



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume XLVIII

THIRD SESSION

Number 38

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

Wednesday

November 7, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 6, second reading of Bill 34.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that Bill 34, An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006, be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 34, entitled An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006, be now read a second time.

Is it the – oh, I’m sorry, be now read a second time. Thank you.

I was on a bit of a routine.

MR. A. PARSONS: I like the way you’re thinking.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006.” (Bill 34)

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

I’m standing here today to speak to Bill 34, which is An Act to Amend the Assessment Act, 2006, which is a piece of legislation that I think everybody knows the importance of. We’re talking about the evaluation of real property in this province.

What I’d like to do is perhaps provide the genesis for how we are here, why we are here and to talk about what this amendment does, which really is going to have some positive

effects for taxpayers and for homeowners and property owners in this province. I think this is a really positive step that we are taking here today with this piece of legislation.

So what I can say is that this – and I think this is a part of the mandate for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment’s mandate letter. I’m standing up and talking about this today and presenting this bill, but the reality is the lion’s share of this work was done prior to me coming into this department. The lion’s share of this work was done leading up to this, and I want to thank the previous minister for the work that he did on this file. In many cases, I’ve stepped into this department and I’ve taken over, but the work has been there. I get to stand up and talk about the positives, but this is something that took a lot of time.

The other thing – I always like to do this and I think we need to do it – is I want to thank the staff of Municipal Affairs and Environment for the work that they have done on this file. This is not a bill or an amendment that was done just in a small room without thinking about anybody. There was a tremendous amount of consultation that had to be done to make this Assessment Act amendment a reality. We had to consult with the Municipal Assessment Agency, which is based in Grand Falls-Windsor, work with them and talk about the realities of the work that they do, how it can be done and how it can be changed. And we had to work with MNL.

I can tell you in the time that I’ve had here doing this work they’ve been a tremendous organization to work with. We’ve all got experience working with MNL, given the fact that they represent all the municipalities in our province. But having that hands-on working relationship with people like Tony Keats and with Craig Pollett, I want to thank them for the working relationship that we’ve had. So, we worked with them.

This bill is something that came out of – a lot of us knocked on doors in 2015 and one of the things that I think a lot of us heard on the doorsteps was at the same time we were knocking on their doors, people were getting their letters from the Municipal Assessment Agency and there was a lot of questions asked. I think one of the things that I’ve asked staff to do

is work with the agency. I think there's a real education process that needs to happen when it comes to property assessment because I think there's a real – I can't say misunderstanding, I'll say non-understanding and I've certainly been guilty of that as well. And if I'm guilty of it, I'm assuming that a few other people are. How does this process work?

There are complex algorithms that are used to come up with this data, with this information. But the reality is that most of what we know comes in a letter that tells us whether our property has gone up or gone down. In many cases, when it goes up, it means money coming out of our pockets. When money goes out of our pockets, we start to question what's going on.

So when we were all knocking on doors in 2015, that was one of the things we heard is people had questions and said what's going on here, how does this work. The other thing, there has been a lot of issues and maybe the best way for me to talk about it is talk about the fixes that we're making, what it is they're fixing and why we are fixing that.

The changes that we have – and I have the bill here – are two things. One of them is changing the actual cycle. One of the issues that we had is that it's been done on a three-year cycle, which there are a lot of things that change in three years when you're getting an assessment back that, in many cases, doesn't seem consistent with the reality in which we're living. People had serious questions about that.

What this bill is going to do is actually going to change the assessment cycle from three years to one year for all municipalities that are governed or handled by the Municipal Assessment Agency and it's going to go from three years to two years for the City of St. John's who handle their own assessments. They don't subscribe or pay the MAA for the data; they do their own.

One of the issues we've had going through this was well, we knew we had to shorten that cycle. Three years is a huge period of time. I think having a shorter cycle leads to a better understanding – people getting better information quicker and it seems more consistent when we have that evaluation done

rather than waiting on three years' worth of data. Sometimes it just doesn't seem to jive.

One of the issues that we had was that what works – pardon for the colloquialisms here. What works around the bay doesn't always work in here. The City of St. John's was saying, look, we can't go to one year. We just won't be able to handle it, and that's a fair point. They were happy with going to two and felt they could handle two, but had a tough time with one; whereas the Municipal Assessment Agency was saying we can go to one. We can handle a one-year cycle. It will not result in increased costs to citizens. We can handle the one-year cycle.

The biggest change that was made in the last couple of months is: Why do we need to have the same thing for everybody? Why should we have a one-year cycle that hurts St. John's? Why should we have a two-year cycle that hurts everybody else? So, we've gone with two. I think it's going to be better for everybody.

We're going to change it so that there's a two-year cycle for the City of St. John's, rather than three. The City of St. John's has worked with us on that and said we can live with that. We can handle that. It will result in increased pressure, no doubt, but it's pressure that's good for citizens. It's pressure that taxpayers and citizens and ratepayers and municipal property owners, whether residential or otherwise, they want this. That's who we're here to serve.

When it comes to everybody else that's handled by the Municipal Assessment Agency, going to one year is a very positive move. We're going to get those notices every year now, rather than every three years. I think that it's going to lead to a better understanding of the process and it's going to lead, for lack of a better term, to more real information, rather than you're getting something that's based on three years and it just doesn't seem to fit with the reality in which we're living in terms of property evaluation and everything else. I think we've got a change there that's going to be positive.

Some of the stats that I have here, the act covers the assessment of more than 225,000 properties. That's a pretty big group. I know we're a small province. There's somewhere in the range of half a million people, which is small. But this is

a significant amount of work. The MAA, I appreciate the work they do, and I appreciate the city when they have to do their work as well.

Now, this act does not cover taxation. Taxation, itself, comes from the *Municipalities Act* or the city's act. So this act doesn't deal with taxation, because sometimes we talk about the assessment: well, did our taxes go up or down? That's a prerogative of the community if they want to change the rate of taxation. That's another issue all together. We haven't touched that because I don't think it's our job. I don't think it's our responsibility, and I don't say that in a way of – I think that's the town's responsibility. I don't think they want us encroaching on their ability to make their decisions.

Now, I've said it a lot and I'll say it again. I've said it at the MNL Conference. I've said it at every meeting I've ever had with municipality. Municipal governance is the toughest level of governance. It's tougher than provincial, it's tougher than federal.

We're all sitting here, and it's hard work. We all know that, and we're compensated for that. But when you see the work that municipal councillors are doing and the remuneration they get, which is next to nothing, I got to tell you, I appreciate every single councillor and mayor that is out there. It's a tough job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: And we try to do our best to work with them and make their lives easier, but at the same time, I don't think it's our right to go in and make their decisions or take that decision-making authority away. That's why they run, so they can make the decisions that are the best interest for their particular community. So they handle the taxation.

So that's just one of the changes that we've talked about here. We've changed the cycle from one year – sorry, to one year and to two years.

The next thing we did was we changed the mandatory assessment roll preparation date. It's currently September 30. So that's when they've

got to get the information compiled and start sending it out.

Now, you'll notice some communities right now – I think, actually, in the City of St. John's, if it's not sent out already, it's in the process. It is behind schedule. And I'm not saying that to lay blame or to pass fault here. I'm just saying that's the reality.

What we're changing is we're going to change it from September back to August 31. So all municipalities will have to get that information out by August 31. And that's important, because it means it's getting in citizens' hands quicker so that they can see this. This is also very important for one of the next changes that I'm talking about here, which will come – show what we're dealing with here. So we want it August 31.

Right now, there's no power to compel them to make sure that it's done. We are now going to change that, so that if a community or the City of St. John's wants to delay that or can't come up with it, they have to ask permission of the department. And I don't think it's permission that will not be granted, but I think it's better for the municipality. I think this is a good pressure.

Pressure is not a bad thing. Pressure helps us make decisions; helps us get things done. There is a pressure to get this done, and the reason the pressure is good is because it's in the best interests of the citizens that we serve. So what we're saying now is you need to, if you want an extended date, you must get ministerial approval.

Now, it's not about me doing that. I might not be in this chair next week. It doesn't matter about the minister. The minister could be any minister, any government, any party, any administration. It's about accountability for whoever sits in this chair. Municipalities need to ensure that they're getting this information out. I think this has an enhanced accountability provision now to make sure that the tax assessment rolls are done by the end of the summer. It means they're going to receive the assessment sooner, which leads to the next change.

We're increasing the owner's appeal period from 30 days to 60 days. That is a very positive step, in my opinion. It is one we've heard

repeatedly from citizens. One of the situations that I've seen, and I can't tell you if it was 2015 or 2016, but people were getting their new assessment later in the season, in some cases November, and what was happening was that appeal period, which was 30 days, was putting you right into Christmas.

Let's be honest, people have a lot of things going on Christmastime, right? Trying to make sure that all the good stuff that comes with Christmas or the holidays is dealt with, and they were missing this. They weren't seeing this. And trying to get something done like that during the holiday season when kids are off school and you're off work or whatever else, was very difficult. So we're extending that period from 30 days to 60 days. When you think about it, we're rolling back the date, so the information should be out quicker; we're extending the appeal.

There was a lot of people – I had people coming to me, and I always put myself in the same situation. I can remember this, getting my assessment very late, and I'm sitting there Christmas and I'm looking at it, and I'm saying, jeez, I feel like if I want to appeal. I have that ability to appeal. I've done appeals. But when you take a lot of citizens are getting it late, everything else that they're dealing with and they got this appeal period that's running right into Christmas, people were not having that ability to appeal the decision. So we're just giving them an extra opportunity, if they want to do that.

So you think about the changes so far, Mr. Speaker. We're making the information more consistent, and on a yearly basis, which I think makes it more accurate, or more cognizant of reality, rather than getting something after three years and saying, how did we end up with this? Rolling back that period to give people more opportunity – we're going to get it quicker and we're extending the appeal period.

All in all I think these are very positive steps. I would note that MNL is supportive, MAA is supportive, and when we talk about – because one of the questions you often get asked in debate is who did you talk to? Who did you consult with? Well, these consultations were done in the summer of 2016. So this has been a

long time coming. There's been a lot of work here.

There were public consultations. There was specific stakeholder groups, online feedback forms, toll-free phone number, email and regular mail. There were 61 submissions. There was work with, again, groups like MNL who deal with municipalities.

This is something that there was a lot of work done. I go back to the people in the department, the people that aren't here on the floor of the House that don't get seen but they actually do the work. I'm here talking about it, it's their hard work. To everybody in Municipal Affairs and Environment, who aren't recognized –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: And then every department that's doing this legislation, we get to stand up and talk about, and as governments, we all get to take credit for it. They're the ones doing the work.

To the deputy minister and the ADMs, the analysts, the front line, thank you. Thank you for making your work – actually, and it sounds like a cliché, your work is improving the lives of the people you represent, the people that you serve. So thank you for that. I get to stand up and talk about it, but let's be honest here, this work was done by these individuals.

Now, I'll continue on. One thing we're also changing here is we are repealing the special purpose property regulations to ensure that the owners of special properties, manufacturing facilities, airports is a big one, they're going to receive evaluation on their property based on market value.

Again, we worked with the City of St. John's on this. We worked with the Municipal Assessment Agency. I mean we had a situation just a few years back where this became a very contentious issue here in the City of St. John's with the airport. I think it was ruled that the regulations were actually not valid.

Since that time, we've done different evaluation. It seems to be working for everyone. I know this is an issue I believe in Gander as well, when

you're talking about these special purpose properties. So we're just repealing it because they're not valid. We're making that change and we're going to give them, I think, an evaluation that's actually based on the market value.

MR. LETTO: Assessed value.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes. As my colleague, the Member for Lab West, says, based on assessed value. And I think that's positive for everyone here.

This is not a case of government trying to get things done no matter what. This is a pure example of listening to people and making a change based on what they say. I don't anticipate there's going to be opposition to this from my colleagues across the way. I do anticipate there will be questions, as there should be. Why did you do this? Why did you not do that? But I think, overall, people will see the positive changes that are being made here with this particular piece of legislation.

We had hoped to have this done quicker, but given the fact that we're in an assessment cycle right now, these changes will happen in 2020. I think to bring these changes in right away – we had wanted, especially, the appeal period, the 30 days to 60 days to happen right now; but making changes in the middle of a process can probably cause more confusion than the good that you're trying to intend to be done.

What we're going to do, this will all be effective from 2020, when that assessment cycle starts. And it's a case of, look, we wanted to get it done quicker, but I'd rather it done right than quick. That's what we're doing here. We are doing it right. I will not agree with any comment that says that we're not trying to do it right.

I mean, look, everybody wants things done sooner. We're all guilty of that. I want things right away. But these things take time. If you don't think them through, you end up in situations that can hurt people and cause confusion, and that, in itself, would negate any benefit from what you're trying to do, from the positive that you're trying to create.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've said about enough on this now about what we're trying to do. This is a

case of a positive amendment to what can often be a difficult topic when we talk about property tax and real property assessment. It's contentious stuff, because we all want to value our properties, but nobody wants to pay more money. That's the reality. But I think we're making changes here now that people will recognize as being good changes. We've done it by working with the people that know what they're doing: the MAA, the City of St. John's, other municipalities, MNL.

I know I have colleagues on this side that will speak to this; I know I have colleagues across the way that will speak to it. I look forward to moving into the Committee stage and the back and forth and comes with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's, indeed, a pleasure to get up here today and to speak, and I will assure the minister that I will be supporting these amendments because they make a lot of sense.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a former mayor of a small town. When you're a mayor of a small town, you get phone calls all the time. It's interesting that the minister first talked about, probably, an education component to this, and to educate the taxpayers in the communities of what's actually happening, because sometimes, as a mayor, or as a councillor – and I definitely do applaud everybody that puts their name forward to be on municipalities and to represent their towns, because it is, it really is the hardest part of any – like the minister said, I believe that municipal governments is really the hardest one, because you're dealing with your friends, you're dealing with your neighbours, you're dealing with your cousins and uncles and aunts and everybody else.

Sometimes when an assessment comes out, as soon as they see the assessment and realize that it's gone up, well, I'll give Kevin a call; he will

take care of that for me. That's what happens in small towns. You know, he's my buddy, I'll get him to have a look at that; there's no way I'm paying this. But they don't realize that this is an assessment agency that comes in, it's independent of the towns, it has nothing to do with the towns, they come in, they do an assessment, and sometimes the assessment is based on – you could live in a small, little lane and it's based on what the property values are next door to you, what the piece of land got sold down the road, and that's how they do it.

They look at the whole municipality and they say, okay, what's the price of a house in Torbay right now that has three bedrooms in it, and has the basement done, and it's on three-quarter-acre lots. That's how they do it. They base the property value on what's in the area at the time, and what the houses are selling like. And in the last couple of years, if you looked at the property values, I know in my own district they've gone down quite a bit. They were at a high. They were really up. It think Torbay, one time, was considered the highest housing values in all of Newfoundland and Labrador. Right now I think it's after going down, but I listened to the news coming in this morning and they say the values are going back up again, and it's related to the price of oil, and that has a huge effect on everything.

So, people, when they get their bill, they look at their bill and right off the bat they say, oh my God, look where it's gone; my house is worth \$450,000. Sure if I tried to sell that, I'm only going to get \$350,000 for it. But it's based on the value and the market value, but it's done over a three-year period. That's why I like these amendments. I really do, because it comes and it takes it year by year by year, because it changes. It changes a lot.

I really believe that we do need to educate municipalities. Maybe there's some way that the municipal agency can send out letters just to explain how it's done, like I just explained. It's based on the value of the whole area. Some areas, what you'll see is property, probably their lot sizes in one town are three-quarters of an acre, another lot size in another town could be a half acre, and so the money you get for a three-quarter of an acre versus a half acre, that's the

reason why it's looked at each individual municipality and see what they're like.

Houses could be sold in one municipality which has water and sewer, and that makes a difference on the value of the home versus a town that doesn't have water and sewer. People don't realize that. They don't realize what the actual basis of their property is, so it's very important that – I agree with the minister; I think that it's something we should really educate on. That would also help all of our elected municipal officials. Then they wouldn't have to be explaining it all the time and they'd have something to go to just to be able to say, look, this is how it's done and this is why we do it.

I know, like I said, going back to my days as the mayor that every time that assessments came out, oh my God, the calls that you would get. I know there are other mayors on the other side and councillors here on this side too that understand what I'm talking about. There are Members over there that worked in the towns and they realize what we're talking about also. So as soon as that assessment came out you could guarantee the phone was going to ring off the wall and people wanted you to fix it and everything else. I really believe that that's where it's to. And that would also help the towns.

The minister spoke a little bit about the mill rate and he said that's not part of this; it's going to come under the Municipalities Act. But the mill rate is something – and he said that he wouldn't interfere with it; I would never interfere with it. It's the town's responsibility to centre mill rates. It's the towns responsibility to take the money that they have coming in – everybody got to realize that municipalities, at the end of the day, the money that they spend and the revenue that got to come in got to equal zero. You cannot have a surplus or should you have a deficit.

So, the towns have got to have the ability to be able to provide what they want to provide. Some towns provide unbelievable snow clearing. I know in the wintertime you'll hear the comment how great the Mount Pearl snow clearing is –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: – versus the City of St. John's snow clearing, but you do hear that stuff.

But, do you know what? That's a town's decisions to make sure that they have the equipment to do the proper work. At the end of the day, the town who wants to invest in snow clearing equipment that costs a lot of money, or a town that says, okay, we're only going to do it this and try to keep the mill rate down because we don't have that money, that's the prerogative of that town to do that.

I agree that as a former mayor we were like – I laughed at my deputy mayor at the time. I had several arguments with him when we were doing the budget. He's deceased now, Mr. Kevin Butt, a great guy. Anyway, I used to argue with him and say you think that money is coming out of your pocket or what. He used to say to me: Yes, it is. I'm a taxpayer; it's coming out of my pocket. When we did a budget, everything was nicked and dimed, but we supplied the service that was necessary for our residents, but we watched every dollar we were spending.

