition in the job market starts from the moment a young person finishes his or her formal schooling. Staying at home and working in the local plant is no longer an option in most areas, Mr. Speaker. Many companies are recruiting for exceptionalism and there is ever-increasing pressure on our youth to ensure their grades allow them to be competitive when employment opportunities arise. And all too often self-worth is still tied to the superficial for far too many people.

So what a better place to address those issues than in our homes and in our schools? What better venues for an adolescent to discuss mental health than among family, friends and classmates? I'm not suggesting a whole new curriculum to add to an already full schedule of must-dos; however, given the gravity of the situation, we need youth to interact openly with their peers. We need youth to realize they are not alone and, through dialogue, discover there are many others facing that same problem.

We can encourage more interaction between health care professionals specializing in mental health issues and our educators. Our educators are often on the front line dealing with the many non-curricular issues facing the young men and women they teach and, undoubtedly, would appreciate more help in tackling those issues, Mr. Speaker. Not to be naïve, of course, no program, whether therapeutic or academic, will eradicate every single health care issue, but using the education system to further the cause is, in my opinion, a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and I will rise again later today to close discussion, and I now look forward to hearing the thoughts of other Members in this hon. House.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER (Warr):** The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

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

I thank the Member opposite for bringing this very important resolution before the House of Assembly here today. Certainly, everyone on this side of the House, I believe, concurs that anything and everything we can do to increase social and emotional learning in our schools by focusing on mental health education and awareness is crucial. Especially bearing in mind, Mr. Speaker, these children are our leaders of tomorrow. I certainly anticipate that perhaps someday they'll even have things to teach us, as they're learning at a much earlier age the values of the importance of mental health and the issues and problems that arise from issues such as bullying and violence in the homes.

It's Halloween today, Mr. Speaker, when many young people dress up as monsters and villains to make a game of the things in our world that can be scary. But what's truly scary is that many children face real monsters in their lives every day. These monsters can be people who mean them harm, or they can be circumstances they find hard to cope with, or illnesses that are hurting them from the inside.

Psychology and psychiatry have been advancing for decades, but we are still very much in the dark about the realities that many children and youth face. Gender issues were seldom talked about before. Gender dysphoria is something that, until recently, was hardly talked about by anyone, but now the issue is unavoidable, but still unfortunately very confusing for many.

Bullying has been with us forever, but our society is still having trouble coming to grips with how to deal with it. New technology means new ways to bully, Mr. Speaker, and technology has created ways that kids can be bullied and assaulted and driven over the edge. I can't imagine myself, personally, having gone through the teenage years, and the challenges that come with being a teenager, of having to deal with Facebook and Twitter, and to pull up your computer screen and see some of the nastiness that occurs on social media, Mr. Speaker. Our children are certainly living in a very different world that can be very, very cruel.

Mr. Speaker, parents can often be in the dark about the hardships that their kids are going through. In a lot of cases, you hear stories of parents who had no idea that their children were deep in trouble until it was too late. Children have to grow up too fast. Certain kinds of stress have increased in young people.

In the past, many kids had to leave school early to go to work to support their families. They had to grow up too fast because they had to go to work to bring money home and put food on the table. But today, our children are growing up too fast in other ways. Younger and younger children have to be pulled aside and educated on things that will protect them from harm but cost them a bit of their innocence, Mr. Speaker.

However, it is far better to educate them because, in the past, many children lost their

innocence in secret at the hands of abusers. It is better to err on the side of safety than to leave children vulnerable to predators who may mean them harm. But it probably scares children to realize at a young age that the world is dangerous and there really are monsters out there.

Cyber-bullying has become ever more prevalent in our day and age, and technology puts nightmares closer than ever. Kids have always teased each other and done mean things that they had to be disciplined for; but, these days, with modern technology, there are new ways of being mean and new kinds of consequences. There are too many stories in the world of kids who have been bullied into taking their own lives. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, bullying taken to the degree that children have taken their own lives?

Impersonal cruelty of social media, Mr. Speaker, can be very cold. Words sent out too thoughtlessly as tweets or instant messages can be cruel, whether it's intentional or otherwise. There are poor role models, Mr. Speaker, in popular culture. It's nothing new that modern culture emphasises coolness in ways that can be destructive. Even Elvis got a bad rap back in the day, but in those days you have to wonder if some of the role models have gotten worse today than what they were back in those days.

Popular heroes are fickle; engaging in wars of words with one another; making fun of each other's style; engaging in violence; and so on and so forth. Mr. Speaker, we all can learn from that, and we see it, perhaps, in ourselves every day, right here.

False realities of social media; cool lives versus dull lives – kids can see other people their age living these amazing lives online, and they think that they aren't part of it, Mr. Speaker. Never mind that some of these realities are entirely fabricated and dramatized to make them seem more glamorous than what they really are.

Kids in small towns or poor families might feel that they missing out on the action. Because of social media, Mr. Speaker, there are new ways to be ostracized, new ways to be excluded and new ways to feel unwanted. Do you have enough friends or likes compared to your classmates? How far do you have to go to get

noticed? These are the challenges that the children of our generation, in today's society, have to face.

Digital images and poor choices with lasting consequences – some kids, out of innocence or inexperience, post images of themselves or their friends that they shouldn't. Some kids ask other kids to do it. Some will distribute those images, or threaten to. How many kids are living the nightmare of knowing they've done something that they now regret?

A simple photo becomes the monster that drives them over the edge. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, because of social media, a simple photo can be a monster that drives someone to death? Where do they turn? How can they tell their parents without losing face, feeling embarrassed and ashamed?

Mr. Speaker, violence in social media, unfortunately, is a reality in the world we live in today. Consider what happened to Rehtaeh Parsons, a high school student in Nova Scotia. At the age of 15, she was reportedly raped by four teenage boys at a party. The incident was photographed, the photos were distributed and everyone found out. Instead of coming to her defence, people were cruel. She told her family, and charges were pressed, but justice was not served.

Two years later, Mr. Speaker, she hung herself – two years later. For two years, she carried the pain of not receiving justice. For two years, she carried the pain of this terrible tragedy which had happened to her and, after two years, she had enough.

In response to Parsons's suicide, Nova Scotia conducted a review, which came forward with recommendations, and they enacted a law in 2013 allowing victims to seek protection from cyber-bullies, but it's so, so tragic, and she's not the only one. How many deaths have occurred among teenagers, that the reason it has occurred was because of bullying, and we don't even know – we don't even know?

Social media can be instruments of isolation. They promise to bring people together, but they often drive people apart. How many kids sit together today, but focus on their phones instead

of each other? They are next to one another, but not engaging with the people they're next to. The screen is more important, Mr. Speaker, than the human being nearby.

How many kids seem happy while their faces are buried in their devices or their games, but they just feel alone and isolated? Maybe their video games are all they have, and they have no friends but those they game with, but have never really met. How many adults are buried in their phones and other devices when their children are nearby? That's got to be tough, Mr. Speaker, especially when, as a teenager, you need the adults nearby to really focus on you and be aware of what's happening. It's important that each and every one of us find the time to put down your phones and be present with our youth.

Most kids will be fine, but not all. Most kids can navigate the new reality, just as we ourselves coped with the challenges of being a youth in our day, but some kids cannot cope. There are things like self-hatred, which manifests itself through anorexia, and it's terrible how there's something about a person's body, whether it's real or perceived, which makes them seem inadequate or unattractive, and they feel worthless and just want to die.

Maybe it's the disposable income that they have to spend. Many families in our province are barely coping with the taxes and the high cost of living, and the young people may not always have the extra cash with a shortage of jobs. Maybe they don't have the latest phone, video games or accessories, Mr. Speaker, and that makes them feel bad when they are with their peers.

Maybe the hard drugs that have permeated our communities are affecting their lives. Mr. Speaker, drugs and alcohol can be tools of self-harm. Maybe they're drinking or abusing substances themselves, and the toxins are affecting their internal balances and they have no one to talk to. Little problems can become overwhelming problems when other things are out of balance, and some kids – and I would say many kids – hide their deepest, deepest secrets and fears.

Mr. Speaker, we all have to recognize that this problem is overcoming our society. We hear stories about kids in some parts of the world who are angry and take out their anger on those around them with weapons. We see it in school shootings and stabbings.

Violence has affected schools right here. Schools have had to develop lockdown protocols. Some kids dream of revenge; other kids live in fear of revenge and live sad lives of intimidation. How many kids in our province today are living in mortal fear? Some of them have good reasons to be afraid. It's a problem that affects us all, and we all have to take ownership of it and find better ways of addressing it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm quickly running out of time. I have a lot more I wanted to say, but I did want to speak about the CBC story that was written by Ryan Cooke. I have to give him great credit, he did a fabulous job with identifying just where we are in this province with respect to self-harm.

Canada-wide, 68 out of 100,000 people were hospitalized due to self-harm, but in Newfoundland and Labrador that ratio was alarmingly higher at 105. For Eastern Health it was 83, for Central Health it was 95, for Western Health the number was 147, and for Labrador-Grenfell the number was 231. That's the number of people who ended up in hospital with a self-inflicted injury in 2016-2017 per 100,000 population, and that is very, very alarming.

Labrador-Grenfell Health, which covers the northern tip of the Island and all of Labrador, reported a rate four times higher than the national average. It's very serious, Mr. Speaker. We have a serious problem and we need to do so much more to address it.

The CBC reported on a young man who returned home to the region fighting his own mental health crisis after being hospitalized in another province when thoughts of suicide and self-harm took control of his life. When he landed in his remote hometown, he saw a small amount of resources and a geographical challenge for anyone seeking access to health. It's a six-hour drive from Corner Brook to St. Anthony, dotted

with small communities in between, and only a small hospital in St. Anthony.

Mr. Speaker, I have just 30 seconds left remaining to my time, so I will conclude by saying we will certainly stand in support of this motion. As you can see, we've only begun to address the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the problems that are out there.

We all have to pay more attention to this, and we all have to lead by example. It begins with us, each and every one of us as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. BROWNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It indeed gives me great pleasure to stand here for the second time today. This morning addressing a very important matter related to the arts community and this afternoon another issue affecting our society.

I will not be using my full time. I will be splitting my time today with the hon. Member for the District of Harbour Main, as this is an issue that both of us are passionate and feel strongly about and have some lived experience with, Mr. Speaker.

I commend the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, the parliamentary secretary for Health and Community Services, on bringing forward this initiative. It's very important. I certainly thank my colleague, the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, for her remarks as well.

If you read through the motion, Mr. Speaker, there are some very important statistics, as the Member alluded to, where she says: "... stress among children is estimated to have increased 45% over the past 30 years; AND WHEREAS in 2016 intentional self-harm was the 1<sup>st</sup> leading cause of death in Canadians aged 10-14 and 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in Canadians aged 15-19; AND WHEREAS initiatives like #BellLetsTalk have shown that overcoming stigma around mental health is essential in ensuring people are comfortable in seeking help."

Mr. Speaker, these are statistics that all speak to the prevalence and the rise – and perhaps not even the rise in mental health issues so much as our awareness of them. I'm very pleased that since taking office our government has brought forward a number of initiatives. Most recently, the youth online questionnaire that the Minister of Health and Community Services has encouraged young people to participate in.

I am told that survey has the largest uptake and usage than any other online survey government has put out there to date. That tells you something, Mr. Speaker. Not only that – as the parliamentary secretary's motion here today outlines the use of technology proliferating through society, Mr. Speaker, but that they are paying attention. These online forms are important to them and that's where they're consuming their information.

We've also, as she alluded to – on the Burin Peninsula where mental health issues have been an issue – brought forward the Roots of Hope initiative; \$2 million this past January was announced by the Premier, by the Minister of Health and Community Services, launched on the Burin Peninsula. The first province in Canada to partner with the Mental Health Commission of Canada. All this takes a lot of work behind the scenes. I commend the minister, I commend the parliamentary secretary, the Premier and the team at Eastern Health. We have a very dynamic team at Eastern Health that have remodelled and reshaped many of the ways that services are delivered.

The day that I was elected, Mr. Speaker, in 2015, you would have seen a wait time of about 180 to see a mental health counsellor in Marystown or on the Burin Peninsula. Today, that number is at zero because the team at Eastern Health have remodelled their services from an appointment-based system to a walk-in clinic.

You can still get appointments if that's how you wish to proceed, but the walk-in model has certainly cleared the decks and allowed for a much better provision of services. We're hearing that all of the time and that is very positive, but it does not negate the need that we have more work to do. We have to continue and journey further on the road toward recover. As the

Member alluded to, we have to get to a place where mental health is seen as physical health.

Last night, as I mentioned this morning, I had the opportunity to attend a concert hosted by the Ennis Sisters and other artists in support and in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Mental Health Association. The Shallaway Youth Choir was there, Mr. Speaker, and toward the end of the show they had Shallaway come out and they sang a song, along with the Ennis Sisters: Sing You Home.

Many would recognize this song as part of the work The Rooms did in conjunction with the Ennis Sisters for Honour 100, but the song actually was written for their cousin, Steve, who died by suicide. It was a very emotional song, and at the end of their performance, as Shallaway was stood right in front of the stage, signs emerged with messages on them: keep the faith, be hopeful, and even some in French, tu es belle.

So these are all positive, reinforcing messages to say that if you have an issue, reach out and if you have an issue, to talk to someone. Perhaps that's the issue that we just don't talk about it enough; that it takes events like last night to talk about the Ennis Sisters' cousin dying by suicide. I had an uncle who died by suicide, Mr. Speaker. Mental health touches all of us.