We went to government, and at the time we got what grants we could get. We looked at our roadwork – and that's what towns do. They assess the amount of money they have coming in and say, okay, what are our priorities. Is our priority fixing up the softball fence? Is our priority making sure we have adequate snow clearing?

These are all the things that really affect your residents, but the mill rate, that's a town responsibility. In my district, I believe, I could be wrong, but I believe it's probably the lowest mill rates in the province in two towns. Another couple of towns their mill rates are up – I'm going to say two towns have it at 4.5 or in the 4 range, and then the other ones are up around 8.9 and 9. But it's different services that you provide. Again, I give the example of snow clearing. You can have snow clearing equipment that can do roads like you wouldn't believe.

I remember one of the first things I did when I was mayor of the Town of Flatrock was we were always – we had contracted out our snow clearing. Myself and the deputy mayor actually went and we looked at how about if we had a couple of pieces of equipment ourselves, what would that do for us, and how would that affect our budget. So we looked into it and we looked at – because when you buy a piece of equipment

it's usually over – it's not like buying a car, a four-year term, whatever, you probably go seven or eight years on a piece of heavy equipment, and that's normal.

So we looked at it and we analyzed the cost of what that would cost, and it looked like that was the best way to go. Now the town has its own equipment and they're doing their ditching, they're doing everything else. So it worked out really well. But that's the decision of the town to do the mill rate, and I'm glad the government is not getting involved in trying to set mill rates right across the province because it can't work.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not a good thing.

MR. K. PARSONS: It's not a good thing at all, no.

The changes that are made here today now – and we'll talk a little bit about the first one that I'm going to talk about, is the three-year cycle. Again, it's a very positive change. Now I'd like to know, and I will ask the minister some questions on this afterwards. I know sometimes there's a delay in getting the assessments back to the towns.

Now that we have a fixed date, I know you have to go for the delay or whatever to the town, but the Municipal Assessment Agency is going to have a lot of work on their hands. There's going to be a lot of work to be able to do this. It's a positive thing to do, but, again, I hope they'll have the resources to be able to do it. And that's important, because you're going to put pressure on these people to be able to do that. So they're going to definitely need the resources to be able to do this.

The appeal process; I had the occasion, sometimes, of calling the Municipal Assessment Agent on behalf of constituents of mine, mainly seniors. People called me and said my act – and I'd call. I'd make the call. I have to say, the people that I worked with down there are fantastic; great people to work with. They return your call, they get back to you.

There's one that I'm working on now that I spoke to, and the lady said, we'll give you a call and we'll let you know when they're going to go

do it. So you can make sure that the resident knows what's going to happen.

Sometimes if you do an appeal – and this is another thing. It's a \$25 fee, I believe, that it costs to do an assessment fee. So I was wondering how that's going to work. If that's going to stay the same or there's going to be an increase or decrease, or whatever. That'll be somewhere we'll go. But to change the dates – as long as we can do it on time, it can be done within that one year, that's a very positive thing.

Moving back the date from September 30 to August 31 is another very positive thing. I'll put two of them into one. By moving it back to August 31, and then also extending the amount of time you have to appeal between 30 days and 60 days, is very important. I'll tell you why.

In a lot of cases, I know where I'm from, we have workers that go away. I'm guilty of this myself. I'll probably check my mail every two weeks. There are people that will go away on a holiday and their mail builds up and they have to go get it (inaudible), but the 30 days are up and you can't appeal.

I know the minister talked about the holiday season, but there are also sometimes – and a lot of times – I used to go up to my moms and dads all the time and I'd check their mail. I'd be over getting their mail sometimes and you'd see letters on the – it could be on their dresser, it could be on the kitchen table. It could be there for a couple of weeks, and: yeah, that's nothing. That's only an old assessment thing or something like that. But without even opening it. So the 60 days is very important. In 60 days, hopefully people will check it.

It's time, because people work away. There are people that are in school. There are people that move away for the winter. They, obviously, have somebody checking their mail or something like that. But it's important to make that change also, the 30 days versus 60 days. Because once the 30 days is up and you call in: no, you can't appeal that. Your assessment came out at a certain date and it has expired.

So, again, not only for Christmastime but, like I said, there are people working away. There are times that people only check their mail every

couple of weeks. Like I said, a lot of our seniors look at it and sometimes – and not only seniors, it could be anybody. Sometimes somebody else will look at that and say: my God, your house was assessed at \$250,000. Sure, you're not going to get \$250,000 for this. You should appeal that, there could be something that's done. Anyway, the extended time is good for everybody. It's a good thing.

The City of St. John's had a little issue, and I'm glad that you can – we can make this work for not only the city. A funny thing about municipal assessments for the City of St. John's – people that work down in the City of St. John's will know what I'm talking about. The gentleman that was in charge of it for years and years down in the City of St. John's was Mr. Ron Cadigan. Ronnie was from my area, a great hockey player and everything else, but I always knew Ronnie was the one that was in charge of the assessments down at the City of St. John's. He has since passed on. He was a great guy, but I always knew what Ronnie's job was down at the City of St. John's.

I think they do over 40,000 assessments all together in the City of St. John's, which is a lot of work. There's a lot of work that goes into it too.

We heard last year, when the assessments did come out, there was a public outcry in the City of St. John's. We heard it on the news. I think there were a couple of protests and everything else. That was related to the value of the homes, how they were after changing.

Again, a three-year period is sometimes almost a four-year period when the assessment actually gets out. Things can change. The property values in the City of St. John's over a couple of years change drastic. People's houses that were appraised at \$700,000 or \$800,000 at the time – boy, if I can get \$700,000 or \$800,000 for the house, I'd sell it tomorrow. The value and the chance of selling the home, the market was bad. You couldn't sell your home, and the assessed value you were stuck with for three years meant that you had to pay taxes on something that you could never get the money for.

So I'm glad the officials over in the department worked with the City of St. John's to do this.

Apparently, under the briefing – which I have to say was a great briefing. I thank the people over in the department. They always do a fantastic job with the briefing they gave us, but I'm glad they consulted with the City of St. John's in ensuring that they were okay with this.

I think you'll see a positive reply from people who were very concerned about this and had huge issues with the amount of value that their homes were done in St. John's, assessed in St. John's. I think this is a positive thing. If the city says they couldn't do it within the one-year period, it's great to see that we're working with the city so we don't put them in a bind to have to come up with (inaudible).

Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned that the total amount of properties that are assessed are 225,000 properties in the province. Now, we have a lot of towns in this province that uses poll tax, and again a poll tax is basically just a flat rate type of thing that you pay in a town. I was interested to see how many towns are still paying poll tax. I really don't know. There's none in my area that are paying it, but I do believe there are some still paying it in the province, so it'd be interesting to see.

But 225,000 homes means that there's going to be a lot of work done. If it takes three years, right now, to assess those homes, then to be able to do it all in one year, I'm sure there will be answers to it on the cost. And the other question, too, that brings to mind when you look at this, because there's definitely going to have to be more cost, there's going to have to be added cost on it to be able to do this within a one-year period versus three-year period, and it'll be interesting to see where that cost, where you're going to recruit the money to be able to pay for it.

I mean it's a great thing. I'm not saying anything about cost or anything at all like that, but it'd be interesting to see if government's going to step in and help the municipal agency and help the towns that have to pay, because at the end of the day whoever has to pay for it, if it's the municipalities that are going to be added cost, that'll just be moved on down to the towns.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I do agree that the department and the people over in the

department have done a fantastic job on this. They've done a lot of work. I noticed that when we went over, they talked a little bit about what we heard when the assessment act was reviewed 2006, and there was a lot of consultation. There were 61 submissions which, it's a lot but I was thinking there'd be a lot more, actually, because it is such a concern with people. I thought there'd be a whole lot more people doing submissions, towns and whatnot wanting to be able to see what's happening here.

They reviewed the timing aspect of this, and that's what the amendments here today are mainly about, is about timing and moving it from three years to one year, and the City of St. John's down to two years, timing of when the assessments come out, also the length of time for an appeal, so they addressed that. And the assessment criteria, while it's not addressed in this bill, it's something that I talked about earlier, the education part of it, making sure that the residents in the towns understand.

It could be a mail out with your bill. We all get our council bills every year and maybe there's some kind of mail out that we can put out with each town so that everyone can be assured that, listen, this is the reason why we're doing this, here's what the value of your home is and it's based on the value of the properties that are in the area.

I know one of the appeals that I went to for a resident of mine, the property was based on X amount of dollars, yet the property itself was mainly bog, it was on the side of a hill, so the same type of property that was assessed, it could be a level piece of land versus the bog – that person appealed and they came down, had a look, and they agreed and said no, that property, that's assessed at this much here.

When people do get their bills, they got to understand that they can go and do the appeal or they can call. Sometimes, the assessment people will come down and they'll look at the property and say okay, no, we realize where you're coming to from there.

Again, the implementation associated with mill rate, and as the minister said, they're not going to touch that. I agree with it. It's under the municipal act anyway and I think that is the – I

don't think government should get into setting mill rates for towns. I think it's the responsibility of the towns to do their due diligence and make sure that they run their towns the way that the people who elected them wanted them to run it. If there are some areas in town where they want to make sure that they spend money on X and X, and another town says no, we're going to do it a little different then that's how your mill rate gets set up. Your mill rate is basically set to make sure that the revenue you have coming in matches the expenditures that you have going out. So, that's the reason why I think that should be left there.

Now, the minister did mention – the last thing that I'll mention too – special properties. I will have several questions on this when we do get into Committee, but when you look at taking special properties out, I can understand that it's jobs sometimes too – and I know there was a couple of court cases on this and both cases were ruled against the assessments. I think the City of St. John's airport was one. When they looked at the value that they assessed – so, to change this it will be interesting to see. I'd like to see a list of what's included in special properties so the towns would know where there're to. It'll be also interesting to look and to see how municipalities – I know the minister just mentioned that time that it'll be market value. So, in some cases, I don't know what the market value of a church would be in a community, or a recreation facility – are they included? If they're included they're not taxed – recreation and your facilities, like a hockey rink, and all that there.

So anyway, I'll have some questions on that when the minister gets up, but it'll be interesting to see what they are and what lists are available to see so the towns will know what's considered as special properties.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to close out now. I just gave my opinion on some of it. Again, I like it. I like the changes. I believe that the municipalities, I know the ones in my area will also like it, and more so than anything it's the residents that are paying the taxes, and it gives them – like I said, when you're a municipal leader, as soon as the assessment comes out you get a lot of calls, and maybe this will help our municipal leaders do their job a little bit better.

It's not that they're not doing a great job now, because most of them are, but it'll give them a way to explain what's happening, and also, the residents, they'll have a chance to do their appeals and give them a little bit more time to do it, which is positive. Like I said with what happened the last time that appeals came out in the City of St. John's, and we saw such an increase and then property values dropped. So that time period now will change and proper assessments will be able to be done.

So again, overall, I think those are good amendments. I think we'll have some questions in Committee, but overall I like the amendments that are done here.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't tell you what a pleasure it is for me today to stand and to speak on Bill 34. Because I have been working with municipal assessments since 1989, both as a municipal leader, I worked with the Municipal Assessment Agency as the president of MNL, and now in this position, and I know how important this is for municipalities.

As the Member for Cape St. Francis mentioned, many of us in this room have gone through the municipal political world, and we know the calls that we get when taxpayers and residents get their assessments. And in all fairness, Mr. Speaker, the assessment sometimes causes a lot of anxiety because people don't quite understand what the assessment value is and how it's used to determine what taxes they're going to pay.

Regardless of what the assessment value is – and I'll say this upfront – the onus and the tax rate is still determined by municipal government. The assessed value is just used as a multiplication factor on what they will assess to the value to determine the tax rate. It's a tool for municipalities, but it's a very important tool and it's a tool that affects every resident of this province.

Now, I can speak first-hand, where this came from and came to light, I was working as a staffer at the time when we were preparing for the election. This came to light in 2015 when assessed values in this province, I won't say went through the roof, but they were places in this provinces where they did from where they were.

One of the places that was really affected by the assessed values of 2015 was Labrador West. We were in the middle. When the assessments were done, which is probably in late 2013, early 2014, we were at the peak of our boom. Prices were high, housing prices doubled in a lot of cases, sometimes more than doubled, tripled, and that's when the assessments were done. But, unfortunately, by the time the assessments got into the hands of the residents and into the hands of municipality and they were going to use those assessments to determine their tax rates, the boom was gone. The boom was gone and we were back worse than we were before the boom.

What happened was the residents of Labrador West got these assessed values when the economy was in the toilet, to put it bluntly, and people were very concerned. You know what? It's not easy for a municipality to be able to deal with that, because residents don't understand all the time how that tax rate is determined.

Municipalities had a big decision to make on how they were going to use those assessed values, because the assessed values when houses were up – like I said it doubled, that's when the assessments were done. But the lag time, the time the assessments were used to determine the tax rate, the economy had already collapsed and housing values were back to where they were before the boom.

What we're doing here, Mr. Speaker, what we committed to at the time was that we were going to try to come up with a mechanism whereby we could better determine assessed values, and they were more reflective of the current market value, and I think that's what this does. Going from three years to one year will help smoothen that ride. It won't cause the ups and downs that we see today with the three-year cycle.

And we're into it again. Ironically enough, we're back to it again now because municipalities,

especially in Labrador West, have another dilemma in their hands because the new assessed value that came out this year was done when the economy was at its low, and now, the economy is starting to recover. So we have assessed values, now, that come out that are about 33 per cent lower than they were. Again, municipalities have to try to determine what that mill rate will be, so that they can have current tax rates stable and revenue.

So, Mr. Speaker, we committed to – as in the mandate letter of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment, this is what we committed to: In partnership with the Municipal Assessment Agency and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, we would immediately initiate a review of the *Assessment Act, 2006* that would address the timing of assessments, assessment criteria and implementation of the associated mill rate.

We all know that the final one – the implementation of the associated mill rate, that remains with the municipalities, and that's where it should remain. They are the keepers of their revenues, and they should have the authority to determine what mill rate they need to assess to maintain their revenue source and to be able to provide the services that they provide.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we've accomplished that in Bill 34 by going from a three-year cycle to a one-year cycle it really does that. And what it does, as I said, it smoothen the ride.

One of the things that the Member for Cape St. Francis was concerned about is: How does this affect the Municipal Assessment Agency, by going from a three-year cycle to a one-year cycle? Well, that was a concern for all of us when we started these consultations. I happened to be in the Department of Municipal Affairs, at the time, when these consultations were done around the province. I must say, we did have a good response from taxpayers and from all the stakeholders involved.

I know Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, when I was there as president, it was certainly talked about. It is something that they were lobbying for and wanted to have a better system in place that would reflect the current market value of the properties in the province.

So one of the concerns that was brought up was how does this affect – does this cost more? The Municipal Assessment Agency has indicated that it will be able to maintain the current fee for municipalities for assessments, so this means there will be no additional charges to residents.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's good news. And for those of us that don't really understand that system regardless of the – municipalities pay that fee every year now. Even though it's a three-year cycle, they still pay every year. They still have to pay their assessment fee every year. And I tell you, sometimes, for a lot of municipalities that was a tough pill to swallow, because they knew they were only getting their assessments done every three years, so why did they have to pay every year.

So nothing will change there. The only thing that will change is that they'll get the assessment every year. That's a good thing, so now they can at least see that they're getting some value for their money. I know when I was involved with municipal politics in MNL that was a big issue for a lot of municipalities: this assessment fee. And I tell you, it's not cheap for a lot of our municipalities, because the smaller municipality, especially, who don't have great sources of revenue and have low revenue coming in, it was a big chunk of change out of their budgets.

I'm sure the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, as a former administrator, would be able to attest to that. That cheque was hard to write for a lot of municipalities, I tell you. And there was a lot of people – and there were a few municipalities who actually got out of the system altogether and went with a different type of taxation. A lot of it was because of the cost they were paying for their assessment fees. Now, larger municipalities can handle that much better, but for the smaller municipalities it was a big concern. So hopefully, the fact now that they're getting the assessments every year will help to move that along.

I guess one of the others things that was considered – and I mentioned it there a little bit earlier – was the fact that we should leave the mill rate allocation to the municipalities. I'm glad we've done that, because that's the right thing to do. We give them the tools. We give the municipalities the tools to be able to calculate

their tax rates, but that final decision should be left with the municipalities because they're the ones that are providing the snow clearing, they're the ones that are providing the snow clearing. They're the ones that are providing the water and sewer. They're the ones that are providing the services, all the services, the firefighting services, you name it. Every service in a municipality is there because the municipal council in place provides that. Mr. Speaker, it's important they be given that authority and given that ability to set the tax rates so that they can have the revenues in place to be able to provide the services they need.

I'm not going to get into the special properties because that's something that – I'll just barely mention it, but it's something that's important. That would be more involved with the larger municipalities, the cities who have the airports, for instance, the breweries. The other types of facilities that are there that are special properties, but I think it's the right thing to do. That we assess them the same as any other property and give them an assessed market value. I think that's the fairest way to do it, and it allows the municipalities and the cities to be able to generate the revenue they need.

Mr. Speaker, for a minute, let me go back to the consultations. These are very important consultations. I remember in the summer of 2016 we started those. That was just after *Budget 2016*, and we weren't the most popular people on the ground at the time, but this was something that we put out there.

I remember being in the consultations and taxpayers showing up. I think we had a pretty good response from Newfoundland and Labrador, from the residents, and people were concerned at the time. This was a big issue in 2015-2016. I'm glad to see that 87 per cent of the submissions that came into the consultations came from taxpayers because they're the people that are most affected by this, and there's only one taxpayer. They're the people that are most affected, and we did have a good feedback.

I just want to mention a couple of things they brought forward and some of the more popular things. They wanted to see more equitable or uniform assessments, because they were seeing too much rise and fall and it was causing

concern for them. They were concerned because – again, I speak for my district, the District of Labrador West, where they had such variation in from one assessed value to the other.

It was a big concern for them, and I think what concerned them the most was that the high assessed values came in at a time when a lot of people lost their jobs. A lot of people lost their jobs. There were a lot of layoffs. There were people that were struggling, and to get this, it wasn't really a bill, but to get this statement in the mail saying that your assessed value is \$300,000 or \$400,000, where it was probably less than \$200,000 the previous one, was a shock to them. So they want to see it more uniform.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, going from the three to one year, I think will help that. And they wanted the shorter assessment cycle. That's what the taxpayers want, and this is what came out of it.

“Taxpayers have difficulty with a three year reassessment period, particularly in the event that the market has continually risen in each of those years. There was a preference for a base assessment year closer to the actual year of taxation and therefore more reflective of current economic conditions. Taxpayers recommended either two year, or one year cycles, and some submissions acknowledge potential administrative difficulties in a short cycle.” But I think we've overcome that fear.

Mr. Speaker, we've listened. We've listened to the residents of the province, and what we've done, going from three to one year, I think takes it really – well, you can't go much more often than that, obviously. But we've listened, and I think the taxpayers will be very pleased with the fact that we're doing that.

“Taxpayers feel there should be some mechanism to mitigate significant increases. It was suggested in some submissions that there should be a maximum percentage increase, an assessment increase limit, or some sort of cap or phase in approach to mitigate any sudden impact to property owners when market conditions change.” Again, that's the reflection of what happened in Labrador West.

I think, again, the assessed values, if we do it the year, they're not going to be such drastic changes. But we have to remember, the bottom line is that that authority and that responsibility lies with the municipality. They have that authority to implement the tax rate that they feel is necessary for them to generate the revenue.

“Taxpayers feel that municipal budgets and the setting of mill rates significantly contribute to assessment issues. Many participants suggested that assessment values are not as problematic as the mill rates assigned by municipalities.”

And that's understandable, Mr. Speaker, because regardless of the assessed value, if the assessed value goes down, the mill rate goes up; if the assessed value goes up, the mill rate goes down. That's putting it as simply as I can, because municipalities are not out to gouge their residents. They want to maintain a consistent revenue. So in order to do that, they have to adjust the mill rates accordingly to the assessed value.

“It was stated that in a market when property values rise, municipalities do not adequately lower their mill rates, thereby generating extra revenue.”

Mr. Speaker, that may be a perception that's out there. I don't think municipalities take advantage of that. Municipalities will only accept the mill rates they need to generate the revenue, as I said, to provide the services. I think going from the three to one year cycle will help them to achieve that and certainly will give some feeling of ease to the taxpayers that you won't see the drastic changes.

They also said they “find it difficult to understand their assessment, or obtain adequate information from the assessors about how their property was valued.” That's always going to be an issue, Mr. Speaker.

The assessors that go around from the Municipal Assessment Agency to do those assessments, they have a mechanism in which they do that. They know what they're doing, but sometimes it's hard for residents to understand sometimes why their property values go up or down, depending on the situation. I think the more

often the assessor does it the better that people will understand that as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll just say that – and as the minister has said, and as the Member for Cape St. Francis has said, there's a lot of work that's gone into this Bill 34. It may be a short bill. It may be a bill that people see that's known as simple, but I tell you, Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of work.

Like the other speakers before me, I want to thank MNL. Because I was part of that for years, I know what they put into it, the Municipal Assessment Agency. There were a lot of meetings. A lot of time has been put into that, Mr. Speaker, but they're confident they can adjust to this new schedule without any additional cost to the municipality.

That was our biggest concern when we started this and that was the first conversation we had with the Municipal Assessment Agency, was to make sure – we didn't want to do anything that would add any extra cost to the municipalities, because we know how much an issue that is with municipalities when they had to write that cheque to the Municipal Assessment Agency. It's wasn't easy for them to do. We had to make sure that there was no additional costs on them with anything that we did with any amendments that we made to the Assessment Act that would improve the service but we also didn't want to increase the cost either. I think we've accomplished that.

I want to thank the Municipal Assessment Agency for all the work that they've done. I know many of them, especially the executive director, and many of them on the board I know. It's a big decision for them. I'm glad that they came on full tilt and I certainly look forward to working with them.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I do want to thank the people of Municipal Affairs and Environment for the work that they put into this. I know, as the minister stated, there has been a lot of work through the deputy minister and the assistant deputy ministers and all the people, staff within Municipal Affairs, there has been a lot put into this.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great bill. It's a long time coming. It's a great bill and it will help municipalities and, most importantly, it will help the taxpayers of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Glad to rise today to speak to Bill 34, An Act to Amend the Assessment Act, 2006. Some of the discussion we've had related to the bill, looking at the particular amendments, particularly related to the timing of assessments, the effective date of those assessments in terms of availability and the activities that a municipality has in regard to preparing things like their annual budget, extended period of time during which taxpayers may appeal their assessments. I understand that is going from 30 to 60 days to allow, again, the ability of a home owner or a property owner to have time to look at any new assessment, what that change would be and to have due course to address that if they had concerns with it.

As well to remove all references to special purpose properties or reproduction cost valuation from the act as properties are no longer classified as special purpose properties. I'll speak to that. As a former minister of Municipal Affairs that was something I was certainly aware of over the past number of years, some issues in regard to the prior legislation, I think it was section 18 that the designated properties, special purpose properties and some of the challenges with that. I think there was two Supreme Court decisions in regard to that, and they were unique properties that didn't often fit in to the normal comparative analysis of values of property.

I remember we had areas like airports, maybe a brewing facility and different entities like that. There was a significant list and it would be interesting to see in Committee how that will be assessed because I do agree that there needed to change and support some of the initiatives as we get in and have some of the questions to see

where I go on this. But it'd be interesting to see where this goes from here now in regard to those properties, their uniqueness, and how that value is determined, and how they get to a fair assessment rate.

Some of these are significant operators, significant employers, the types of operations they are, and goes to their bottom line in regard to how they can operate today and what the costs are. With some of the strains we have today in regard to operating costs, it's going to be important for these facilities, what they're going to be charged in regard to comparable taxation. So that could affect their ability to operate in the overall taxation scheme that they're under here in the province. It will good to have a good discussion on that, how we're getting there for those properties and what they're going to look like.

Originally, special purpose property, which are going to be based on this bill, that will be removed. In the past it meant it is a real property that has a design or layout, or is constructed of special materials or in a manner that restricts its use. So that's what was used in the past. We're going away from that now, and the amendment will look at making that change.

The Assessment Act, obviously, comes under the purview of Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment, and establish, overall – this is going to do and does, the legislation – a system of real property assessment throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The act came into effect in January 1, 2007, and there think there were some amendments made in 2012. An assessment is, basically – and most people out there would understand, and are familiar with it in regard to vacant land property you have or your home, your personal residence, a cabin you may have that's within municipal jurisdiction, a small business, any kind of industrial sites. Everybody's familiar with the estimated value of a property for municipal taxation purposes within that municipal boundary.

So a number of factors considered in a property assessment, such as location; size; condition and age of a building, all those types of things; type of construction; something as similar as a two-

story house with a basement, finished basement areas, those kinds of things; existence of other buildings; commercial features; lot size; adjacency, oftentimes, to various other services as well.

As the minister indicated when he introduced the bill, assessments in Newfoundland and Labrador currently carry out over a three-year period and this bill addresses that in regard to the timeline. That dates back to the last decade and some of things we've seen in regard to the escalation of properties over a very short period of time.

When economy gets very hot, and there are a lot of activities, industrial, commercial, which is driving economic activity and oftentimes, in that environment, you get a very quick increase in property and land value. That often results over a three-year period and the fourth year when it is implemented, there's significant increase for all concerned in those property owners. Whether it's a home residence or whether it is a business property, you see that driven, and that causes some concern and strife for people in regard to what they need to pay and their overall operations of a household or even a company.

Most municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador, the body used to do those assessments is the Municipal Assessment Agency. The only one that does not use that, or is not required to use it, is the City of St. John's who has its own assessment process.

I've heard some municipalities, I think in the past were able to opt out of the Municipal Assessment Agency. I'm interested when we get into Committee to see if that's still applicable, or if there's a requirement for all municipalities to use the Municipal Assessment Agency outside the City of St. John's.

The minister did say, when he got up to introduce the bill, he talked about 225,000 properties. So, where we're going from three years and reducing it back, obviously there's more work to be done in a shorter period of time. It'll be interesting in Committee as well to see is the Municipal Assessment Agency being reshaped.

Obviously, there are more activities, more requirements, more work to be done. Does that

mean that this Municipal Assessment Agency is going to be changed in terms of structure, in change of budgets and what they're going to charge? Because, right now, my understanding is a municipality is charged for the municipal assessment when it's done. That an extra charge that's going to be – is that passed on to the municipality and what's the operating cost of the agency? Is that going to change? How much is it going to change? Are we going to see more staffing there?

From a clarity point of view, I think it's important that that's discussed and outlined for municipalities out there as well, what change is coming in regard to the agency. Because while we may agree with the changes here and more work in a shorter time period, what's that going to mean to being able to execute it and make sure that work gets done. So, that's something we certainly want to ask the minister in Committee.

In 2016 – and I think why we're here is that I talked about some of the significant changes in regard to land value with an economy. Many residents of the province saw new assessments and there was a lot of concerns. I saw it in my own jurisdiction, own district, in regard to new assessments and concerns that were raised. The base rate for the 2016 assessment was 2014, so that's the lag time I was talking about before and some of the concerns that were expressed by property owners and felt that property values did not reflect the 2016 values. I guess that's where we're to.

So if the economy is going well and you have a downturn with significant projects, megaprojects, the oil and gas sector in regard to what was happening offshore, those are winding down. Or you get a slowdown in something like production where oftentimes we've been as high as 38 per cent of our revenue in the province comes from the oil and gas sector. So that's pretty significant. If that starts to wane or fall off, properties and values go with that. So that's some of the genesis for what we're talking about here today and the actual bill.

In August, my understanding, 2016, government – and the minister spoke to this as well in regard to MNL, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador – to undertake a review of the

Assessment Act and talk about some of the issues that are being debated in Bill 34. Some of the items there that needed to be looked at, as I mentioned, the timing of the assessments, the assessment criteria, what would be used in that, the implementation of associate mill rate by municipal councils.

That's an issue the minister spoke to, and my colleague from Cape St. Francis as well, in regard to the independence of local governments to set mill rates, set property rates, because that's tied to their requirement to bring in a balanced budget every year and projected for the future year. So they need that authority to continue to do that, and they're accountable to do that under the Municipalities Act. And that will continue is my understanding. That prerogative would be theirs, because they're the elected officials on the ground in local governments that make those decisions.

The other part for the review was, as I said, the designation of special purpose properties and what would be done with that. Because my understanding is the system that was in place – and after the judicial reviews, I think maybe 2014 or 2015 that stopped. So this would give some guidance on how those properties would be assessed in the future.

Government carried out a consultation in August and September of 2016 with various stakeholder groups. The minister said submissions from various groups as well. They could do it through telephone, email or online. My understanding, we were told 61 written submissions were received by the department; 53 of those came from taxpayers or property owners, five came from municipalities and three came from assessment-related agencies.

In terms of what they heard, there was a broad spectrum of requests and concerns brought forward to enter into the discussion of bringing forward this bill, Bill 34.

Special purpose properties; regulations were deemed to be somewhat discriminatory and were struck down, as I said, twice by the Supreme Court. They're not seen to be used since that time, as he indicated as well.

I know in my time, too, as minister, we had a lot of discussions with many of these special purpose property owners. As I said, great concern in what the format was and how it was developed then and the guidelines that were under the previous section of the act, section 18, in regard to special purpose activity and property. I'm glad to see that government has taken this on, and we'll see what the exact details are when we go to committee and have a discussion on it.

The department also noted that other provinces have more property assessment resource material available online in the province. Maybe that gets to the issue of an awareness and understanding and all of those things that people desire to know when you're taxed. Where does it come from? How is it evolved? What goes into it? If I don't agree with it, what's the process I can go through to have my concerns addressed? It seems some of these are addressed here in the bill.

I am sure jurisdictional reviews were done in regard to what models exist for somewhat unique properties in this jurisdiction and others, and what's been used. I'll certainly ask some questions in Committee as well with regard to that and what other jurisdictions had to offer and did we adopt anything from those jurisdictions. Certainly, jurisdictions who have similar properties that were previously designated as special purpose properties and see what they do and if we adopted any of the regulatory frameworks that they may have in place.

As well, my understanding is officials worked with authorities to develop public education materials. I know my colleague from Cape St. Francis, who has experience as a former municipal leader of a town, spoke about that and the importance of that, and certainly from his own perspective. There's nothing better than getting someone that's been in that role that knows the importance and can articulate clearly the importance of that information. I think that's positive, that any time we can provide information and to make residents aware of what's available, what their options are and why we're doing something is extremely important.

As well, referenced the appeal process that goes from 30 days to 60 days which allows people to

have an opportunity to express some concern if they're not in support of what they get from the Municipal Assessment Agency.

So those are some of the things as we go through the bill that stands out. I certainly look forward to going into debate in Committee and looking at some of the finer points of the bill, to assess it to see how we move forward with the particular bill.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm pleased to stand this morning and speak to Bill 34, the *Assessment Act*. It's important I think, that even when a bill is as straightforward as this one that we do speak to it and raise broader issues that are part of the bill. This bill, obviously, is a technical bill in the sense that it deals with the timing of the assessment process, the effective date of assessments and everything around the process of the assessments of real property.

So in that sense, it is technical but it also is very practical in terms of the customer, in terms of the resident, in terms of people who own property, because it is going to, number one, make the process more streamlined; and, number two, it's going to make sure that assessments are done in a much more timely fashion to match the fluctuating house market, as has been pointed out by both the minister and also by my colleague from Labrador West.

He outlined the difficulty that happened in Labrador West when you had such a distance in time between the assessments being done – or the three-year distance between assessments being done and an assessment being done when the market rate was quite high. Then by the time it became an effective assessment, the market having dropped and people being caught in a terrible situation of being assessed at a value for which their house no longer was the value. So

this is getting at situations like that, which are extremely important.

I'm not going to go through all the sections of the bill because I think the minister did that. And it's been done by the Member for Labrador West, and it's been done again by the Member for Ferryland, and I think maybe the Member for – I can't say your district, Sir.

MR. K. PARSONS: Cape St. Francis, a beautiful district.

MS. MICHAEL: Cape St. Francis. Cape was coming out. It is a beautiful district. It's one of my favourite places for going for a drive on a nice, sunny day. I think of the Member every time I go down that way.

So I'm not going to go through all the technical points again because, obviously, they're pretty straightforward. Of course, I shall be supporting the bill. I mean, there's no question about that. It's been needed and required.

In actual fact, the minister's mandate letter of 2015 said the minister should review the *Assessment Act, 2006* to address the timing of assessments, assessment criteria and implementation of the associated mill rate, in partnership with the Municipal Assessment Agency and Municipalities NL.

This was in the mandate letter of three years ago. So it has been a wait getting to where we are now, but we need to point out that the amendment we're dealing with in this bill addresses the timing of assessments, as asked for in the mandate letter, but does not address assessment criteria and implementation of the associated mill rate. These were not recommended for legislative amendments, we were told by the officials from the department.

I would like to mention the assessment criteria, because it seems to me that's one of the things that people question; that's one of the things that property owners question, especially when they see a major shift in their assessment and they haven't seen much of a change in the market value. Then they wonder, what exactly is it that's being used as a criteria to make the assessment? So I'm not sure why that has not been dealt with by the minister. Perhaps in

Committee I can get an answer to that one, but I think it's an important question, considering the fact it was in the mandate letter.

With regard to the mill rate; as was pointed out by the Member for Labrador West, the mill rate is set by the municipalities. I think that's where it is and that's where it needs to be, because municipalities are in a difficult situation. Because they always have to have a balanced budget and because their revenue source is mainly property tax, if they don't have control over the mill rate then they really can be in a very, very difficult situation. So I think that needs to be where it is.

There are a couple of points I'd like to make, more general points, but I think they are important ones.

Assessment of the property is important because of the nature of our taxation system for municipalities. We say that property tax is the way to raise money. So there has to be a way then of evaluating the properties in order to tax it. The property tax itself is what is called an ad valorem tax based on value; based on the principle that the amount of tax paid should depend on the value of the property owned. The difficulty is that basing our taxation system – and it is related to the assessment, so that's why I'm bringing it up. The assessment happens because of the nature of our taxation system.

Based on our taxation system, the tax doesn't relate to somebody's income. It relates to the value of the house in which the person or persons live in their property. So, for example, if somebody, such as a senior citizen, has been living in their house for a long time and have been able to meet their bills and able to pay their taxes, if all of a sudden for some reason the assessment of that property goes up based on the property's value and the person on fixed income doesn't have an increase in their income because they're on a fixed income, it can cause real difficulty because of the fact that the taxation is based on an asset that the person owns rather than the person's income.

So property tax in that sense is blind to the payee status. Municipal leaders can face collecting the tax knowing that perhaps they have senior citizens that can't pay, who need to

stay in their home, and may be making choices between buying groceries and paying their taxation or paying the utility bill. I know some municipalities make some adjustments and they do try to recognize people's situations, but the bottom line is that municipalities depend on that revenue. So you get stress on residents who live in their own homes.

There have been different options that have been looked at by people, maybe in government. I know MNL and other people who look at this whole issue of property tax and say maybe there's a better way in which to go. Some of the options that have been put forward in different areas are recommendations that would include property tax being capped at a flat rate, and there are ways in which that could be assessed. That's one thing that could be considered. You might still have to have, in some ways, an evaluation of property. I don't know. I think you can do it without having the ad valorem aspect to the tax.