Just a few weeks ago, we had a renowned musician, with roots on the Burin Peninsula, who died by suicide. We have to talk about these things if we're going to improve the stigma that surrounds it, and the services that we've provided.

I agree with the Member's resolution that starting in schools and providing that early education to our students, to our youth – and as the youngest Member of this House, not that long ago I was in that school system and I can tell you it was much needed.

I fully support and endorse the resolution by the parliamentary secretary for Health and Community Services, and I ask all Members to do the same.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. PARSLEY:** Good afternoon, it's always a pleasure to get up from the great District of Harbour Main and share something that's very dear to my heart. As my colleague, Mark Browne, had just said we all deal with mental illness. I want to thank him today for sharing half of his time with me. This is what it means to be in this House and to be able to do things like this.

I want to talk today about mental health issues because I live with it. I live it, as I spoke time and time again, and the pressures and the stresses of mental illness. When Mark just talked about Shallaway – yes, my son was in Shallaway. He –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** The Member.

**MS. PARSLEY:** I'm sorry. When the Member from –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Placentia West - Bellevue.

**MS. PARSLEY:** – talked about Shallaway, my son was there. He had all the things that he needed. He performed; he did the tours with them. What a wonderful choir. But, Mr. Speaker, mental illness got in the way, and mental illness is not like any other illness. We can't go to doctor; we can't have a simple blood test; we can't define it.

We've had people who will say they will go to the Waterford; they were sent home. But like I just said it's not simple; it's not a test. It's something that goes on in the mind and unfortunately, the thing that we have to do is to be able to support the person and to be there for them. Sometimes we don't understand when we walk through the Waterford most days and see the patients are there, and the kindness of our health care professionals, the time they take out to be able to support these people, and to support me and my family, and to make arrangements so that things go right. And yes, it's good that we're getting our new Waterford; I've advocated for it.

I was also at Choices for Youth with the minister from Gander a little while ago when we did the online questionnaire, and what a great place to hold a questionnaire, Choices for Youth, where most of our young adults end up when they have no place to go, because these are the people that they can go to and be at home when there was nothing else left for them.

So that morning when that was launched, to see the smiles on the youth, and getting their iPhones out. And yes, 20 years ago there would've been no such thing as an iPhone or a questionnaire for those youth, but today, with modern technology things are advancing. But like my colleague on the other side had said, along with modern technology there comes stresses, and stresses for young people in schools today. They start off at a very young age; the bullying, the outside interaction on playgrounds, sometimes they don't know how to deal with it.

So I think it's a great move to put this into our schools and to have people there who are able to help, because if we don't get mental illness looked at at a very young age, it's almost too late. I recently had several suicides in my District of Harbour Main, young men – I just attended one last week, 22 years of age, heartbreaking to see a hundred-and-some-odd people in a funeral home to say goodbye to a young man. It was heartbreaking.

And I was in that case almost a year ago in February with my son, but through the help of the Waterford and the team that's in place, we almost got him back on his feet, and that's what we need to do.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. PARSLEY:** If we're not here for our children and the people who are closest to us, we are the ones that can help; no one else. We can put a lot of things in place but we need supports, and they need someone to go to and to be able to talk to.

And sometimes it's their peers, and they're not really taken seriously. But in the school system today, if we got the supports in place and someone is having a hard time and they go and talk to their guidance counsellor about their

mental health issues, maybe that person won't end up dead. Because it's brutal; it's one of the worst things we've seen in society. It's like an epidemic.

In Marystown I noticed the health – they've got great coverage out there, I know we have a place now in Holyrood that's open daily at the community health services for mental health. I reached out to minister from Gander, Minister Haggie, to see can we get some help in the district because we want it to stop. And we got to keep talking about it. It's Bell Let's Talk. We can't cover it under the rug; we got to be able to speak. We don't mind talking about our other illnesses, but when it comes to mental health, it's shush.

But it's changing, I see it – I see it every day. Like I said, I am glad we're replacing the old Waterford; it's one of my fondest things to happen. I once said here in this House, until the day I close my eyes, I will always have to worry about my son. When he went missing three weeks ago on a Sunday evening at 7 o'clock, the RNC were the absolute best with the Waterford. Five o'clock that morning when the call came he was found walking, that night no one will ever know what went through our family's mind, and it's been a hard ordeal.

But I think with the new work that the government is doing, our colleagues here, talking about it and everything else, that we are on the right track, and we are on the right track by putting things in the school now. Our young primary kids coming into school, the bullying, they don't know how to handle it. If they don't know how to handle it, then they get into the teenage years, drugs come into play, and then they're finished school, and then it's the big thing: Do I go to university? The marks are probably not good enough, and then they're on a downward path, and this is where it happens.

They need a place to go and they need supports, so I support the private Member's motion today.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** The hon. Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's indeed an honour to stand, and I'll start, when I normally get to speak to something that I support and note the way I'm going to end it, that I wholeheartedly support this private Member's resolution and see the merits of it and see the importance of the debate we're going to have here, for a number of reasons.

One, outlining a strategy that's necessary to improve supports around mental health for young people, but particularly around showing to our society that, as a unified House, we can come together to support the initiatives that are necessary. We can come together to support a cause that's important, that's dear and near to all of us, more dear and near to some who are faced with the challenges on a day-to-day basis, but also dear and near to all of us who want to look at providing a better service and a better process for the next generation and the generation beyond so that young people themselves have a better coping mechanism; that families know there are better supports there; that the school system and the administration and the teachers and the fellow students have coping skills and a skill set to be able to work that.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, what we all want here is to find a way to eliminate a lot of the stressors, a lot of the mental health issues that are facing people. But while we're doing that, be prepared to be able to have the services that are necessary to address the particular needs that individuals are facing, that families are facing and have those supports.

So this gives us an opportunity to have that dialogue to talk about some of the challenges we have, to talk about how we move it forward, and particularly, to identify. What I like about this is it identifies a particular mechanism we have or a particular resource. We just got to build on that resource and – for play on an oxymoron – resource the resource here.

Our biggest resource is we have a captive audience. We have a school system which is equipped in a multitude of other ways and very highly-skilled professionals, but we also need to be able to resource them and support what they're doing. We can't overburden them with taking on other responsibilities without ensuring they have the flexibility and the supports to

handle their primary objective, which is the academic enhancement and teaching of our young people. But to be able to do that successfully, you've got to also deal with the social issues that young people are facing, and that's a reality.

I've had the privilege – I suspect 10, maybe 15 times over the last three years in this House – to present petitions around working with our school system and supporting them around mental health. So this bodes well in supporting what thousands of people have signed in petitions and what administrators have been saying, and teachers and counsellors and psychologists and leaders in our community and outside agencies who deal with the young people after they're out of the school system.

It was just noted, great organizations like Choices for Young, the Canadian Mental Health Association – all very valuable organizations who do valiant work to be able to support and deal with issues that people are facing from a mental health point of view. Their biggest drawback, and they'll tell you this, is the fact they get people later in their lives; where if they had them earlier, if there had been interventions earlier, that some of these issues may not have existed or may not have been as traumatic in this society or may have had the supports for family members to be able to support that.

So there have been some challenges. We've come a long way, and that's a positive. We've come a long way because we've identified it in a public realm and the stigma has moved. We haven't come anywhere near as far as we should have – because this is not a new discussion. It may be new in the fact that it's more open and that isolated groups who at one point would be afraid to speak up, afraid they'd be stigmatized, afraid they'd be labelled, but now it's open, the way it should be.

That's a testament to people of stature – and I say stature, who had a personal acknowledgement in society, be it athletes, or be it musicians, or be it particular people who have a skill set who are known far and wide, who came to speak out and say, you know what? It's not a stigma to be facing a certain particular ailment, and in this case it's a mental health ailment. They'll all tell you, had they had

various supports earlier in their lives it would've made their understanding, their being able to be assessed, their coping – and in a number of cases the supports they would've had from their family and from the communities itself.

So we've come a long way. It's unfortunate that two decades ago when this was still out there – but, unfortunately, because of us in society, and it's all of us, it's from professionals to parents, to the everyday individual who would not bring it to the forefront. It took a bit longer, but we're there. The good, positive thing is we're there. Let's not look in the past but let's look forward.

I will note one thing in the past, and it's ironic. Somebody posted a couple of weeks ago on one of my Facebook pages, somebody inadvertently found it. It was a stranger that sent it to me, but the name, it was a thing they had found on Google – 35 years ago I was on a panel at the Arts and Culture Centre, Memorial University, and it was about youth; the struggles of youth in our society at the time.

I was a young youth leader at the time. I think, as a matter of fact, I was the executive director of the youth advisory council, which was an agency that had – fortunate enough, I had hundreds of thousands of dollars in the budget to do research and that. I had staff. While I was a civil servant, I was an outside entity. I was a Crown agency, and the board of directors were the people who oversaw what we were doing. There was an adult advisory board, but there was a youth board. In those days the age of youth went to 21, not to where we are now.

I remember on the panel – and I saw the panel. I watched it. MUN Extension were the moderators of it. It was at the Arts and Culture Centre and the auditorium was full. I remember looking at it – and when I say it now, the old cliché in life, I wish I knew then what I know now – it was the opposite. I wish I knew now what I knew then, because the conversations by that panel of four young people at the time, which was reflecting the multitude of conversations with thousands of young people in Newfoundland and Labrador, were reflective of society and where we were going, and that's 35 years ago.

While we've improved on certain things, we haven't eliminated any of those issues. At the



time mental health was summed up, particularly with young people, in a bigger category and it was youth suicide. Because we knew at the end of the day that, unfortunately, was the ultimate suffering that people had to face, was youth suicide. It never got to a point where we broke it down to: How does a young person get to that point? What are the mental health issues? What are the stressors in life? What are the challenges in life that force a person to get to a point that they give up on life, that they give up on all the things that were important to them?

So when I started to look at it and I listened to the other panelists, and there was – the young lady who was there at the time now is a very successful businesswoman in St. John's, extremely, has led a multitude of other organizations and agencies and that, and I probably will share that with her. There was another young lady at the time who has since gone on to – I think on a national level be head of a national organization. There was a senior bureaucrat who, fortunately enough, 25 years later, I got to work with at a different level.

The onus here was around the issues were still relevant. The thing is we didn't have a mechanism. We didn't have a mechanism to deal with it because we didn't accept it as reality. We hid from it. We said it was somebody else's responsibility. There was no collaborative approach, but we've come that far. It's unfortunate it took that long to get to where we are.

So what we have an opportunity to do here now; we have an extreme, positive opportunity to take the mechanisms, take the resources we have – the key resources. We have an education system that in my opinion is second to none. Does it need to be resourced better? Of course, it does. Does it need to be supported in a different way? Should it be given the freedom to think outside the box from an administrative point of view and offer services and that? I agree 100 per cent.

We have the opportunity to do that. We have an opportunity to send a message from this House of Assembly with this PMR and the discussions we've had over the last number of years around mental health in schools. As a unified process here, that no matter who the government is, no matter what department it is, everybody has a

responsibility, and there's a continuum here. What you do in finance has impact on what you do in education, what you do in health care and vice versa.

If you want to be able to ensure our citizens are productive, that we minimize the cost on various segments of our society, if it's health care, if it's education, then let's have a cooperative approach. Let's have a collaborative approach. Let's all be on the same page.

Having this discussion here, I think opens up the door and starts – I'd be shocked if it's not unanimous support at the end of this PMR, but let's not just talk about it. It's great to put here and we read that the House of Assembly will continue to increase social and emotional learning in our schools by focusing on mental health education awareness. Great. It sums up exactly what needs to be done.

What we're all being told from the professionals who deal with this on a daily basis, from the administration in the school system, from the agencies that look at the research on this and the interventions, from the families themselves, more importantly, the families themselves – equally, if not more important to listen to, the actual individuals who are facing the struggles when it comes to mental health in our school system.

Let's provide the services in an environment that's very conducive to what a young person would go through from a learning point of view; that it's not intimidating and it's not institutionalized in the manner that we would normally have when we think about how we provide mental health services. I know we've come a long way in trying to look at how we provide services, and I know we've moved forward on a new Waterford process that would also be a different type of engagement in how we provide services.

I'm dealing with a constituent now whose young son has some real challenges around mental health and, unfortunately, had there been more things in place during the school system, I don't think we would have been at the stage where we are now where he's been in the Waterford for the last couple of months and is still struggling to get the types of services that he would need

because there's so much to catch up. This is his first real struggle with mental health. Even though it always existed, it just was never picked up on.

The opportunity here now, I say, is that we're sending the message to the House of Assembly and we're sending it to government that we're supporting you guys. We're supporting you to look at the resources you have. How do you better resources? As Minister of Health and Minister of Education, how do you convince your colleagues – and maybe you don't need to convince them, I'm hoping the support here is (inaudible) – that the types of supports, be it financial, be it collaborative approach, be it change in policy that some of the agencies who could offer these programs and services be given more latitude, be given the leeway to be able to put the programs and services in place that may be, from a process point of view, not what we're accustomed to?

Again, as I said it earlier, and people in the health care system, but particularly in the mental health care system will tell you, and they've told me over the last number of years, you have to think outside the box when it comes to addressing some of the needs. Some people who have some challenges within mental health and need specific services do fit within a program delivery process and model that's been very successful.

We can learn from other jurisdictions, no doubt. We need to be able to model our approach here to the uniqueness of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that would be the geography itself, the makeup of our school system, particularly when we're talking about here, the supports we have in our communities, or in some cases the lack of supports we have because of the geography or the size of communities as such, or because of the travel from one community to another for schooling.