So looking at capping a flat rate, the property tax system could be eliminated altogether in favour of a flat rate, period, that isn't based on the value of property, or a taxation system based on the income of individuals who live in the property. You could have a blended commercial and reality tax.

I think these are three of some of the major things that are being thrown out there as ideas. Right now, we have the tax that we have, and that's why we have to have our assessment agency and that's why we have to have the *Assessment Act*, because of the way in which we do it. But perhaps we could change how we help municipalities raise revenues rather than through property tax based on the value of the property.

MNL has floated the suggestion that the provincial government transfer a portion of the HST permanently to municipal governments based on the percentage of tax revenue generated within each of their boundaries. That would be very helpful to municipalities. Government says the minister has said they are sitting with MNL. They sat with MNL when looking at the assessment. I would suggest, I hope they are still sitting with MNL looking at the different proposals that MNL has about raising revenue that would be different from property tax.

If a portion of the HST went to municipalities it could provide up to \$100 million annually to the municipal government sector. The HST technically is a regressive tax, disproportionately impacting those with lower incomes. We know that. It is significantly less regressive, though, than the real property tax and would therefore improve the overall repressiveness of the municipal tax system. I think it's really something to be considered.

In addition, the HST is an efficient tax. It is difficult for taxpayers to avoid and easy to collect and administer, because it's being done all the time by government. So it's a matter of looking at the percentage that could go to municipalities, again, based on the tax revenue that gets generated in their boundaries.

Doing it this way would also be very easy administratively because it would be part of the system that's working now, and you would get revenue to municipal governments, based on the portion generated within their boundaries, which I think is very fair.

I think it'll be a while before we see changes. If it took three years to get to where we are now with the assessment piece, I think it's going to take us several more years before we get to looking at a different taxation system. I encourage government to do it. I know MNL wants government to look at it.

So we will see the Assessment Act in force for some time to come. Because of that, I'm glad to see the changes that are being suggested, or that are not only suggested, that government would like to see happen through this bill. I think these changes are good changes. As long as we have the Assessment Act, I think it is important that we make sure that the process for assessing the properties is a good one.

But, as I said, I will ask in Committee for an answer from the minister with regard to why the criteria of assessment has not been dealt with in this bill, as was required in the mandate letter.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 34. I have a few comments on it. I don't want to be too repetitive, but I do want to put my points out there for the record.

Mr. Speaker, first of all I'll say, as everyone has said, I certainly support this bill. I will be voting for it. I do have some of the same questions, particularly around the special purpose properties, the new assessment model, and I guess I look forward to Committee of the Whole to hearing those answers.

More than likely, before it gets to me, the Official Opposition would've already asked the questions and received the answers, so I probably won't have to. But I do look forward to hearing those questions, and if there are any questions that aren't asked, then I will certainly be asking about those.

I just want to comment very quickly – and I appreciate where my colleague from St. John's East - Quid Vidi is talking about. I spent eight years on city council in Mount Pearl, and I was the Avalon director with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador at one point in time. I've heard from a lot of municipalities over the years, and particularly the rural ones, who have challenges in raising money because they just don't have the population base, quite frankly, and the business base that you would have in the urban centres to be able to generate the same amount of revenues.

Of course, there are economies of scale. Obviously, the more people you have living in an area and the more business you have that are all paying taxes, then you create an economy of scale. There's a lot more money going into the pot, usually in a denser population area and it allows you to provide, perhaps, more services and recreation and everything else. That's just a reality of life. That's not unique to Newfoundland; that happens everywhere.

I do understand what the Member is saying about the HST. I've certainly heard municipalities talk about the gas tax as well. But one of the things that we have to be cognizant of in this House – and while I do appreciate them wanting to raise more money, is that if we were

to take, for example, HST or a portion of our HST or a portion of the gas tax, and give it to a municipalities for their area, while I'm sure they would welcome that and it would benefit them and benefit their municipality, that's money that we don't have.

That's money that doesn't go in to education, health care or so on, or it's a more a challenge in terms of our growing debt and deficit and everything else. While it's great to say that – and I understand why they would want it and I think we should work with municipalities to try to help them, if we can, to raise additional revenues, it's important, just for the record, that we all understand – and I'm sure we all do – that any money that is coming in, any revenues coming into the provincial government that gets transferred to another level of government is money that we don't have for the services that we have to provide and so on.

You can't have it both ways. You can't have the money here and then have it over there. So then that means we would either have to cut certain programs or services that are being provided by the provincial government or increase taxes or continue to borrow more money. I think that it's important to put that in context, while appreciating the fact that municipalities, particularly the smaller ones, do have challenges raising revenues and we have to do all we can to support them, and I certainly do.

This particular bill, Mr. Speaker, as has been said, is really dealing with assessments. The most important part in this bill from my perspective, at least, is not so much around the changing three years to two years in the case of the City of St. John's or changing three years to one year in terms of all other municipalities – although that is important. It's good to have consistency. It's good for people to understand when they get their assessment every year to have a more accurate picture of what their assessed value is so that you're not into a situation where you have sort of a boom-bust scenario and you're getting assessed on the boom, even though you're in the bust, if I can put it that way.

Or vice-versa, because it could also work the other way, you could be in a situation where your property values were assessed low and all

of a sudden, within that three years, a big boom happened and all of a sudden your assessed value is very low when you feel it should be much higher. But at least by doing this, people have an accurate reflection of their property values based on today, not based on three years ago.

So I see some benefit in that, but let's not kid ourselves, because the reality of how it works, because somehow – someone could be listening to this debate and get the impression – I've had people who've had that impression, thinking that because everyone's property value is assessed 20 per cent higher than it should be, that means by fixing that you're going to pay 20 per cent less taxes. That's not true at all, because municipalities set their mill rates every year for every budget.

I'll take the City of Mount Pearl as an example. If they have an annual budget – I'm not sure what it is now. I think it's somewhere between \$50 million and \$60 million, something like that, if memory serves me. If the City of Mount Pearl needs \$50 million, we'll say, because they have to achieve a balanced budget by legislation, they can't borrow money and so on. Every year, the books have to balance.

So if the City of Mount Pearl needs \$50 million, then they need \$50 million. If all of a sudden the Assessment Agency lowered the value of everybody's property by 20 per cent and they had a 20 per cent shortfall in revenues, well guess what? When they do their budget, they're going to set the mill rate to recover that 20 per cent. If the City of Mount Pearl, if assessment values went up, for argument's sake, and the City of Mount Pearl were going to realize a 20 per cent increase, if you will, then I would hope and I would expect – and I know when I was there that the city would then lower their mill rate to reflect the \$50 million that they need. They're not going to take \$60 million if they only need \$50 million.

Now, people are always skeptical – and I get it, people are always skeptical. There's no doubt, because it's not a perfect science. If assessments go up or down and the city has to make an adjustment, there's no way that you can make an adjustment and set a mill rate of a certain percentage to get that exact number. It's just not

going to happen. So when you set your mill rate based on assessed values and based on what you need – so if you needed \$50 million, chances are if you set your mill rate you're not going to get \$50 million right on the nose. Depending on if you raise it a point or a half point or a quarter of a point, you're going to be a little above that 50 or a little below. I can guarantee you, the municipality is not going to go below.

So, arguably, they'll always take – if there's going to be an adjustment, it's going to be probably a little bit more than what they actually need. I think most people sort of feel that way. I think that's pretty accurate, because you also have to bear in mind that they don't usually change their mill rates every single year. Usually it's every couple of years, or every three years or whatever. Sometimes it might go a little bit more and then you got enough of a buffer to get you through a couple of years before you have to raise the mill rate again.

So this whole sense that because the assessed value is not reflective of what it is today, as long as it's consistent, and every business and every property and every household is a higher or lower than the reality of the market, whether you change that every year or every three years, the reality is the municipality is still going to set their mill rate to get the money they need. In that sense, it really doesn't make a big difference I suppose.

The part that does make a big difference, though, is the whole concept of the appeal process. To my mind, that's the most significant change in all of this is the appeal process. Because now the assessments have to be out by the 31st of August, as been said, and now residents have not just 30 days, they have up to 60 days to appeal.

If you look at August 31, that brings them up to the end of October. So you've got to the end of October to appeal. It gives you lots of time, for the case of people who – maybe they work offshore on the rigs or they go back and forth from Alberta, maybe they're on vacation, maybe they don't check their mail, like I think the Member for Cape St. Francis said. He doesn't check his mail sometimes for a couple of weeks. I'm the same, probably.

I think it's important that people get their assessment in plenty of time and they have plenty of time to appeal. That's the important part, as far as I'm concerned, the most significant part, because whether rates go up or down, whether assessment rates go up or down as a whole, individual properties, regardless of that, can be assessed improperly for any number of reasons.

Somebody used the example, I think it might've been the Member for Cape St. Francis, talked about someone building on a bog versus someone who wasn't, and even though – when you're just looking at it on a map and sort of applying a rate to a neighbourhood, the person doing that assessment may not take certain things into account that would create exceptions in neighbourhoods, where there might be a property here or a property here that doesn't fit the norm for whatever reason, and therefore their assessed value, perhaps, should be lower than the other one.

That's where it's important that people have that right to appeal those anomalies or mistakes, or whatever else can happen. By giving people that information in advance, and giving them plenty of time to make sure that they actually get that assessment, plenty of time to do that appeal and to have that process over and done with, as the Acting Minister of Service NL and Minister of Justice and Public Safety said, getting through this process before we get into the Christmas season where people are, without doubt, have other things on their mind. So it's certainly more convenient. It's more, what's the word, I'm going to say user-friendly. That's probably not the exact term, but I think everyone knows what I mean.

So that, to me, is probably the most significant piece, the greatest benefit. The one year versus three year certainly adds more clarity, or the one year versus two year in the City of St. John's adds more clarity. Absolutely, the right thing to do. I'm sure that'll be great because at least municipal councillors won't be getting as many phone calls. I'm sure they'll be glad to see this, because they won't be getting as many phone calls from people saying: I can't believe my property is assessed at this much, what's this all about? So it'll end some of those headaches.

Like I said, at the end of the day, in terms of taxpayers' dollars coming out of a taxpayer's pocket to pay their municipal taxes, whether we do it one year, three years or whatever, the municipality is getting its money that it needs regardless of what assessment value. They'll simply adjust the mill rate up or down to get the money they need to operate, to balance their budget, which is their mandate by law.

So the only other piece in this, of course, is the special purpose property, as I indicated. I look forward to a couple of questions in Committee of the Whole on that.

I listened to the Member for Ferryland, I believe he mentioned something about a couple of court cases that have basically judgments that have determined that this is not an appropriate means of taxation. So that would be the impetus for making the change. If that's something that needs to be done to ensure that everything is done properly, above board, legally, within the confines of what the courts have determined as fairness and justice to taxpayers, then that's what we need to do, and I would obviously support that.

The final thing I'll say is I'm very glad to see that this was something that proper consultations did take place. It was put out there to the public, put out there to municipalities. I understand in listening to the Member for Lab West and the minister that Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador are onboard with this. I'm assuming the municipal administrators group also would be onboard with this. The Municipal Assessment Agency are onboard with this.

The only other thing I will say, and this relates to the Municipal Assessment Agency. It's been said, and I look forward to hearing the answer to this question as well. One of the things that kind of puzzled me a bit was if we're going to now do what used to be done in three years, do it in one year, the question is, how do you do that without increasing resources.

The Member for Lab West said – and I'm not putting words in his mouth, but I'm pretty sure he said – that the MAA, Municipal Assessment Agency says we can do it, and that's great. I believe he also said they can do it within the budget they have and that there will be no

additional fees charged back to municipalities to make that happen. I think that's what he said.

MR. LETTO: That's exactly what I said.

MR. LANE: Okay. He said that's exactly what he said. That's great news.

My only question is, how are they going to achieve that? Because, theoretically, you have three times the work now, because you're going to do in one year what used to be three years, so it's three times the work. Unless there's some, I don't know, new technology, new formulas or something, or you're going to eliminate jobs in the MAA, you're going to say to people working at the MAA, you and you and you who used to do job A, we're not going to provide this anymore. We're cancelling that and we're going to hire three new people to do assessments, or we're going to offer you a job to do assessments. I can't see how the same people can do three times the work.

The only way that could happen would be that the people that are doing the work are only working one-third of the year and the rest of the year they're not doing anything, and I don't believe that. I'm not suggesting that. I don't believe that.

But there's no other way I can see how that could work, unless you're going to rearrange duties, or use more technology or something. Something has to change. You can't do three times the work that you're doing now, assuming everybody is going to work and doing their eight hours a day that they should be doing. That's my only question about that, and I certainly look forward to hearing that in Committee of the Whole.

Other than that, as I said, it's a good bill. I support it 100 per cent. I'm glad that the government are listening to municipalities on this one, it makes good sense and I will support it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment speaks now, he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

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

I thank my colleagues on both sides for their contributions to this debate. I look forward to the Committee stage. One question I'll answer now – and I might still have questions during the Committee stage – is the question – and it's a good question about – you're changing the cycle from three years to one year, and how do you manage that.

What I would say to that is I can only go by what they are telling me. The Municipal Assessment Agency is telling us that they can do it with the resources that they have. There are no new resources required, and there will be no new charges to taxpayers. If we were dealing with that, this might be a different scenario if we were imposing more cost on people. So that's what I take assurance from.

What I would suggest is I have no problem reaching out to the Municipal Assessment Agency and saying there are Members that have questions on this process, and there's no reason that – they are an entity that is allowed to be questioned. They can do a heck of a lot better job than I can of explaining their processes. I mentioned the Member for Cape St. Francis said, too, about education and assessments.

I can't tell you, technically, how they're going to do this. I'm telling you it's a good question. I'm telling you the assurance that I've been given, which is what I'm relying on. I don't know if I would be supporting this if it meant new costs to taxpayers. But they're saying that can do it, and there are no new costs, which is why we're all supporting it. But I think it's worth – and, again, you can do it directly if you'd like. You can reach out to them directly, or I could arrange that through the department. Because it's not a bad idea to, perhaps, be able to sit down and ask them these types of questions and other questions on this process.

I'd say to the Member, hopefully that satisfies – you won't get any different answer out of me during the Committee stage. That's what I'm saying now, because it is something that was brought up by multiple Members. On that note,

there may be other questions during the Committee stage that I will do my best to answer, and we'll continue on.

Thank you.

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

The motion is that Bill 34, An Act To Amend The Assessment, 2006 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.'

Passed.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006. (Bill 34)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 34)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Member for Lab West that the House resolve itself into a Committee of Whole to consider Bill 34.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

I will now leave the Chair.

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 34, An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006." (Bill 34)

CLERK: Clause 1

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

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

I thank the minister, too, because there are some questions that I know that we will have to ask the municipal assessments to see where it's going to come from, but I just want to know, in general terms, how many municipalities are involved in the municipal agencies – do you know?

Like I said, in my speech earlier, it was just a question I wanted to know because I know that there are some towns that use poll tax and stuff like that and I'm just wondering if you have that information.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you.

I'll try my best to answer. I think right now in this province as a whole there are currently 276 municipalities in total. My understanding is that four have opted out of that and everybody else would be governed, I believe, by the Municipal Assessment Agency.

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

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

I have an organizational chart of the Municipal Assessment Agency, and I understand the number of assessors to do – how many there are right now. I know the minister said that they told him and explained that it wouldn't be an extra cost or whatever, but there isn't a cost to the municipalities for doing assessments. So, obviously there will be an increase in assessors, because someone has to pay for any additional assessments that are going to be done.

So I'm just wondering, to do it one year over – now, I'm not saying – I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said they mustn't be doing anything, but I know they work very hard because I've been in a lot of times with them – so I'm just wondering where the cost is going to come from to pay for the additional assessments, and I can't see it being done without extra assessors to be able to do the job.

And I know, Minister, you told us that we could ask this to the assessment because they assured you we could, but I just –

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: It's a good question that the Member asks.

The main takeaway that I want to put out to people is there will be, we have been assured – because this is a different scenario if we say we're going to change something that brings extra cost to municipalities, we're having a different conversation then. But I've been told there is no new cost to municipalities; no new cost to taxpayers. They are assuring us that they

can find a way to do this with the resources that they have.

Now, the technicalities behind that would be better answered by Sean and team at the Municipal Assessment Agency. We've been at this a couple of years. This process is not something that was just whipped up. They've been at this a couple of years doing this review, and that's the assurance that we have, and we have to move based on that assurance.

So, I get what the Member's asking, I certainly do, it's a good point. But when I'm given that assurance and I will rely on that assurance, they are saying they are able to make this work and the good news is that we're not going to pay more for that service.

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

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

I want to thank the minister, because I think that it would be great if some of us could do a technical briefing with the Assessment Agency and I'd gladly be one of the people that would love to be able to take advantage of that, because there will be questions that I have to ask.

It's a great bill. I agree with the amendments. I think it's something that the towns are looking for. I believe that the residents are going to be pleased with it. But, again, I understand if they can do it, it is fantastic, great, if there's no extra cost or whatever.

I have a question for the minister: I know it's changed now, say, if, for example, there is a delay in the assessments, and now it's switched over for ministerial approval, rather than I think before – and you can correct me, Minister, if I'm wrong. I think before it had to go to the agency, to the manager or director to get the delay on it.

Is there a time frame that the towns will have to come in and say, listen, we're not ready to send out the assessments, or how will the minister handle that role?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

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

Two points. The first one I would say to the Member is that – and I would say this to all Members, is that I will undertake, if Members are interested, that I will help arrange or facilitate a meeting with MAA. I would suggest that Members' interested should reach out to me directly and we can make that happen. Though, obviously, it would have to be done together. We're not going to have separate ones because they're going to need extra time now, obviously, doing all this work in the cycle. But I will undertake to help facilitate that. I think that's productive, and I would say that to Members on our own side.