We also need to be able to say, at the end of the day, we need to change the whole approach. And that might mean a partnership with the university schools of education when they're training teachers. It might mean the school psychologists' association. It might mean the school council association. I think in my assessment and what I've been told, it means all

of those coming together and collectively identifying the resources. And it may not be just about throwing money at it. When I say resources, I say about taking the professionals that we already have in play, taking the not-for-profit agencies that are very supportive of what we're doing, taking the communities that we have.

Just only a month ago the municipal AGM, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, put forward a resolution on mental health, and one of the components was around youth mental health. I know the individual who had put forward the resolution is a councillor in my district. I had some discussions with her around this; her background is in youth mental health. So the focus there, unanimous; one of the few times that MNL have supported a resolution 100 per cent.

So that tells you everybody's on board. The communities are on board, the education system is on board, the families are on board, we know the not-for-profits are on board, and obviously in the next hour or little over an hour, the House of Assembly will be on board, I'm convinced, to ensure that our education system is prepared, it's resourced, it has the partnerships that are necessary. But just as important, it has the latitude, the latitude to change the norm of what was acceptable or the process for dealing with mental health. Because while it has been, to a certain degree, successful, it hasn't gotten us to where we need to go.

People can't wait another two or three years for their son or daughter to get the service they need. They fall behind academically; the impact it has on the family is devastating. But those young people, they need to have a quality of life; they expect that. If we do nothing as parents, we want to ensure our kids have the quality of life that they deserve and they have opportunities to succeed in our society.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll end based on the thing as I started. I will be supporting this, and we look forward to moving this forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

I don't propose to take all 15 minutes – conscious of the time that my colleagues are wanting to spend on this, and I do have other opportunities to kind of talk about mental health – but it's a subject close to my heart, and it's been very close to my department, really, preoccupying it in a large extent since I took on this role.

To put in some systematic context, we released *Towards Recovery*, also subtitled the mental health and addictions plan for Newfoundland and Labrador. And that was a year last June. You may recall there were 54 recommendations and, as of June of this year, 20 of those were actually completed. Of the other 34, all of them are in progress, and each of them are on schedule that we identified upfront, which I think is actually quite remarkable when you consider the complexity of it and the fact it took two years of work to generate this action plan.

The key, I think, to that report and the action plan was the involvement of people who traditionally may have been slightly marginalized. I refer to my colleague opposite when he talks about stigma and the derelict areas and damaging effects that that actually has on mental health and people who have mental health, and bringing in the Recovery Council, which, I think, was an idea – possible actually my own idea; although, I don't want to blow my own trumpet. It was key to formalizing that link with people with lived experience, who have been so valuable in helping us craft the plan, and also monitoring its execution.

But I think if you look through business literature, something like 80 per cent of good plans fail, but they fail because of implementation issues. So what I'm just going to talk about for a second is the implementation piece of this, because I think it's a real example of how to set yourself up for success.

The implementation of this was delegated from a small core group into eight teams. The core group, the *Towards Recovery* team, was in actual fact not as small as I'm hinting here today, because those of you who went to the Public Service Awards in the lobby of this building a few weeks ago would've been treated to seeing them all on stage. They won the Team Award for this year for Excellence in Public Service, and I think it doesn't do any harm to repeat that from time to time because I have said, and continue to say, that we, as a province, as a group of individuals, are not very good at telling people what we actually do well at.

The *Towards Recovery* team is led by someone who I colloquially refer to as the fearless leader, to steal another political title from years ago, but it's actually Ms. Colleen Simms who has had 20 years of dedicated work in the mental health and addictions field. I think her involvement goes beyond – well beyond anyone's imagination of a nine-to-five job. It really does, and I think it deserves recognition, and I will take any and every opportunity to call that out for the stellar piece of investment – a personal level that it is.

It's not easy work. She's quiet, she knows her stuff, but she gets things done. And for her, it's always been around the person, the individual.

To refer right back, however, towards the motion itself and try and stay as relevant as I can. We have, under the *Towards Recovery* team, one of the implementation groups is actually focused on education and youth. It's actually co-led with Education and Early Childhood Development and Mental Health and Addictions through the department.

Social and emotional learning is a specific program that falls under their remit. So just a little bit of what SEL is, social-emotional learning, it's a process and it involves both the children, pre and at school, in acquiring knowledge, attitudes and skills. Those skills and that knowledge are all around understanding and managing emotions. They are focusing on positive outcomes as part of this. We all have days when things do not go the way we would like them to and it's how you cope with that and what resilience you have to deal with those negative feelings that enables you to get up and get on with it the following day.

It's about managing and feeling empathy for plight of others because you can see how other people are feeling and you can try and mirror that in yourself because doing that and putting yourself in someone else's shoes is a crucial manoeuvre throughout childhood and adulthood. It gives you a perspective that is worthy of consideration. It then helps tie all those together to help make responsible decisions.

So the competencies that SEL looks at are around self awareness, around self management, and you can see that has to be tailored to an appropriate delivery for children who may actually be kindergarten or grade one versus someone who's in junior high or senior high. It's around social awareness. It's around relationship skills.

We've seen quite clearly from the Recovery Council and the discussions we have on a regular basis that a lot of people whose challenges in the teen years have stemmed from issues around these kind of problems when they were a lot younger and not having the coping skills, not having developed any resilience that they need to be able to deal with that. Then they all feed into how you make responsible decisions.

The recommendation for social and emotional learning comes both from the *Towards Recovery* Action Plan, under recommendation 2, about developing and implementing a comprehensive school health and wellness. It specifically mentions a program that would involve social and emotional learning. It's embedded in the curriculum at every grade. It helps the students, as I've said, in the ways I've described. But it also includes some of the things we hear about in here around the social determinants of health, things like poverty. And my colleague earlier on referenced the significant investment we've made in a vast number of poverty reduction strategies.

My colleagues have probably addressed this in more detail or will do. The new curriculum, in actual fact, starts next year. It's already out there. September of 2019, the guides are being worked on and they will be available for both the English and the Francophone school boards in time for that. And by the end of this current school year, the teachers who will be delivering

that curriculum will have had their PD and training on it.

So we're very well poised to put all this lot in place for the start of the academic year in 2019. So not only have we planned and listened, we've implemented, and there are tangible actions there. I speak wholeheartedly in support of this motion, which is a further sign of this House's focus on moving it forward.

So with that I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I am standing to speak to the private Member's motion. I have read this motion again and again and again and I really can't quite understand what concretely this private Member's motion is calling for.

The Be It Resolved says: "THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this honourable House will continue to increase social and emotional learning in our schools by focusing on mental health education and awareness."

But I don't know what it is directing anybody to do. There is nothing concrete; nothing at all concrete in this private Member's motion, which I think is a shame and a missed opportunity. It's basically saying, what? I don't know.

We know in the preamble it's talking about stress among children, which has increased – and we know that to be true. That the intentional self-harm has been a very serious problem. #BellLetsTalk, they're doing some interesting work, and the government established *Towards Recovery*.

Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the government did not establish *Towards Recovery*, that was the work of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, which started over three years ago. As a matter of fact, it was as a result

of a private Member's motion that I had introduced.

Then it says: "... the release of the Premier's Task Force report 'Now is the Time', this Government developed an Education Action Plan which reflects the importance of student mental health." That is true. That is something that government has done.

But now it says: "THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House will continue to increase social and emotional learning in our schools by focusing on mental health education and awareness." I don't know what it's asking government to do. It's saying the House can focus on this issue, but, Mr. Speaker, we have a crisis. We have a crisis in our schools right now. What we need is we need an immediate response to that crisis, that mental health crisis in our schools. One of the concrete things that can be done immediately is to increase the number of guidance counsellors and the number of educational psychologists in our schools.

The ratios of students to mental health workers in our schools is appalling. The Newfoundland and Labrador Counsellors' and Psychologists' Association made presentation to the All-Party Committee three years ago on November 9, 2015, and they had very specific recommendations. They were raising alarm bells about what's happening in our schools, and so did the Premier's task force on education. Because the All-Party Committee, we met with them as well. They raised the same concerns. They were saying there is a crisis in our school system, and it's not enough simply to raise dialogue. It's not enough simply to feel warm and fuzzy, that we realize there are problems.

It's not enough to say let's do some emotional education and learning. It's not enough. Who's going to do that? Are we going to train our teachers to do that? Are we going to increase the number of teachers so that they can do that? The guidance counsellors can't do it, and the educational psychologists can't do it. I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker, because I have followed up with them again and again and again in the past three years. One of the questions I keep asking them, because they had very concrete recommendations, very concrete

recommendations – not because it was about being warm and fuzzy, because they knew that children in their schools were dying. That's what they knew.

So they came up with concrete recommendations. They also knew the level of suffering of children in their schools, in the area of mental health. So it's not good enough just to talk about stigma.

And, we have talked about stigma. I agree with the Minister of Health that we have done a really good job about that, but by talking about stigma we are saying to the children of Newfoundland and Labrador come and talk – we're talking about it because we're going to provide the services that you need. There is nothing in this private Member's motion that speaks to that, that speaks to the need for developing and delivering particular services that we have been told, that we have heard time and time and time again in the hearings by the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions.

So, what guidance counsellors and educational psychologists are telling us is that nothing has happened around the ratios since November 2015. They are still presenting to the Premier's task force on education. They're telling us clearly, Mr. Speaker, that there is a need for mental health providers in the schools. They have told us that time and time again. They continue to tell us that and there has been no movement.

There is a front-line crisis in our schools. Students are spending their days in schools – for those who do come. Many who have mental health crises may not even get to school. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, we do not know how many of children are not in school. We don't know that.

So, students who have mental health issues, or mental illness issues, they come to school and when they're going through a crisis that happens in the schools. They may have an appointment with a counsellor once every few weeks out in the community, but the lived reality of their crisis is lived in the day-to-day time that they spend in the schools. The guidance counsellors cannot respond to the growing need.

We all know that there has been a 600 per cent increase in the diagnosis of autism in our children in the past 20 years – a 600 per cent increase. We've heard last week about the increase of intentional self-harm. We know about the increase in anxiety in our students; we know that. Raising dialogue is not enough. They are needing mental health intervention and they need it in the schools.

Things do not stop for these children between their appointments out in the community, which may be once every two weeks, or it may be once a month. They live their lives in the schools and there are front-line issues that happen in the schools that have to be taken care of.

Anxiety rapidly raising – the issue that we must look at, that we absolutely must look at is the issue of the shortage of mental health workers in our schools. I don't think that the counsellors, the educational counsellors, the guidance counsellors could tell us any clearer about the crisis that is being faced in our schools. There are expectations. We have raised expectations through the All-Party Committee, through the report *Towards Recovery* and through the Premier's task force on education. We have said to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador we have heard you, we have heard what the problems are and we are going to address them.

One of the guidance counsellors told me, for instance, in a school in Ontario, very similar to a high school here in St. John's with the same kind of demographics, the school in Ontario with 1,500 students had four counsellors, plus a social worker, plus an administrative assistant for the counselling team at their school, plus a youth care worker – all in that one school, 1,500 students.

The school comparable in Newfoundland and Labrador with 1,100 students only had two counsellors. The current guidance counsellor ratio in Newfoundland and Labrador is 1 to every 500 students. The national standard is 1 to every 250 students. They cannot do the work that is required of them.

The current ratio is particularly difficult when the counsellor is split between schools, and especially rural schools, because then they're travelling back and forth. The national

recommendation for educational psychologists is 1 in 700 – that's the national recommendation for educational psychologists. Here, our psychologists, our educational psychologists are trying to get the ratio down from 1 to every 1,000, where it currently stands.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are problems. There are specific problems that need specific solutions. Unless we have those solutions, we are not dealing comprehensively with the mental health and with the mental illness needs of our folks in schools.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue is that guidance counsellors are telling us they can't do the preventative and the educational work because they are dealing with the front-line crisis of so many students with mental illness issues and mental health challenges. They say that they are always putting out fires. So they can't help our kids with their career issues, they can't help with prevention and education because they are dealing with crisis. They're doing crisis management.

Mr. Speaker, we have to do something about this. Again, we raised expectations and this government raised expectations, and Department of Education raised expectations. It's still the situation, if a student needs psychological or psychiatric help, they can wait up to a year to see a psychiatrist. That is still true – unfortunately, that is still true.

The other thing that guidance counsellors and educational psychologists are saying is that there needs to be a cross departmental co-operation with the Department of Health, with the Department of Education and with the Department of Justice.

For instance, if the Department of Health has a particular educational and mental health program that they want to deliver around youth, unless there is consultation with the Department of Education, who is going to delivering that, there is a problem. We still need different departments to be speaking to one another to be coordinating these services.

Also, social workers are very interested in being involved once again in the schools. They used to be. But the role of social workers for schools is

not necessarily consultants or counselling, but to work with the families of students. Guidance counsellors and the educational psychologists who work with students in the schools, they do not do outreach to the families. We know if there's a persistent or a critical problem at home, or if a student has a serious problem that they need help with, that the family needs to be involved as well. Guidance counsellors do not have the mandate to be doing work outside with the families, and that is the role of social workers. We need that.

They also talked about the number of appointments that are missed at Eastern Health, for instance, by students because they don't get to their appointments at Eastern Health. So how important it is to make sure that the ratio of guidance counsellors and educational psychologists in the schools are adequate, so that the guidance counsellors and the psychologists can be doing comprehensive work and not just crisis work.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the realities of what's happening in our schools. Addictions are on the rise, and there's not enough education about addictions in the schools as well. Again, because the guidance counsellors can't do that kind of work because they are too few, and because of the rising mental health issues in our schools.