The second part, and I believe what we are doing here today, we've rolled it back to August 31 for the compilation and you have to have that information there. The first note I would make – so what we've done here is right now municipalities, if they're late, they're late. We have no say. We want to have some accountability there. If they are going to be late they have to get ministerial approval. There's no timeline on that.

What I will say is that the department has had really solid relationships with municipalities, and that needs to continue. So this is not meant to be stringent or onerous. I think it's an accountability measure. And communities in the past have come in and expressed issues with this. The department is always willing to have that conversation, and sometimes there might be good reason. There can be issues that arise that nobody anticipates.

So I think it's good for everybody, though. We need to have a timeline there. There is a ministerial approval, and I don't think it would not be given or it would be withheld for – what's the word I'm looking for – for non-necessary reasons. I think this is one of those things where in terms of a timeline, municipalities will have a good idea. To me, do you come in August 30 and say I'm not ready. That's probably not the smartest move. I'd say it's one of those things – these communities have an idea of how that's going to work, and it's incumbent on the department to work with them as well because we all represent the same people. We all want the same goal.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to go back to the issue of the cost and any new cost, just for clarity purposes. Right now, my understanding is a municipality would pay the Municipal Assessment Agency for when that assessment is done. What we're saying now is that over a shorter period of time there's another assessment to be done. So I'm confused.

Is the municipality still required to pay for that assessment? Because the minister said there's no new cost in this process, but if there's an additional assessment done in a shorter period of time, someone needs to pay for that. I'm just wondering, who is going to pay for that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: Municipalities are already paying on a yearly basis for this information. Even if the cycle is every three years, they're already paying on a yearly basis. So they're getting – it's a good question.

There's no new cost there because they're already paying on an annual basis.

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

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

Minister, I'm asking – it's not in the act, but I think you won't mind answering the question. I understand from the officials when we had the briefing that the assessment criteria were not recommended for legislative amendments, and I think I can understand that.

How are you going to be dealing with the assessment criteria? Because I think it really is an important point for people.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you.

I don't mind discussing it to the best of my ability. It's not something in the act, but it's something that was considered in this amendment. There were a bunch of things considered.

It was through assessment between MNL and the department and the MAA that this was not something that would be touched in this particular amendment, but it's a question that's worth asking. I still think there are a lot of questions on the assessment criteria.

What I can do is – and, again, I'm probably not the best person to speak. Put it this way, when you had your briefing you were speaking to the smart people, and I think they did their best to get this information to you.

What I would say is I'm always willing to have that consideration. It was just felt, at this particular time, that this might have opened a can of worms, perhaps, that shouldn't be opened at this point. I think going forward there has to be more education, conversation, and there's always the potential – these are pieces of legislation that can always be amended if there's a positive or substantive reason for it – not that they're not substantive here.

In some cases by trying to fix something, are you creating a problem that didn't exist? I know that's a bit of a roundabout way of talking about it. I also have some information I can forward to you, that's been forwarded to me by staff, on assessment criteria and what it's comprised of.

To me, when we talk about the imposition of assessments on properties, it's one of those things that it's ever green. It's always continuing. You always have to have that talk. I don't think you can bring in this legislation and say: Oh, it's perfect, we're not going to consider it. As long as we continue to have assessments there are going to be questions on, how are you assessing me? What are the criteria?

We didn't decide to go with it now. I trust the consultations that took place between all the individuals that I mentioned earlier, who said: Let's go with these ones now, and then that one is better off not being touched at this particular time.

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, I would appreciate receiving anything that you have on assessment.

MR. A. PARSONS: Okay.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, just in the spirit of co-operation and full understanding of all the information. As we know the process here now, we're in Committee of the Whole. Then there's going to be a third reading, which in theory could happen tomorrow.

Given the fact that we have some questions – I have a couple of questions which I've raised, and other Members – of the Municipal Assessment Agency, and I guess concerns about how they are going to achieve what you've been told they're going to achieve without any tangible explanation as to how that's going to happen and I guess concern that while they might theoretically say, yeah, we'll handle it this year but then next year they're going to say we're going to have to charge municipalities and so on – I don't have that information.

So in the spirit of that, I'm just wondering, would you be able to commit here that – because I certainly want to attend that briefing. Until that briefing happens, if it's tomorrow or the next day I'll make myself available, I'm sure the Members will – but we could have that discussion with the Municipal Assessment Agency prior to us voting on third reading. Just in case – I'm sure it's not going to change my vote because I support the legislation in general, but we do have the ability to speak to third reading, albeit it may be unusual but we certainly can. Prior to having that vote, I would just like to have the opportunity to speak to the Municipal Assessment Agency about a couple of questions.

I'm just wondering if you could commit to not bringing forth third reading, leave it on the Order Paper until we've had that little briefing.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments from the Member. I'm not going to commit to it because I cannot guarantee the timing on it and I need to get this done soon.

What I'm going to say is this, I agree with the premise of what you're trying to do. I prefer all Members feel comfortable in the votes they're casting, and I don't think the meeting is going to change the vote, like you say. I tell you what, how about you leave that with me. I'd like to try my best to accommodate that. I got to work with MAA to see what their schedule looks like, but you know what, I'm certainly going to have a look at that.

I can't commit to it because it's not me actually in the meeting, but just leave that with me. I'm going to see if I can arrange something that would be beneficial for Members.

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

Again, I'd also like to be able to be involved in that meeting. Sure, if you can do that it would be great.

I have a question. Right now in the appeal process there's a fee involved of \$25, and I'm wondering if there are any talks of any changes or anything to the fee for appeals. I know sometimes what will happen, people contact the agency, an assessor will come down, have a look at the property, and there's no cost involved. They just come down and the look at the cost of the property.

Minister, what I'm asking is there going to be any change in the – right now they pay \$25, and I could be wrong on that. I think it is \$25 that you do pay for an appeal. But sometimes what will happen if a town or anybody got some interest, an assessor will down and probably

have a look a general area and stuff like that. I'm wondering if there are any changes in that at all.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: Good question.

Whenever there's an increase in fees, it's something we should be concerned about. I have no indication, none at all, that there's going to be any increase in fees. That's the assurance that I've been given here because if it was the case, we'd be having a different conversation. So, no increase that I'm aware of and that would be the information I put out to the House.

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Again, Mr. Chair, this is the last question I'll ask the minister. Again, I assure him that I know that I'm in favour of most of the things that are being done here and if there's no added costs to the municipalities, I believe it's really good.

The last thing I want to ask, Minister, I know there was a lot of consultations done with MNL and different municipalities. People had the opportunity to go in – 61 people went into the consultations and gave their assessments of the Assessment Act.

I'm just wondering is there anywhere that the assessment agencies are going to have the towns more involved in doing the assessments. Right now, they don't have hardly any involvement at all. Sometimes, I know when it goes back the towns will look at certain areas, the value and stuff like that. I'm not sure – will the towns have more involvement in the actual assessments?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: I can't say for sure that the towns will have more say, per se, in these assessments. I mean there are specific criteria that's used. But, going back to your greater point, I don't think it's a bad thing for municipalities to feel that they know more about the process and understand the process.

I definitely feel – amongst the populous – that there is a genuine lack of understanding about the process and how this all happens which is why my direction to staff, or my opinion to staff is that we can all – the department, the agency – do more to educate people on how this assessment is created rather than just have a piece of paper that shows up and says here's what you're valued at, here's what you're going to pay.

That's a tough pill to swallow for a lot of people. So, if we can do more to educate people on that, I think it's better for everybody. Hopefully that answers it and municipalities would then probably feel like they have more of a say. Now, at the end of the day, the criteria are the criteria.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A question for the minister on the special purpose properties: That reference has now been removed from the act, so just to clarify, those properties that exist or have been designated in the past as special purpose properties, will the assessment for those now come from the agency or will it come from actual municipalities?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: What I'm going to do is I'm going to double-check again before we move on to any third reading to make sure. My understanding is that would be done by, depending on where the property is located – you're saying special purpose, so if it's in the City of St. John's they handle the assessment of that, or depending on where it is, it'd be handled by the Municipal Assessment Agency.

The big thing is that we're moving to an actual assessed value rather than these regulations which were – we've got to repeal them because we've dealt with court challenges which didn't bode well.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: And as well, if the minister could check in regard to some of these

properties would be under federal jurisdiction, or would be held by federal agencies.

So again, the method to find out all of these that were previously designated as special purpose properties, because there are variations in jurisdictions, types of properties. I guess the question is – and the minister's committed to find the answer – What's the process for all of those properties, and is there any exemption to any of those of who does them going forward, or would they be all done by the Assessment Agency?

I recognize St. John's has their own assessments, so I guess those within those city boundaries would be done by the city; but outside of that, all of those that are left, who, specifically, would basically carry out that assessment. That's the question.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. A. PARSONS: It would be done by, like I say, the city or the agency that handles it across the province. The ownership, at the end of the day, doesn't matter per se if it's federal, because at the end of the day, taxation and value is taxation and value.

In many cases, these haven't been used in years anyway. They've already moved away from that. There are no exemptions to it. It doesn't mean you can't do a grant-in-lieu approach. In many cases, even though we're repealing it now, it hasn't been used. But it would be the responsibility of the agency or the city.

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 12 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 12 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 12 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006.

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 Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that Committee rise and report Bill 34.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 34.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those opposed, '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 34 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 34 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 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 suggest, with the co-operation of the opposing House Leaders, that we recess until 2 p.m.

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

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I have some special guests today that I'd like to introduce to the House of Assembly. First of all, I would like to welcome the former Mayor of the City of St. John's, and former MHA of this very hon. House and recipient of the Order of Canada, Mrs. Shannie Duff. She will be mentioned in a Member's statement this afternoon.

Mrs. Duff is joined by her husband, Mr. Frank Duff.

Great welcome to both of you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome number 41 and, in Speaker's lingo, this is the former Speaker of this House of Assembly, Mr. Ross Wiseman, a former Member of this House of Assembly.

Great to see you, Sir. We think of this in Speaker talk; he's number 41 in the sequence.

Great to have you here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we will hear from the hon. Members from the Districts of Conception Bay East - Bell Island, Labrador West, Cape St. Francis, Harbour Main, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to acknowledge an organization and individual from my district who are making incredible impacts in supporting those struggling with mental health. I speak of SPIRIT Horse NL – Stable Life and Ms. Erin Gallant.

This organization's vision of service is aimed at enhancing mental health and life skills of youth, adults, families and groups, through therapeutic interaction with horses. Participants gain a sense of meaning, purpose, self-worth and belonging through their contact with the horse. By spending time with and caring for these animals, the participants learn the power of themselves as a caring and needed individual. They will feel free and confident and empowered to achieve recovery at SPIRIT Horse NL – Stable Life.

I must note that for this program to have made such an impact on hundreds dealing with mental health since 2015, an enormous amount of work and dedication has been shown through leadership, and partnerships by those involved and those who support the program, but none more than the organizations founder Erin Gallant who spend countless hours lobbying for financial support, developing supportive programs, working with individuals, families and groups, recruiting board members, caring for the horses and, yes, Mr. Speaker, even cleaning out the stables.

I ask all Members to join me in thanking and congratulating Erin and SPIRIT Horse NL – Stable Life for changing the lives of so many.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to talk about goosebumps. Labrador City made it to the top ten places in Canada that gave you goosebumps with Expedia – a world-known travel booking website.

Expedia's Travel Sensations blog asked 1,200 Canadians, "What's the last place that gave you goosebumps?" Each destination was assigned categories based on the type of chills you can expect such as scary, beautiful, cold, mysterious and exhilarating.

Among the top ten were: Ancaster, Ontario; Tungsten, Northwest Territories; Hafford, Saskatchewan; Dorion, Ontario; St. Louis, Saskatchewan; Vaughan, Ontario; Glenboro, Manitoba; Alert, Nunavut; Montreal, Quebec; and Labrador City, Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: Labrador City scored two categories: beautiful and mysterious. Tungsten scored the most with three: exhilarating, cold and beautiful.

Mr. Speaker, there was never any doubt that our province has some of the most beautiful and unique places you would ever see in Canada, and this just takes it to another level.

Some of the highlights mentioned about Labrador City are the Tanya Lake and the Menihek Walking Trails, as well the Trans-Labrador Highway – known as Canada's loneliest road.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Town of Labrador City and invite everyone to visit Labrador West to experience the thrill of a lifetime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to recognize the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department and its members for the valued service they provide.

Mr. Speaker, the department is marking 44 years of service to the Towns of Torbay and Flatrock. Approximately 42 individuals serve as active firefighters with the department, and the members are greatly aided by the Ladies Auxiliary.

Many of the firefighters have been involved with the department for a long time. At this year's annual ball, individuals received service pins. Mr. Speaker, five-year pins were presented to Jason Gosse and Kent Abbott; 10-year pins were presented to Fred Gosse, Ron Francis, Chad Oldford and Kirk Russell; 15-year pins were presented to Rob Dowden and Paul Bishop. Paul Blundon received his 20-year pin, and Mike Matthews was presented with his 25-year pin.

It's also worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that Chief Mike McGrath has been with the department since the beginning, 44 years of steadfast service. Fred Gosse was also presented with William Manning Award as Firefighter of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department is well respect for the service it provides and I ask all hon. Members to join with me in congratulating the department and its members and the Ladies Auxiliary for 44 years of dedicated service to their communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Harbour Main.

MS. PARSLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of the official opening of the Tommy Ricketts Memorial Peace Park in CBS. I was honoured to attend, alongside hundreds who gathered to mark this significant addition to the community. Sgt. Ricketts's granddaughter, Catherine Sople, was in attendance as well as the hon. Minister Seamus O'Regan, Mayor

Terry French, RNC Chief Joe Brown and other special guests.

This ceremony not only commemorated the opening of the park but honoured the memory and legacy of Sgt. Thomas Ricketts. A hundred years ago, Sgt. Ricketts was on the front lines at Ledegem, Belgium. His story is remarkable. At the tender age of 17, he put his own safety aside to save the lives of his comrades. For this bravery he was awarded the Victoria Cross – the highest commendation for valour awarded in the British Commonwealth.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank those who made this park possible. The Tommy Ricketts Memorial Peace Park is a magnificent addition to the community of CBS and wouldn't exist without the support of the park committee. I'd like to make special mention of co-chairs, Clem Drake and Robert Hillier.

As *The Shoreline* so powerfully stated: "A park to honor a hero and make peace with the past."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am delighted today to congratulate former mayor, deputy mayor and councillor, Shannie Duff, who was recognized earlier this year with the highest award granted by the City of St. John's: the Freedom of the City.

Shannie won eight municipal elections, having been first elected to St. John's city council in 1977. During her career, she spent 36 years serving in various levels of government, including as a Member of this House.

Among Shannie's extensive community advocacy work, she is a founding member of the Newfoundland Historic Trust, the St. John's Heritage Foundation, St. John's Clean and Beautiful, the Quidi Vidi Rennie's River Development Foundation, Equal Voice Newfoundland and Labrador, the Eastern

Regional Health Care Foundation, and the Bannerman Park Foundation.

Shannie is a recipient of the Queen's Silver and Golden Jubilee Medals, of honorary life membership in the Newfoundland Historic Trust, and of the Heritage Canada Foundation National Award of Honour.

She was appointed to the Order of Canada for outstanding community service and awarded an honorary doctorate from Memorial University for outstanding public service.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Shannie Duff on her many honours, especially the Freedom of the City for her beloved St. John's.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, who will ask for and seek consent, please.

MS. DEMPSTER: I ask for leave, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize Mrs. Dorothy Roberts of Forteau, Labrador, who celebrated an extraordinary milestone on September 26, her 100th birthday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Hailing from Pilley's Island, Dorothy met a logger from Forteau while he was working in her hometown. They married, raised a family, and as they say, the rest is history.

Dorothy's life has not been without its hardships, including multiple strokes, Tuberculosis and the loss of multiple young children. Despite those hardships, Dorothy exudes joy, grace and gratitude for life and has many stories to share with her eight grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. Talk about a legacy!

Mr. Speaker, it is nothing short of awesome to fathom a life that has spanned from the First World War until today. This past Sunday, I had the privilege to visit Dorothy at the long-term care unit in Forteau to wish her a happy birthday and ask her, what is the secret to longevity?

A sharp and enthusiastic woman, Dorothy credits a local diet, personally sourced, to her long life. She said everything she ate, she raised or grew herself. Hers is a story of resilience, resourcefulness and hard work.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in wishing Mrs. Dorothy Roberts a very happy 100th birthday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Consistent with an order passed in this House last night, I would ask the Member for Mount Scio to stand in his place in this House of Assembly and apologize to this Assembly for the failure and violation as cited by the report of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, as of October 3, 2018.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

MR. KIRBY: The light's on the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

I offer my apologies to the House, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: 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, members of our law enforcement services and first responders in this province regularly give their time through a number of non-profit and community organizations in an effort to give back to the communities they serve. As part of the annual Law Enforcement Torch Run Polar Plunge for Special Olympics, representatives from a number of law enforcement services took

a dive into the cold waters of Sunshine Camp this past weekend.

The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is an international initiative by law enforcement officers to raise money and awareness for Special Olympics. This year, special guest plungers RNC Chief Joe Boland and RCMP Commanding Officer Ches Parsons led members of their teams as they raised money for this important organization.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of participating in the polar plunge in 2016 and, despite the cold water, the opportunity to support the Special Olympics and the incredible athletes was a true honour. And I can assure you, it's an experience that you do not forget.

This annual event provides funds to an organization that empowers and encourages athletes who, in turn, inspire others with their determination and remarkable achievements.

Members of our law enforcement services show their commitment not only on the job, but in the many contributions they make to their communities through various fundraising and community initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking those who were 'Freezin for a Reason' and acknowledge all those in law enforcement who continue to give back to their communities and their province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement and for his bracing remarks. I join as well with the minister in thanking those who participated and helped organize the annual Law Enforcement Torch Run Polar Plunge in support of Special Olympics, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The annual Law Enforcement Torch Run brings together organizers from the RNC, the RCMP, corrections officers, municipal officers, other

law enforcement personnel in support of Special Olympians, coaches and volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, this year's polar plunge and the Law Enforcement Torch Run are especially important as the 2019 Special Olympics Winter Games are quickly approaching. This winter, during February and March, over 500 athletes, coaches, volunteers and supports will descend on Grand Falls-Windsor.

I commend all those who participated in the polar plunge and thank them for their support of this worthwhile initiative.

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. I have had the honour of attending Special Olympic events. The excitement, joy and pride of all who participate is incredible. Bravo to members of law enforcement and fire services for stepping up to help make this happen. Reason for a reason; what better reason than helping ensure the Special Olympics is a success with as many as possible being able to participate.

Truly, volunteers are at the heart of our community and the polar plunge folks warm the heart. Bravo to them, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this hon. House to announce that our province will host the East Coast Music Awards in St. John's from April 29 to May 3, 2020.

Our province last hosted the ECMAs in 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure all hon. Members agree, the music talent that exists in Newfoundland and Labrador is second to none.

The ECMAs present a wonderful opportunity for our artists to showcase their immense talents and abilities, and will also be a boost for the local economy as many people visit our wonderful province to participate.

The depth and diversity of the music community in Newfoundland and Labrador was apparent at the most recent ECMAs held in Halifax where local musicians garnered 20 nominations.

Mr. Speaker, to help our musicians foster their talents, skills and growth, the provincial government provides MusicNL annually with a \$350,000 investment to help support operations, and programs such as Market Access, Artist Development and Professional Development.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure to present MusicNL's Lifetime Achievement Award to Ralph O'Brien. Mr. O'Brien noted the variety of music offered at the awards show, stating "fifty years ago, we didn't have all this diversity."

Yes, Mr. Speaker, from folk to metal; rock to country; hip-hop to gospel, we have certainly cultivated a style and culture that is our very own. I ask all hon. Members to join me in saluting our talented musicians, as we look forward to presenting and creating an unforgettable week of music in 2020.

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 his statement. Mr. Speaker, this is welcomed news. As the minister as stated, our province last hosted the East Coast Music Awards in 2015, and it was a fantastic opportunity to showcase

our province's immense musical talent and culture. Not only do the ECMAs include an exciting award show, it also includes multiple days of seminars, workshops, showcases, performances and more.

Hosting the ECMAs in St. John's will be important for established artists, and it will also provide up-and-coming musicians with a wonderful opportunity to meet others in the industry and advance in their field.

Artists from our province have had tremendous success in being nominated and awarded East Coast Music Awards in the past, and I congratulate them on their accomplishments. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Ralph O'Brien on being awarded MusicNL's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Mr. Speaker, the ECMAs will bring many visitors to our province and will, indeed, be a boost to our economy. We look forward to the 2020 awards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister. I'm delighted to hear we will have another chance to showcase our phenomenal, homegrown musical talent with the ECMAs on our own home turf.

We have an unbelievable number of talented people in this province; arguably, more per capita than anywhere else in Canada. What a fabulous opportunity to remind the rest of Canada what we bring to the national music scene.

I hope government's enthusiasm is reflected in a commitment to extra resources to invest in this upcoming event beyond the annual grant to MusicNL.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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.

May I ask the hon. Premier if he could inform the House whether parliamentary secretaries are privy to Cabinet documents?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Right now, the parliamentary secretaries would not be aware of Cabinet documents. They would not attend Cabinet briefings. These are done through the committee and, of course, they do not take part in Cabinet proceedings.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

I'm sorry, the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition – my apologies.

MR. CROSBIE: Possibly premature, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. CROSBIE: Question for the Premier: During debate last night, an allegation was made that Cabinet papers were leaked on your watch – a serious breach if it occurred. What have you done to investigate this serious allegation since it was made?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I would with all Cabinet Members, the position that I've made in conversations that I've had with Cabinet Members is that they all understand through their oath and through the confidence that they take, the Oath of Office, and as they're sworn into Cabinet, that every decision, information that is shared with Cabinet it is for strict confidence, Mr. Speaker.

So based on the conversations that I've had and the conversations that were here in this room last night, Cabinet Members in this Cabinet are fully aware that breaches and leaks in Cabinet is something that would breach Cabinet confidences and it is something that we would not tolerate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, as well during debate last night there was reference made to documentation that the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said he had seen. I ask the Premier. Have you seen or asked for the documentation this Member was referring to?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it was said in debate last night and I understand from what I heard from that, this was a discussion that was had with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards that participated in that debate.

Mr. Speaker, I've asked individuals that would have been involved in all of this and, from information that I've been given, there was no breaches or Cabinet leaking information that would have come out of Cabinet meetings. None of that has been shared with me and the individuals that were mentioned said that they do not exist.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the Premier for that reassurance.

In a report dated October 4, 2016, the province's Information and Privacy Commissioner stated – and I quote – “True commitment to accountability and transparency dictates the implementation of record-keeping practices and policies that preclude use of personal email accounts or other means that either avoid creating records or make records inaccessible.”

For the Premier: Can he confirm that his government now operates all government business on government phones and no business is done on private phones or communication devices?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, government business is done by government devices. This is access to information. But the Leader of the Opposition raises something that comes up quite often. Actually, he raises it quite often. So we use the government phones and emails as we do government business. That happens.

But, Mr. Speaker, I also know that the Leader of the Opposition speaks a lot about integrity, speaks a lot about disclosure, speaks a lot about honesty. Yet, based on a release in October of this year, October 2, this was his comment, or a comment that was on their website: upholding our commitment to full transparency – full transparency. Yet, the Leader of the Opposition today failed to disclose the corporate donations and the individual donations to his own campaign just over (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: On the question of disclosure, I do have a question for the Minister of Finance. Last week the minister said in the House that he was going to try and find out who are the shareholders of the numbered company. We asked yesterday; no answer then provided.

Once again to the minister: Has he been able to determine who actually owns the company?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any company that incorporates here in the province would be available through the Registry of Companies and Deeds, through CADO, and anybody can access companies that are registered here in this province, and their directors.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister who just answered the question knows that in the case of a numbered company there is a place marker director who may appear on the filings, but that under the present laws of Newfoundland and Labrador one cannot ascertain at the Registry of Companies the shareholdings.

So I repeat the question to either minister: Have steps been taken to find out the ownership?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I was at an Invest in Newfoundland and Labrador conference earlier today with a group of investors from all over Canada wanting to do business with new start-ups and to look at attracting more capital right here.

I can see how the Member opposite is a bit upset with our approach to being able to attract over \$16 billion in the natural resource sector; unlock Crown land so that we're adding new farms and creating new opportunity, growing our tech sector.

When it comes to private business and private business matters, the Member opposite is a lawyer in his professional career prior to being a politician, he certainly knows, or he should know, contract law and corporation, and the basics of anybody that wants to get into

business. These matters are disclosed. Whether somebody has a numbered company or a company ABC Limited, that is –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I ask the hon. Minister, if it's the policy of his government that secrecy surrounding ownership of numbered companies is essential to the economic development of the province?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, we are very open as a government to doing business in a very open and transparent way. We have been attracting tremendous amounts of capital here in Newfoundland and Labrador in the oil and gas sector, in mining, in the technology sector, in aquaculture. Just seeing that this investment in Grieg that's happening right here is going to create 800 jobs on the Burin Peninsula. These are tremendous investments that are happening in our economy.

We're growing with *The Way Forward* so that we create those opportunities. What they did previously when they worked with their bureaucrats, they did not even listen to them in the Department of Finance. Letters that had gone forward to say we have concerns about Muskrat Falls and all this overspending, that didn't reach them. These are the types of things that was happening under their watch, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: There's not much point asking any more questions of the hon. minister on this subject, but I will come back to the Minister of Finance.

Does he intend to follow through on what he informed the House several days ago that he would look into the identity of the shareholders of the numbered company and report back to us?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: As I said, Mr. Speaker, anybody can go and look up any company that's on the Registry of Companies and Deeds in Newfoundland and Labrador. They are listed. The companies are incorporated and the directors are listed, whether it's a numbered company or whether it's an unnumbered company, or whether it's company ABC Limited.

The matter that the Member opposite is talking about, and he makes a lot of unfounded accusations about people who are in business, people who are publicly traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, on the New York Stock Exchange. These are people who have to follow regulations and securities, and follow the rules. There is significant compliance that must be followed in these particular matters.

I think the Member opposite needs to look back at all the good things this government has been doing at attracting investment here.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I'll switch topics to one where one can find out the identities of people through a registration process, and that's the lobbyist registry. According to the registered lobbyist disclosure in respect of Canopy Growth, one Jeffery Ryan lobbied the Office of the Premier.

I ask the Premier: Did he or his chief of staff, Greg Mercer, meet with Jeffery Ryan?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I will guarantee you, there was no lobbying that would impact the decision around Canopy done by Jeff Ryan or anyone else. The due diligence was done at the department, Mr. Speaker. Jeff Ryan and others – Jeff is an employee of Canopy, from what I gather, an employee of Canopy.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you this, when it comes to this registration that everyone talks about, this registration is a public information, and I will challenge the Leader of the Opposition today, if you have concerns about any transaction, go ahead and file a complaint. File a complaint against Jeffery Ryan or anyone else but while you're doing so, file a complaint against Leo Power, your beg man that raised money for you and not disclosed the information –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: – but have done much work with this government. We've invested in it. He stood in photographs with us. Investigate Leo Power and (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: I understand the hon. Premier to admit that he and his chief of staff did meet with Mr. Ryan. The same lobbyist disclosure said Mr. Ryan also lobbied the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

I ask the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, if he had a meeting or meetings with Mr. Ryan?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did have a meeting with Mr. Ryan. I wouldn't be able to say when it was. I have meetings with lots of individuals on multiple files, and given the fact that I was one of the lead ministers on the legalization of cannabis in this province, I've had a number of meetings with a number of people on cannabis.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Finally on this topic, according to the lobbyist disclosure, one Gary Anstey lobbied on behalf of Biome Grow.

I ask the Premier: Did he or his chief of staff, Greg Mercer, meet with Mr. Anstey?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Not certainly meet with Gary Anstey on the company that you're talking about, no, I did not; but, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you who I have met with many times, and that's your beg man, Leo Power. We have put millions of dollars, creating 275 – no need – Mr. Speaker, I see the Leader of the Opposition with a smirk on his face right now because he is actually – it's almost like *A Tale of Two Cities*, if it impacts the PC Party he doesn't want to talk about it.

Mr. Speaker, there are no special arrangements done with anyone, any public relations firm or anyone at all. The due diligence is done on every single program that would exist in this province. And today CFI is employing 275 jobs in St. Lawrence, and Leo Power was part of all those discussions. As a matter of fact, when it had a picture taken outside –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

PREMIER BALL: – weeks after that collecting money for the (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In July 2017, this government appointed a new chair for the board of Labrador-Grenfell Health. Now, with little over a year into the role, we

learn the chair has been suspended and is facing an investigation under the health authority's respect workplace policy.

Can the Minister of Health and Community Services inform this House regarding the nature of the allegations?

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

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

We received allegations that were serious and have been referred, through Labrador-Grenfell and their respectful workplace policy, for assessment and investigation. That is a confidential process, Mr. Speaker. I will not be commenting on it any further.

In the interim, there is an acting board chair, Dr. Wayne Button, from Labrador West who has agreed to serve in that capacity until the investigation is complete.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that the investigation is underway and the minister does not want to speak to the specifics, but can the minister outline whether or not his department or his officials have received any other complaints regarding this individual from Labrador-Grenfell Health?

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

MR. HAGGIE: I can only reiterate my previous answer, Mr. Speaker.

This is a serious issue. The allegations are under investigation through Labrador-Grenfell Health's respectful workplace policy. It's a confidential process, and I will not be commenting on it or debating it or discussing it in public.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The suspended board chair has alleged on social media that there is too much interference in health care by politicians.

Minister: Is it common for you to direct the activities of the health boards? And, if so, under what circumstances would you become involved in the operations of a health board?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, the health boards are appointed under the *Regional Health Authorities Act*. The members are appointed through a new process put in place by this government, the Independent Appointments Commission, a merit-based, entirely independent arm's-length process run by the Honourable Clyde Wells, currently as chair of that group.

We, the health authorities, the department, meet on a regular basis and discuss matters of local concern and general policy quite frequently. The relationship between the health boards, the chairs, and the department has been functional and cordial, and I look forward to that continuing, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Is a normal process that the Minister of Health, the MHA for Labrador West and the MHA for The Straits - White Bay North be consulted on the location of two vice-president positions: one in Lab City and one in St. Anthony?

Isn't this a suggestion of interference on a matter that should be left to the board to make decisions, and not politicians?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker.

I have made it quite plain to the board chairs that when they were appointed for the newer ones, their role is that of oversight of their sole employee, the CEO, who operationalizes policies which come down through departmental activities.

In terms of how those are operationalized, that is entirely at the discretion of the CEO of the senior management team.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Cabinet Owners against Trash Tax have raised concerns about the fees to cabin owners for waste disposal.

On September 14 during the by-election of Windsor Lake, the Premier wrote to the group, and what he said was he'd give assurance that my government would be committed to finding a solution. They've asked for an update on October 1, and have not had a reply.

Premier, can you give this House a reply on what progress is being addressed on this?

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

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

I'm certainly quite aware of the Cabin Owners group. I've actually had an opportunity to meet with them and had discussions. In fact, they've had a number of meetings with our department, and they have expressed some concerns – concerns that we do take seriously.

I actually had a meeting on this yesterday. We are in the process of having a letter drafted this week to be sent back to the Cabin Owners group outlining some of the responses to the questions that they've outlined.

We will continue to work with them, and we will continue to work on waste management in the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the Budget Speech back in March, the Minister of Finance stated that participation in federally directed programs, such as carbon pricing and waste water initiatives, comes at an added cost to the provinces and territories.

Now that the carbon tax has finally been announced, and the plan, can you tell us what the added cost of the federally directed program will be to our province?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd be delighted to get that information for the hon. Member. We'll provide it to the Member or to this House as quickly as we can get it.

What we will do, Mr. Speaker, is provide that information – something different than the previous government did, when, for example, we had half a billion dollars added to the budget of Muskrat Falls, which came out during the inquiry recently, that the previous government didn't see fit to tell the public about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Interesting approach, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't know the number, yet he's got to compare it to something else. That's probably why we're in some of the trouble we're in.

Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite referred to their carbon tax as being federally mandated. Can the minister confirm that the Liberal carbon tax that he announced is indeed a permanent tax and that the revenue will go into provincial coffers?

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

MR. OSBORNE: I got to address the preamble a little bit here, Mr. Speaker, because bureaucrats in the Department of Finance weren't government of a massive, unnecessary tax burden. They didn't bother to tell the public about that. They didn't bother to tell the public that despite the fact they knew as a government that the deficit was going to be in excess of \$2 billion, didn't think that the public had a right to know that nor did they have a feel that the public had a right to a mid-year update themselves, Mr. Speaker. They didn't provide that to the general public.

So, I had to address the preamble by the hon. Member opposite because there are a lot of things the previous government didn't tell the general public that they ought to have known.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: As Member of the previous government, the hon. Member served as minister of Health and had the most increased expenditures in that decade, so he might want to think about that when he looks at this side. He was part of that government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, how much annual revenue does the provincial government expect to collect from the permanent carbon tax?

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

MR. OSBORNE: The answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is \$1 million a quarter.

Now, I'll address the preamble by the Member again because while I was in Cabinet over there and responsible for some of the decisions, the provincial budget went from \$4.3 billion to \$5.7 billion. Mr. Speaker, that's a lot different from going from \$5.7 billion at that particular time to over \$8 billion while that Member was there in Cabinet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: No, excuse me.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

Sorry, the Speaker is having trouble with his math here today.

Please, the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

AN HON. MEMBER: There are a lot of Speakers like that.

MR. HUTCHINGS: We've seen a little bit of that over the last little while as well, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Can you tell us how the revenue from this permanent tax will be spent by the provincial government?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is \$1 million a quarter; it's a total of \$4 million. It will go into general revenue, Mr. Speaker. But I do want to talk about some of the things, because it's about time the party opposite where held accountable for some of the things that have happened.

Two departments, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Finance and the Department of Natural Resources had requested an independent review to that Cabinet for Muskrat Falls and it didn't happen.

The reason I'm talking about this today, Mr. Speaker, is because that is the largest single contingent liability on our province today. It is responsible for one-third of this province's total debt, put in place by that government and they haven't taken responsibility. Mr. Speaker, it's shameful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: I ask the hon. Member who was a Member of the Progressive Conservatives at the time, when the Energy Plan came out, he ran under that platform – did he support the Energy Plan?

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

MR. OSBORNE: I'll tell you what I did support, Mr. Speaker, I was independent when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned. I supported what they promised. I supported what they promised, Mr. Speaker, not what they delivered. I'm absolutely embarrassed today that I actually believed them.

What they promised, Mr. Speaker, was a \$3 billion investment in the project. What they promised was a total investment paid back to the province in eight years. What they promised was billions of dollars in dividends to the province. We know that none of that is true. Why? Because a lot of that information was hidden from the public – a lot of it was hidden from the Members of this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely shameful.

I'm embarrassed I believed them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while your government was imposing a permanent carbon tax on the residents of the province, the federal Liberals are proposing to lower carbon taxes for coal-fired plants in New Brunswick.

Minister, can you explain why the Liberal government will be charging taxpayers and industry emitters in our province a carbon tax while coal-fired plants in New Brunswick will have to pay next to nothing?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Climate Change.