I believe that these are huge challenges, but they are not insurmountable. I believe that there are concrete solutions. It is my hope that, in fact, this private Member's motion would've been about real, concrete solutions; something that we could sink our teeth into. But I'm afraid it's vague, it doesn't make any concrete promises and, again, it's dangerous to simply raise dialogue and to not provide services.

We have made a promise to the children of our province that we would be taking care of them. And, Mr. Speaker, we are not there yet.

Thank very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, I wasn't scheduled to speak this afternoon; however, after listening to what the Leader of the Third Party, and some of the information she put out there is totally incorrect. She really needs to research her facts.

But, Mr. Speaker, this particular resolution, it's too important of a resolution to really politicize and get down into the weeds, which I am trying not to do. My blood pressure when sky-high a few minutes ago because of the fact that some of the information she talked about – she talked about a national average for psychologists in our schools – for guidance counsellors, 1 to 250. Totally incorrect, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, it's not 1 to 250.

She talked about Newfoundland and Labrador. Yes, Mr. Speaker, 1 to 500 is actually the numbers that's in the province. However, in October of 2018 – this October 2018, we increased the number, and we have actually 166 full-time guidance counsellors for the 2018-2019, which gives us a ratio of 1 to 400.

Now, Mr. Speaker, she talks about Ontario, and really talks about numbers. Well, Mr. Speaker, the number for Ontario in guidance counsellors is 1-436. So when the Member opposite gets up and tries to politicize this very, very important resolution, we all know – listen, Mr. Speaker, I have every respect for the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association for every man, woman that's out there that's teaching our children on a daily basis and doing the best they possibly can and to listen to something over there as if that's not being done, I think it's totally indigenous for her to do that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HAWKINS:** And, Mr. Speaker – disingenuous. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I'm getting carried away by my blood pressure.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have in front us today a very serious situation.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. HAWKINS:** A very –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

There's a point of order being raised.

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, to accuse me of being indecent or whatever, I believe is unfair and defamatory to me. And the statistics that were quoted are very much also recorded in the proceedings of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Forty-nine.

**MS. ROGERS:** No, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, section 49. And I would ask the Member to take back that comment.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Does the minister wish to speak that point of order?

**MR. HAWKINS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will. In fact, it was disingenuous for me to make that comment; I take that back. But it's also disingenuous for a Member opposite to get up and make statements with regard to facts that she is reporting that are not necessarily correct.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further to that point of order.

**MS. ROGERS:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to a presentation that the Newfoundland and Labrador Counsellors' and Psychologists' Association gave to the All-Party Committee on November 9, 2015, and they stand by that presentation that they made, and I believe that they are not incorrect, that there was no misleading statements as all. Thank you. Three years ago.

**MR. SPEAKER:** There seems to be – do you wish to speak further to that point of order?

**MR. HAWKINS:** (Inaudible) she's quoting 2015 numbers, Mr. Speaker, and that's not 2018 numbers, and I just made a statement, I just –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay. You're speaking to the point of order; you have the floor.

**MR. HAWKINS:** So, Mr. Speaker, again, these are numbers – and I don't want to belabour the situation because as I said when I started this particular private Member's resolution is too

serious to bring politics into this. Mr. Speaker, it's too serious.

I think it's important for all of us to be cognizant of that. I did make a statement. I made a statement that the men and women, our teachers in this province, our guidance counsellors in this province, our psychologists in the province – as a matter of fact in 2010, almost nine years ago, we had 43 psychologists in our schools. The population since 2010 has significantly –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay.

Is the Member still speaking to the point of order?

**MR. HAWKINS:** I have no idea what I'm speaking to.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay.

I think I've heard enough on this point of order. I ask the Member to take his chair.

I'm going to rule on the point of order first. I think we have a disagreement between Members on the facts of the matter and sometimes it's possible for Members to have different facts and information and bring that to the House. So, I'm going to rule that there's no point of order on this point, but I would also encourage Members to keep their comments temperate as they continue the debate.

**MS. ROGERS:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** A point of order by the hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

On section 49, again the Member has accused me of playing politics which is really – on such a serious matter to accuse me of playing politics with this when in *The Way Forward* report itself it says that the Newfoundland and Labrador Counsellors' and Psychologists' Association strongly advocated to the committee about the need for more mental health resources in schools, particularly school counsellors and educational psychologists.



Mr. Speaker, it's right here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** To the point of order, the hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** This is not a point of order. This is a usage of the other Member's time. The Member had her time to speak and I would suggest she's just using the other Member's time. This is certainly not a point of order.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader to the point of order.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Section 49, I believe my colleague referenced inappropriate parliamentary language and I think that's the issue in regard to 49, so I guess that's what the ruling would be on.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay.

I'm going to rule on this matter now. The language used – parliamentary language takes into context, takes into what was said, and those issues – while there are no list of words or phrases that are unparliamentary, this phrase, I think, in this context is not necessarily unparliamentary, so I'm going to rule that there's no point of order on this. There seems to be a disagreement between two Members on the facts around the matter.

I'm going to ask the Minister of Education to continue speaking on this motion.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, that's out of character for me to make these types of comments because I don't usually do that, but there are some things that happen, we get passionate about it when we have a very, very serious situation that we have in this private Member's resolution.

The Member for the Third Party made reference in the recovery, and in *The Way Forward*, that we are going to be looking at that, and I have to give her credit for that; that is actually what we're doing, and that's part of what we're looking at when we looked at the Premier's task force that was put in place by independent,

professional people, who made 82 recommendations of education within this province, to make significant changes.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that I think the Premier was very, very clear. When the Premier's task force was put in place and the recommendations were accepted, I think the Premier was very, very, clear in saying and making a statement. It is not his intent to have 82 of those recommendations sit on a shelf somewhere and collect dust. It will be implemented.

And if the Member opposite – we all know that part of the recommendations feeds into the Education Action Plan where we have a steering committee made up of deputy ministers and the CEOs from the university, from the English School District, from the French Francophone school district as well, that will look at implementation of those 82 recommendations.

Part of that, Mr. Speaker, as well, is to look at some of the areas within the education system that needs attention, and I firmly believe that there are areas. As I said earlier, we have counsellors, we have guidance counsellors, we have psychologists, we have teachers, we have IRT, we have teacher learning assistants, we have student assistants, all of these that try every day to make a difference to our young people within this province, and they're doing a fantastic job.

Now, do they have all of the resources that are necessary? Probably not. Mr. Speaker, it's very easy to get on the other side. I would love to have an education psychologist for every student that's in our school. Is that possible? No it's not, but I think the important piece is that we have to identify that every single child in this province, no matter if they have exceptionalities or if they don't, have a right to a proper education, and I think the professionals that are in our field today, the professionals that perform every single day in our schools are making a difference.

I've gone into several schools since I've been in this portfolio. I spent 30 years in classrooms. Mr. Speaker, there were days that I came home and I was totally frustrated because I felt I did not have the necessary tools and resources in

place to address all of the situations that students faced. But was it a crisis? We work through it. If you listen to some of the comments, you would say some of our schools – all of our schools are falling apart. That is not true, Mr. Speaker.