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

As we announced a number of weeks ago, we've reached an agreement with the federal government on a scheme that will see the lowering of emissions for this province. We have a carbon tax that will be coming, but it's a plan that has a number of exemptions that recognizes consumers, that recognizes the offshore which is so important.

So, again I think we've reached a compromise here that's going to be good for the citizens of this province. It's better than some other provinces right now who don't have a deal and will be stuck with the federal backstop, which is not as beneficial as the plan which we have in place.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you.

According to reports, one of New Brunswick's coal-fired plants, the Belledune Generating Station, was the second-largest source of greenhouse gas in Atlantic Canada in 2016.

Minister, if the Liberal carbon tax is truly about making big polluters pay, why would large coal-fired plants in New Brunswick get a free pass

while people and industry in Newfoundland and Labrador have to pay?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Climate Change.

MR. A. PARSONS: Again, I find it hard to speak about plants in New Brunswick, because we're worried about what we got going on here in Newfoundland and Labrador. But I do appreciate the question that was written by Andrew Scheer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I find it interesting that Members on the other side are talking about what's going on in New Brunswick and they fail to speak about the plan we have in place here. But the first thing I would suggest is do they actually believe in climate change?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the minister, we are 98 per cent green energy and we feel we're paying our fair share.

An information sheet titled *Made-in-Newfoundland and Labrador Carbon Pricing Plan* notes that the legislative amendments will "provide an opt-in for industrial and electricity generating facilities that emit between 15,000 and 25,000 tonnes per year."

I ask the minister: Are you assuming that emitters will want to be regulated?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Climate Change.

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

I got to mention something in the preamble, he feels we're paying our share. Because of their term in government we certainly are paying our share, and it's coming out in that inquiry every single day that we watch it.

What I would suggest is we have a plan, we are working with industry. We know and they know that they have to reduce emissions; that they have to be a part of a plan – unlike the federal backstop, which would not take into account the special circumstances that we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have a plan that will reduce emissions that's going to be good for citizens, it's going to be good for everybody, and we're very proud of the plan that we've come up with.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South for a quick question, please.

MR. PETTEN: Minister: What will the changes to the accord acts be?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Climate Change for a quick response, please.

MR. A. PARSONS: I'm not quite sure what the Member is referring to, but any changes that are going to be made legislatively will be brought to this House. There will be briefings, there will be debate, and we look forward to any changes.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

And now finally, the hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, let's pull back the curtain on the minister's fall fiscal update. We see few real improvements to employment or economic diversification, and very little detail on fiscal situation. I am optimistic for the future, but optimism must be based on reality. All the minister has is wishful thinking pinned to the exchange rate on the American dollar and to volatile global oil and mineral prices.

I ask the minister: Will he acknowledge that the main message from his update is that his

government's diversification efforts have gone nowhere and are simply based on a wish and a prayer?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have the long-term care facility in Corner Brook, for example, which already has people working, Mr. Speaker. The White Rose Extension have 1,000 people currently working. I would say that's more than wishful for the people down in the area of Argentina, Mr. Speaker. Those are real jobs.

We have PAL Aerospace, which have 150 people currently working, Mr. Speaker, as a result of what our government did. Those are real jobs. That's more than wishful thinking.

Canada Fluorspar, there are people working there today as a result of what this government did. That's more than wishful thinking, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. OSBORNE: We have S&P Data, something they say are not important jobs, but for the people that are working at S&P Data, Mr. Speaker, those \$30,000-plus a year, in addition to health benefits, those are important jobs (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance continues to brag about creating jobs. Most of these jobs may or may not be created in the future, depending upon world market prices. Our current unemployment rate is 12.7 per cent, double the national average and doesn't include the hidden unemployed, those who have given up looking for work and people unemployed in precarious minimum wage jobs.

I ask the minister: What is he going to do about the immediate jobs crisis facing many of our people?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I just talked about Canada Fluorspar who have people working today; West White Rose who have people working today; PAL Aerospace who have people working today; S&P Data who have people working today; Quorum who have people working today. The jobs secured at Wabush as a result of the work of the Member for the area, the Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources, saving those jobs; Voisey's Bay Underground who are currently looking for employees.

None of those are the make belief in her mind, the jobs that she's talking about. They are real jobs for real people, producing results in this province because of the work our government has done. They are real results.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

We continue to hear of parents protesting the 1.6 kilometre busing policy because children inside the walk zones are walking on busy roads with no sidewalks or shoulders, too close to speeding traffic, and it's even worse in winter with snowbanks.

The 2013 Deloitte busing study asked people for feedback, and the most frequent comment was that safety is more important than cost savings.

Would the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development agree children walking on busy streets is a safety issue that trumps budgetary concerns and implement a hazard policy as recommended by the 2013 Deloitte report?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank you for the question. I would just like to make mention to the hon. Member opposite that that was 2013, and to my understanding nothing was done since 2013.

However, Mr. Speaker, since appointed as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development last April, we have made some changes with regard to courtesy seating, and we have made provisions within the 1.6 kilometre to accommodate those students that need to be picked up within the 1.6. And as a result of that, it's courtesy, we have implemented and we've done that policy.

I'm sure the Member, if she'd stay around this afternoon again, we will have some further discussions on that because it's going to be a private Member's resolution, and I will have another (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi for a quick question, please.

MS. MICHAEL: Well, I asked the minister because parents are not happy with what was done.

He walked right into my next question.

So I'm asking him: Will he now sit down with parents, schools, school boards and communities and redesign the busing policy to align with current conditions on our roads, because parents are not happy.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I tell you one of the things that we have done since we've become government, Mr. Speaker, is we have talked to stakeholders and we've talked to the school board, and we are making changes and we're working with them.

And one of the things, Mr. Speaker, I'm a very understanding person, and I understand some of the conditions and I understand some of the challenges, but as a government we're working to address those challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, during debate this morning on Bill 34, the Assessment Act, one of the discussions we had was on assessment criteria, and I think one of the Members asked for information.

So I'd like to table this assessment criteria for those Members, so that all Members of the House may access the information.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

MR. A. PARSONS: The second thing, if I could, is sort of in addition to this.

The Members asked earlier today about having a briefing with the Municipal Assessment Agency prior to the vote on this bill, and I'm happy to say there will be a briefing at 9:30 a.m. this coming Tuesday for any Member that would be interested in meeting with the Municipal Assessment Agency, and I will undertake not to hold a vote on that bill until you've had an

opportunity to meet with the Municipal Assessment Agency.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to undertake an immediate, complete and thorough assessment of the supports in place for DHH children by a committee of at least two independent and recognized experts in the field of DHH education and to accept the

recommendations of these experts and, in the interim, take measures to honour their support commitments made to all current and future students upon closure of the Newfoundland's School for the Deaf in 2010 to ensure that all DHH children are provided with access to a quality education equivalent to hearing classmates, as well as access to sign language.

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

Mr. Speaker, it's a real shame –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

Please proceed.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's shameful that I have to be presenting this petition because the families in this province and parents of children who are deaf and hard of hearing should not have to be going around begging for the needs of their children to be met.

As we know, it's been in the media, it's been quite public, the parents are really upset with the way in which they cannot expect – they have to beg for services to be in place. We have inadequate resources for their needs. We have inadequate resources when it comes to support in the classrooms. The parents are just dumbfounded to use that term, Mr. Speaker. They really are, because of the fact that their children are in the school system like every other child and they should have what they need to be there.

This government needs to assess the inclusion model as it was used in closing the School for the Deaf and putting DHH children in the mainstream. They should be sitting with the parents and listening to what they're saying. They should be assessing this situation because it is not working and it can work, if you sit and consult.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour for a response, please.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly take the comments made by the Member opposite very seriously. I fully understand the issues and challenges that are being faced. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I joined the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women at a town hall meeting in her riding probably about three weeks ago.

I had some really lengthy discussions with some parents that are faced with these challenges, their children are faced with these challenges and I fully empathize with that. As a matter of fact, if you looked within our Education Action Plan and the Premier's task force, we're looking at ways in which we can improve resources.

Mr. Speaker, right now, I understand that there are some challenges when it comes to being inclusive for not only the child that's impacted by that, but also the classmates that are in the class trying to identify and trying to communicate. I can only understand that's it's very, very challenging. I fully understand that, and I can assure you that as minister responsible we'll continue to have discussions with making sure and looking at the possibility for resources that will be able to help these students, and not only students but families as well, that have to deal with these situations.

So I fully understand that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party, and I remind her that she has less than two minutes.

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

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament

assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the highest 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 only rose 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 an hour minimum wage as a step toward a living wage;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to legislate a gradual 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.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand and to present this petition. This petition has been going on by folks – folks have been signing this petition for well over a year. So what they're asking for was for \$15 an hour over a period of four years, to bump it up over a period of four years – I believe maybe even five years.

So it's doable, it's desirable, and this is good for the economy.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I now call the Member for Conception Bay South to introduce the resolution standing in his name; it's Motion 2.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a pleasure to get up and speak on this PMR today, and I will read it into the House.

I move the following private Member's resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the safety of all our children by removing the restrictive 1.6-kilometre busing policy where safety is a concern.

This resolution has been seconded by my colleague for Cape St. Francis.

Mr. Speaker, this is brought to this floor of the House on a pretty well a daily occurrence, I know since I've been elected and I know the last year or two it's been pretty continuous, Members on this side anyway expressing their concerns with the 1.6-busing policy.

It's not a new issue, this is not something that happened yesterday and it never happened 10 years ago, it happened probably 40 years ago. It's been a policy in place for, I'm not sure, but I'm told it's back in the '60s.

I said this the other day when I presented a petition; I said it respectfully, too. It's across party lines; it's been around for a long time. I feel that it's time for it to be changed, as do most parents. Most parents indeed have children who fall into this situation. They agree. I know in my District of CBS, I know my colleague from Cape St. Francis, and Conception Bay East - Bell Island, another colleague from Ferryland, we all experience this.

Anywhere you're outside the city areas, you're experiencing this. My district is close to St. John's, the metro area, my district is a rural district. No different than my hon. colleagues. Busing is a huge issue. Schools are on this Route 60. It's a very busy road – one of the busiest roads in the province. Children have to find a way to school, and there's a vast number in all of the schools, namely several of them elementary schools, they fall outside the parameters. They're 1.58, 1.59, 1.52. I can list off many, many.

I've lobbied, I've argued, I've stressed, I've fought for them on their behalf with the school district, trying to find ways, trying to find is there a way we can do this, is there another bus route we can do? Is there a better option? Can we change how you measure the distance to the school, because the policy states that when you enter from the main thoroughfare.

So, I got schools that got probably, I don't know, 500, a thousand feet off the road, but that don't count. So you're told you drop your child off on the edge of the road, technically it's a drop-off zone there, that's the measurement – that's what they measure. The bus goes into the school, but they measure from out on the side of the road.

You're not dropping your child off on the side of the road. You're not dropping your child off on the side of Torbay Road, nor are you dropping your child off on the side of Route 60 with cars and traffic. And as I stated, it is the fifth busiest road in the province, maybe even the fourth. You're not doing it, Mr. Speaker, we all know that.

The measurement was changed some years back, not that long back, to try to cut down on the number of children getting buses as a cost-saving measure. That's the only thing I can figure.

What you're dealing with now is you got a policy that's in place, you got parents that are dead set against it. You got a lot of politicians that are against it. Everyone is doing it for the right reasons. Politically, I mean the current administration, that would be an easy one for them because all the parents would applaud them. It's a very unpopular policy.

Has there been any cost analysis done? Not to my knowledge. I spoke publicly recently on this. How much does it cost? You are told figures, anecdotally, it's \$10 million, \$15 million, \$20 million. That's probably a blanket cost to putting an extra bus on every school in the province throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We know that won't have to be done. There are lots of school where this is not an issue. There are lots of schools where there are lots of spaces on buses. There are a lot of areas where there are no spaces on buses.

We have children walking to school on shoulders that are barely existent during the winter months. It's a big issue in a lot of communities in our province. A lot of families struggle to find the rationale to provide answers to explain why this policy is in place.

I've been a believer, and I'll stay to my word. If I can't rationalize it, I will not tell someone that it's right. Regardless of whose policy it is, regardless of what administration it is, regardless of my own government, my own party, I cannot, as a person – my conscience will not allow me to tell those parents or tell those individuals something that I don't believe in, and I don't believe in this policy.

My colleagues can vouch for this. I've said it in our room; I've said it. If you're not with me, that's fine, but I'm against this policy. I'll stand on my own against this policy because I don't think it's right.

Politics aside, and respectfully – I mean the minister and anyone on the opposite side can criticize for politics, it's nothing about politics, Mr. Speaker. This is truly what I feel in my gut. It's something that I have a strong opinion on and it's something that I, along with my colleague, we fought for. We keep fighting for this, and we're going to continue to fight for it because we don't believe this policy is fair. We don't feel it's safe for our children. We think it's time for it to be changed. It's an old policy. It's been around for a lot of years.

I want to go back to a point the minister made in my petition the other day. He referenced that this government was in power and you had an opportunity to change it. Why didn't you change it? That's exactly the problem we face with a lot

of issues in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, it's blame: why didn't you do it?

Well, you can point the finger about anything like that. That's a very good question. We should have changed it, absolutely, and if we get in power again we probably will. But the option is there for this administration. It's been laid to them, given to them. The public are out there crying for it. There's more uprising now than I've ever seen.

I'll remind the minister, too – like himself – I was not here pre-2015. You can check *Hansard*, I have been speaking out against this policy since I was elected to this House. I can't go back any further than November 30, 2015. I walked the halls of this building. I spent a lot of time up in those chairs upstairs, but I was not in this Legislature until November 30, 2015.

Any Member in this House can check *Hansard* if they want to and correct me if I'm wrong, which I know I'm not, I have spoken out about this policy since I've been elected, and I'll continue to. It's my role. That's what we're elected to do. We're elected to represent people and people's interest are – this is their interests, it's big or small of an issue to some people. To people in my district, and I'm sure in other Members' districts, it's a huge issue.

I have this group that formed in my district, and they're reaching out to other districts. It's called: Against 1.6 Km, a Facebook group. I have to tell you, they're active. I'm impressed by them, but they're almost overwhelming to a degree because it's almost like too much energy and you don't want to under deliver. They got so much energy and they want to make change. You don't want to disappoint them. You feel the pressure is on you.

They are sending out petitions all over the place to get a petition signed. I never – and I'll challenge anyone. I can give you this lady's number. She proposed to me, she's the one – and, ironically, she called me at the beginning of the school year. She was 1.59 kilometres, her children were – 1.59. The bus was picking up children here, her driver was there, and she had to watch children getting picked up there. Her three kids couldn't get a bus, plus she had an

after school daycare program she had to figure out some way around. She was in a jam.

Last year they included her – apparently, erroneously. This year they just cut it off. I spoke to the district and they agreed this was unfair. So this lady – I argued it and we fought it. At the end of the day, no, there's nothing can be done. She was outside the policy. We're sorry, end of story.

I was disappointed and frustrated. I went back in and told her, and I apologized. I said I can't do anything else for you. She in turn then said, but how we can change this policy? I said, well, there are all kinds of options. We present petitions to the House. I'm your Member, I can speak to the minister. I can make this a point in the House and we can ask questions, whatever I can do. She took this upon herself now and it's become a real motivational – I'm getting notifications every – within in minutes, pretty much. People are involved. People are motivated.

We can talk big things. We can talk about Muskrat Falls inquiries, we can talk about Canopy Growth, we can talk about these big multi-million dollar buildings, you can talk about any structure, any road, all that stuff sounds good. Politically, it may score you a lot of points when you go out and you can land a \$10 million announcement in your district. But, Mr. Speaker, anyone that knows me, that's not where I'm to.

I'm the most simple and straightforward person you're going to find. I believe I'm elected to represent the people that elected me; the people that marked an X for me, and even the ones that never, Mr. Speaker. The people in my district is my responsibility. I feel that responsibility. I carry that burden daily. Everyone got their own way of dealing with it. That's the way I'm wired.

They've made this an issue, and I support them wholeheartedly. This really affects their family model; this affects their life. It has a huge impact. They'd rather get another bus and get their busing fixed up than get a \$10 million announcement in CBS, I assure you. Most of those parents would trade that like that. That says a lot. My role is to advocate for those

people, and I do that with pride, because that's what they elected me to do.

So the Minister can get up and make references to courtesy seating and the changes they've made. I know the busing policy. I've been dealing with this for the last number of years. I've read it. If you go up in my office and look on my desk, the busing policies are on my desk. There's nothing new. It's the same old, same old.

Parents know this, too. Parents read this policy. They know the policy as well as I do, because they're looking for ways to try to figure out a way around this so their child can get a bus. How do we deal with this? How can we do this? What can we do? How can we help you? They're being very patient. They're being very understanding, considering their children are walking with no sidewalks; they're walking up four lanes of traffic.

This morning, actually, on the way out, I noticed that St. George's Elementary, it's a school zone – something else I'm advocating for is lower speed limits in school zones. Where these children are forced to walk in areas, I'm trying to get the speed limit reduced. I proposed a proposition to the Minister of Transportation and Works. They're coming back – they want to do it from 7 to 5. I want to do it 24-7 because it educates people – in your mind, you're challenged to slow down all the time.

As I drove by this morning, St. George's on the fence it was: School zone. Please slow down – and wrote the speed limit up. And all the kids had these coloured – on the fence. This road is on four lanes. This is the one I've protested. Protests have gone with me – I've gone to their protests. I've advocated from. And I'm not going to stop because this issue is very important. Again, it's not the big multi-million dollar building, it's not the big structures, it's not the big ticket items; this is what matters to people, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague, when he left last week – I seen his interview, and I have a lot of respect for him. He made a very good point in one of his final comments. It's about people, and that's a very true indicator of a man. I have a lot of respect for my former colleague from Topsail -

Paradise, Paul Davis. That statement spoke volumes. That's what I kind of feel like. It's about people. We make some references, we joke sometimes, it's all about the people – it is all about the people.