I've been in a lot of schools. As a matter of fact, I was in a school on Friday of last week, where it was a day off for the students, and they have a makerspace within that school. Guess what? The students came back and the teachers came back because I was going to do a visit to that school. And there's a significant difference. You want to see excitement within schools? Go visit our schools. There is excitement there. There are a lot of good things happening.

But are we perfect? No, we're not. Are there challenges? Yes, there are many challenges. There are challenges every single day that we have to face within our schools. But we, as a government – and I would say as a collective – are trying to do the best we can to provide the level of education for our students to ensure that when they finish school, they have post-secondary opportunities for them.

Mr. Speaker, when we come back – and I fully support the private Member's resolution. I know the Member of the Third Party would like to have more meat put on that, but, again, it's better than not addressing it at all. I think the more that we can do as a House, the more we can do to bring awareness to the fact that there are mental health issues, not only in our schools but in our post-secondary schools, in our workforce, in our workplace. These are things that we need to talk about.

We will continue to talk about them, and we will continue to strive to look at opportunities where we can make improvements, so that we know and we can get to that point where we are providing the best possible services under the resources that we have. Again, Mr. Speaker, sometimes these resources are not possible to the level that we have to get there, because it would almost impossible to do that. We'd have to cut services somewhere else in order to do that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that we're moving in the right direction. I believe that our Education Action Plan is a livable plan, it's a workable plan, it's a plan that will make

significant improvements to education of our students within our schools in this province and I am really looking forward to the full implementation of that plan. I'm also looking forward to ensure that we do have the resources available.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are issues out there. I attended a town hall meeting in St. John's two weeks ago with my hon. colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources. It was very enlightening for me, as a minister, to stand in front of a town hall meeting, and people had concerns. I listened to the concerns, I understand and I empathize. I am fully aware that we have challenges, but we are going to work with stakeholders, we're going to work with the resources we have to ensure that we are doing the best possible job we can.

Hopefully, within the resources we have, and potential additional resources, to be able to address some of the situations we're facing in this province to ensure we do have a good, solid education system for our students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, if she speaks now she will close the debate.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member.

**MS. HALEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank Members on both sides of this hon. House for their participation in today's discussion on a topic that is obviously near and dear to, what I'd like to say, all of us, but that's not the case, as we just heard.

I'm very sorry and very disappointed to know that the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for St. John's Centre is not so supportive, Mr. Speaker, but I can guarantee you Members on this side of the House will continue to do our work to look after this issue.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. HALEY:** Change can be slow and stigmas can be hard to fight. But I believe we are finally on the path to accepting that mental health is as important as physical health to the well-being of the individual.

For youth, especially during the years of adolescence, where fitting in is all-important, the stigma that still surrounds the whole issue of mental health is often enough to render them silent, to force them to face the stress and anxieties of their lives alone. Many youth will navigate those stresses and anxieties quite fine and will go on to lead productive and happy lives. However, we must also concern ourselves with those youth who, for one reason or another, are unable to cope with the complexities of their lives.

As legislators, we readily accept our responsibility to put into place programs to ensure the physical health of those men and women, Mr. Speaker. And finally, we are at a point as a society where we accept good mental health is a must. As of late, we have been implementing programs to deal with mental health issues, Mr. Speaker, all good programs that are reaping positive results.

Today's motion is intended to take this one step further, to present a proactive means of dealing with the issue so that all youth, whether self-identified or not, are provided an opportunity to help deal with issues before they arise, or to provide our youth with strategies to cope with issues that have been burdening them.

There is no better place than the classroom to fight the stigma surrounding this issue, because until the stigma has been eradicated, many will continue to suffer in silence. By having health care professionals and teachers come together, sharing their expertise and formulating ideas for working with youth on the issue of mental health, much can be accomplished.

Engaging youth is the key. No one is so naive to think more emphasis on mental health at the school level will heal all wounds; however, I do feel this will be another piece in the puzzle towards improving the situation. If such dialogue could serve to help two or three students in the class, then it would be well worth the effort, Mr. Speaker.

At a very young age, they are presented with ideas and information that were foreign to most of us until we were much older. They are swamped with temptations, such as illegal drugs that many adults are shocked to know even exist in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. As legislators, it is imperative we grasp an appreciation of the realities that didn't exist when we were teens. It is imperative we present counterforces so that our youth can lead healthy and enriched lives.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members on both sides of this House to consider the merits of today's resolution. I ask Members to support an initiative that will no doubt positively impact many youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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.

All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Division.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Division has been called.

House Leaders, please call in your Members.

### Division

**CLERK (Barnes):** Mr. Andrew Parsons, Ms. Coady, Mr. Haggie, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Warr, Mr. Bernard Davis, Mr. Edmunds, Ms. Haley, Mr. Letto, Mr. Browne, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Derek Bennett, Mr. Reid, Ms. Parsley, Mr. King, Mr. Dean, Mr. Holloway –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Excuse me, before we proceed, I'm looking for clarification from the Clerk. We've had two Members enter after the bells had stopped and the bar was up.

**CLERK:** I didn't see when they came in, I'm sorry.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**CLERK:** I did not see them come in.

**MR. SPEAKER:** They were after the bell.

**CLERK:** It was after the bell?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay. You can't recognize them.

**CLERK:** Okay.

Mr. Hutchings –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Please carry on with Mr. Mitchelmore.

**CLERK:** Okay.

Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Petten, Mr. Lester, Ms. Rogers, Ms. Michael. It was after – Mr. Speaker, (inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** No, I haven't informed them, but given that the bells had stopped, technically, and the bar was up, I'm not able to recognize additional Members.

Thank you.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Point of order, Sir.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, I'll just point out I was in the caucus room. Immediately upon hearing the bells, I proceeded to the Chamber. The bells stopped while I was in the hallway, Mr. Speaker. I was within the precinct of the House of Assembly, and attended here as quickly as possible when the bells were ringing. I would suggest they rang for a very short period and did not provide enough time to enter the Chamber.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I appreciate your – the hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** I'm just going to say Standing Order 16, when Division is called,

usually House Leaders are given an opportunity to ring the bells longer. I appreciate where the Members are coming from, but we have very clear rules that once the bells stop and the question is put to the floor that Members cannot go to their seats after and vote.

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Just to that point, there was no indication to House Leaders for the bells to stop or not. I expected the bells to continue to ring for longer than what they did.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Perhaps I'll wear the blame on this, but I cannot insert grey tones in the decision. The bar was up, the bells had stopped, perhaps I should've allowed more time but I assumed all the Members were here. So there will be no point of order.

I'll ask those against the motion, please rise.

**CLERK:** Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 27; the nays: zero.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is carried.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** This being Wednesday, and Halloween, and in accordance with Standing Order 91(b), this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock.

Thank you.