The minister and this administration, they have the power. This can be changed. Is it \$20 million? Is it \$10 million? We don't know. We presented a PMR last year and there was a change made, when we can afford it, or something was added on, which made the PMR pretty well a moot point. We may see another amendment coming today.

Deal with the issue. That won't make anyone happy, that won't make those parents home today with three children trying to get from home to school, from school in the evenings. You have single parents, I have working parents, I have parents who have no support, I have parents who have no vehicles – we have all a mixture.

Again, I don't have public transportation in my district, like a lot of Members here. They deal with the school bus. There are no sidewalks in the majority of my district. I'm not in St. John's; they have to walk the shoulders of the road up to their knees in snow, what have you – whatever the weather is they have to deal with it. Unless they can be fortunate enough to find a way to school.

People can't afford to put them in a cab every day. They can't afford to pay a private operator. They're depending on the school bus. They are within that zone of 1.6 kilometres, which is a mile. Again, maybe the minister or maybe the people opposite need to get out and walk a mile on some of these roads.

You got news – you got items there of people getting struck, speeders risk – in Airport Heights – the headlines. Parents are concerned. It's their children, Mr. Speaker – it's their children. So they can heckle if they want, but I'm talking about children and I'm talking about people. And people –

MR. A. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Municipal Affairs want to interrupt me anymore?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: I'm trying to do a private Member's on an important issue.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I ask the Member –

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: I'd just like to say on behalf of our caucus, many of us have walked those roads; please don't make those accusations.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my final minute maybe I'll tell the people that are not watching home, he's heckling. He's over there; he's in three conversations, so his point of order falls really thin on me, Mr. Speaker. I got parents that are concerned about buses, not listen to this nonsense every day.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Let me have my final minute, Mr. Speaker, this is nonsense, nonsense, nonsense and we're seeing it again today.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Just a point of order again. If the Member is going to make comments, they should be factual. There was no heckling going on over here.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: There's no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Again, nonsense, gibberish.

People in my district care about this, Mr. Speaker. They may – but people in my district care, people in his district care, all our districts care. And I care. So if he wants to get on with his nonsense again today and get on with his pouty mouth, good for him. I'm here to speak for the people in my district. It's time for this policy to change. I've had enough of listening to this. What I've listened to in this House, this week, I've had enough.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time is finished.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Again, I'm glad to see that the debate we've had over the last few days has really had an effect. I would ask the Member to please – it's one thing to have a debate and there's another thing to get into personal insults, and I would ask that he please retract the comment.

MR. SPEAKER: Any comment from the Member?

MR. PETTEN: My time's up, Mr. Speaker (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll try to bring some degree of civility to the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would like for the hon. minister to continue.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll try to bring some degree of civility to the House. I understand emotions sometimes run wild. I was not going to make any reference, Mr. Speaker, to any of the previous administration, but since the hon. Member opposite talked about he wasn't in the House. I would just like to remind the House that no, he wasn't in the House, but he was certainly an EA to a minister in the House and certainly would have had that contact and be able to have the discussion.

Mr. Speaker, back in April when the Premier had the confidence in me to appoint me to Education and Early Childhood Development, I took it seriously. After spending 30 years – and I know the hon. Member talks about he knows the bus policy. I know the bus policy as well; I lived the bus policy, Mr. Speaker.

I spent just about 30 years, and I understand – when I became minister back in April, it was interesting to see, Mr. Speaker, that there are some things in life that change significantly. There are other things in life that never ever seem to change. It was surprising when I started to get into the department and to look at some of the best practices and some of the things that were happening to realize – and I really should have given it thought but I realized that the 1.6-kilometre bus policy was still in place and there was significant restrictions there.

I know the Member opposite got up and talked about 1.59. I still find it very difficult that he was talking to anyone in the school board and they said we can't accommodate that; 1.59 is splitting hairs, Mr. Speaker. I know I don't have many on my head, but at least it's splitting hairs because I'm sure that there are – if the conversation had been made to me, we could have talked about it.

I'm in constant contact. We have two school boards, Mr. Speaker. One is the English school board, Labrador and English School District, the other is la Conseil francophone de Terre-Neuve. We work with both of these school districts to ensure that we have safety as number one. Safety of our students is number one, and we ensure that we have safety measures in place, as well as proper programming.

Mr. Speaker, I know a lot of times we'd like to have the best of everything. As a teacher, I would love to have had a teacher for every student. I would like to have had a teacher maybe for every 10 students, but –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you – but we realize that sometimes it does not happen.

What the hon. Member opposite is talking about – I'll just give you some idea – there is not one single province in Canada, not one single province in Canada that does not have an eligibility zone for students. We have a 1.6-kilometre zone.

For the House, for junior high and high school students in Nova Scotia – a province not unlike Newfoundland and Labrador – there is 3.6 kilometres. If you live outside of 3.6 kilometres, it is the responsibility of the parents who live within that 3.6 to ensure that their students get to school safely. Now I know, Mr. Speaker, there are all kinds of situations that arise. There may be parents without cars, there may be parents that can't afford cars, I understand that; but that's no different than any other province.

In New Brunswick, another Atlantic province, students from K to 12, they have a distance of 2.4 kilometres. For all K to 12 students in Alberta, the distance is 2.4 kilometres. In Ontario, including the City of Toronto, including the City of Brampton, where my grandchildren attend school, in Ontario the distance is 3.2 kilometres. If you live outside of 3.2 kilometres, there's busing; you live inside of 3.2 kilometres, there's no busing.

For junior high and high school students in Quebec, it's up to 2 kilometres. Get this, Mr. Speaker: K to 6 students in British Columbia, the distance is up to 4 kilometres compared to 1.6 kilometres in Newfoundland and Labrador. For junior high and high school students in British Columbia, the distance is up to 4.8 kilometres. These are just some examples of distances throughout the country. I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, in many of the other provinces that probably have a lot more resources than we have, yet they still have these requirements and policies in place.

If we were to eliminate the 1.6 kilometre, what does that mean? Does that mean a student that's 50 feet from the school is picked up by a bus? Does it mean a student that's 100 feet from the school is picked up by a bus? The hon. Member opposite, when he talked about this, said that well, you don't have to put it everywhere. So, in other words, we grandfather in the buses we have now and we tell those areas that don't have the busing, or whatever the situation is, too bad, you're outside of that. So, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of situations that we deal with when it comes to that.

I'll get an opportunity to speak on this – I'm going to move, and seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that the private Member's resolution currently before the House be amended by deleting the words "removing the restrictive 1.6-kilometre busing policy" and by inserting instead the following "reviewing the additional courtesy stop within the 1.6-kilometre busing policy, which was implemented this year to determine its effectiveness".

We have that in place. So, the amended resolution would read: BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the safety of all children by reviewing the additional courtesy stop within the 1.6-kilometre busing policy, which was implemented this year to determine its effectiveness, where safety is a concern.

MR. SPEAKER: We'll take a few minutes to review the proposed amendment to ensure that it is in order or not. So, we'll take a brief recess.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The amendment is found to be not in order in that it exceeds the principle and the scope of the original motion.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very disappointed, really, in the ruling. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, we talked about that we

have done a significant amount of work and changes. One of the things, as minister, that I've been trying to work with since I came into this portfolio is to have discussions with the school board, have discussions with stakeholders, and to make sure we're providing the services in a very safe and caring manner. Mr. Speaker, we've continued to do that.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things we've done, because actually the motion is telling us to remove the 1.6 kilometre, when in essence that is, in fact – although it's a policy still there, we have made accommodations within the 1.6 kilometres to ensure that students are not left on the side of the road when there are courtesy seats available. That's a significant move from what had previously been there. Previously, that certainly was not administered the way in which we would've liked it to have gone. So, as a result of that, we have made significant changes.

As minister, one the things in discussions I had with the school board, we had – there are 42 schools that seemed to have some issues with that back in September. One of the discussions I had with the school board was to ensure that if there were any seats available on any bus, passing along by any students within the 1.6, that we would accommodate. It will be called courtesy seating, and we would put, inside of that 1.6 kilometre, a courtesy stop, and that stop would be a safety stop. It might not be at 0.8, it might be at 0.6, it might be at 0.9, but at least it would be within the 1.6. So that students who are on that route could have an opportunity to get on the bus if there are empty seats.

Mr. Speaker, that's a significant change from what had been there previously. The intent of putting the amendment in there was to give us an opportunity, at the end of this year, to evaluate and to look at and review whether that courtesy seating is working. The intent of the courtesy seating was, once we had – we have 1,100 routes that we have buses.

Mr. Speaker, one of the directions we talked about, in consultation with the school board, is when the 42 that we had talked about last year – once we had gotten through that, those 42, that we would look at implementing the courtesy seating throughout the district; particularly, in pressure points and pressure areas. And that

would, certainly, accommodate students that will be walking to school.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, this would be if, in fact, the 1.6 kilometre rule had to be removed, we would be the only province in Canada that would not have had a busing policy that would require to pick students up.

The Member opposite had talked about a cost analysis and all that sort of thing. I can assure the Member opposite that we are running a very efficient department, and we have very professional people within our department. And to think that we're not looking at any of these would be pretty naive on his part, because we are looking at policies throughout – not only a busing policy, we're looking at other policies. We're looking at improvements. We're looking at best practices. We're looking at ways in which we can improve. We're looking the Premier's Task Force. We're looking at the Education Action Plan, we have 82 recommendations. All of this, Mr. Speaker, to make improvement, and making improvements from time to time means policies will have to be changed.

Mr. Speaker, all of that doesn't come cheaply, but we invest in it. We have invested a significant amount of money into the Education Action Plan coming out of the Premier's Task Force; very worthwhile investments, Mr. Speaker. We continue to do that.

So when we look at the 1.6 kilometre, we fully understand. I fully appreciate that there are areas and there may be parents within the 1.6 that – they're students. They don't understand why their student is not being picked up because they're 1.1 kilometre or they're 800 metres from a school.

Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I go back to what the Member opposite – I ask the Member opposite: Do we pick up students that are 50 feet away from a school, or 100 feet, or 300 metres? Do we eliminate 1.6 and now we provide busing for every single student in this province and pick them up everywhere, on their side streets, on the corners, up in the subdivisions. That's a huge commitment, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm not taking this lightly, because when I became minister that was probably one of the first discussions and conversations that I had, in early May and June month, was talking about busing. Because I know, I lived it. I lived it every September when I was an administrator. You'd live it. You'd live busing issues because there was always somebody or some parent that felt they were left out, and that's understandable, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this motion, this 1.6 – removing 1.6 kilometre goes far beyond just getting up on the opposite side and saying: oh, remove 1.6.

We have many areas in the city that are subdivisions. We have many areas in smaller towns that are subdivisions, and right now the policy is if you're more than 500 – we do not go into subdivisions less than 500 metres away. They walk down. So does that mean now we've got to go 500 metres up every subdivision? We've got to go up 500 metres every street? We've got to cover every area within the province?

That, Mr. Speaker, would take a considerable amount of time, a considerable amount of resources and it would not happen overnight. That's certainly something that you just cannot arbitrarily say, oh yeah, remove 1.6 kilometres, no longer – we don't need that because there are some parents that may not be able to get their children to school.

I fully understand that, and thank you for your time.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I'm really pleased to be able to get up today, and I always say to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, but this is an issue that's so important in my district. I'd say, bar none, this is the most important issue when it comes to anything in my district that I've heard over the

last, almost 11 years that I've been here in the House of Assembly.

I just listened to the minister. I've spoke to the minister before on this and I think he understands where I'm coming from and where my associates here on the side of me, colleagues on the side of me, are coming from.

Minister, you just spoke that time about a cul-de-sac, and you spoke about sidewalks, you spoke about in town. We're asking you and your government to review this policy, to eliminate the 1.6. That's it, 1.6, that's it, there's no more stops, we're not picking up any other children. What we're asking – and I've been up on my feet in this House on, I'm going to say, 50 times, bringing in petitions on 1.6 because I have so many of them there to bring in. And each time I get up I talk to the former minister, who was an advocate when he was on this side, about the 1.6. He brought in a private Member's motion, I looked at it yesterday. The petitions, he brought in as many petitions as I did on this.

I think you understand where we're coming from, because you just gave all the reasons why not to do it that time. You just gave all the reasons why you can't do it because, are we going to go every cul-de-sac? I'm asking you, and I'm asking your government, to review this policy based on one thing only – on one thing only: the safety of our children. Now I'm not asking you that if – and maybe we can look at this policy and first when we implement it we can K to 4, K to 6, and have a look at that. Maybe we can implement a new policy, I'm not saying to change everything, maybe we can look at it and we can say, okay, there are no sidewalks.

This morning, Mr. Speaker – and I knew I wouldn't be able to do it – I was almost going to stop and take some pictures of Piperstock Hill in Torbay. Everybody knows what the rain was like this morning, and it was raining pretty hard. If you looked on the hill coming up where you walk to the new Juniper Ridge school, coming up the hill, Piperstock Hill, which is pretty close, I think it's about 1.8, The water was running down. There were grooves of water running down. An adult would have a job to walk along the side of the road there this morning because of the conditions it was in.

I know of a family that I received – but, it was 1.8, 1.7 kilometres. It's just in front of the school, going up to the school. It's not a very safe area. Listen, we all got it, especially in rural Newfoundland. In St. John's there are sidewalks, there's curb and gutter and stuff like that but it is an important issue.

I spoke to a lady only a couple of weeks ago in my district and her issue was that she lived within the 1.6 zone. She's a single mom with three children. She doesn't have a car. She works at home, does her work at home. She said: Kevin, there's no way that I can send my children to school and walk that distance. So, I went to the minister and he did explain to me about the new courtesy that he thinks is new, but to me it is not new because courtesy seating has been there for years and years and years.

As a matter of fact, courtesy seating – up to about two years ago – if you had a good bus driver, a real good driver that understood that there were little kids that had to walk up over the hill, they would stop. I mean there's sometimes that they would definitely stop. But it came in a couple of years that the board came down and said now listen, you cannot do this anymore; you have to stop it.

I understand that, but you know in rural Newfoundland and in places like in my area too, everybody knows Joe the bus driver. Everybody knows Chris drives this bus. I can name off most of the bus drivers. Johnny drives this bus. They understand that there are two little children that live in – and what used to happen with courtesy, most of the times in my area, is they'd walk back to the closest bus stop. That's what the minister is talking about right now. He's talking about adding another one but that's basically – courtesy busing has been in place all the time.

I went to the school in Torbay, Juniper Ridge, and spoke to the vice-principal. She said: Kevin, there's no problem. If there was a seat available for those kids, we'd make sure that they got a seat on that bus. But guess what? There are no seats available, so there's no way that they can avail of courtesy seating. The only way that you can avail of courtesy seating is if there's a seat available.

Sometimes, if you look at buses, you'll see them go in the morning and probably there are 10 seats available. Coming back that evening, because most parents are working and today is different than when I went to school and I'm sure when a lot of you went to school, when there was probably only one parent working, and nanny and poppy lived next door and it was a run. That's not anymore; we don't have that anymore. When I grew up, I grew up next to my grandparents. Most people don't have that anymore; don't have an aunt or an uncle that's available to pick up a child.

It's a huge issue. I can remember growing up that if it rained, I could mark it down that Auntie Kay was outside the door with her car waiting for me to pick me up. I believe that most people on the other side can understand what I'm saying. Times have changed.

I look at incidents – and I talk about the 1.6 again, but I had to make these points on courtesy busing. Listen, courtesy busing is a great thing, but only if there are seats available. I spoke to the vice-principal down in the new school down in Torbay and asked her – she said, Kevin, I know there are lots of buses going by that person's home, but there are no seats available. They will have to walk the 1.4 kilometres up the north side hill in any kind of condition. Seventeen-thousand cars a day travel on Torbay Road – 17, 000 cars a day and we're going to ask grade 1's, 2's and I think it's grade 4 to walk along the side of that road.

I'm not here to do political, this doesn't mean – politically, that's nothing to do with it. This is strictly about the safety of children. All this is about – when you were over on this side and you said, listen, you got to do it too. Listen, I was agreeing with you. I don't care if it's in the Minister of Finance's district, or it's in the Member for Labrador West's district, or the Member for Exploits's district, or where it is, children's safety should be foremost in everybody's minds.

There is a huge issue when children have to walk alongside of the road – and I don't care what they do in Alberta. I don't care what they do in New Brunswick. I care what we do here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I don't mean to be – we can spend money on lots of things, we can

spend a lot of money on different things, but I don't think you can put a dollar value on the safety of a child, and this is what this motion's all about.

We're not asking – and my colleague from CBS, he's not asking to just eliminate the 1.6 and pick up people 50 feet away from the school. He's not asking for that. He's asking to listen, let's review this policy and make sure that all our children get to school safely, and all our children come from school can – the parents that are working and the family members that are working that are concerned about the safety of that child does not have that concern.

My two children are reared. I have two little grandchildren now, but where they live now they'll be okay to get on a bus and go out. I tell you, it's a major concern of parents, and I don't think you can argue with it. And listen, courtesy busing? Wicked. When the seat is available, sure. If we can pick up that child, if it works and makes it safe for that child, then so be it.

I just go back to the minister, and he made a comment that really hit me. He said: Well, we'd like to have a teacher for every child. That is not what this is about. Sure, we would. Listen, we'd like to have probably 10 children in a classroom. That would be great because, obviously, the more attention they get, that'd be great. This is not about that stuff. It's not about what we're offering in our education, oh, we'd love to have – sure, we would, but that's taking away from what we're talking about here today.

What we're talking about today is one thing only: safety of our children. We're talking about the safety of children, and to come up with a saying like that, that just – when I heard him say that, I just had to roll my eyes and say I don't think the minister's getting what we're trying to do here today. And it's not only us. You talk to parents, talk to school councils, you talk to people out there, everybody's concerned. I'm sure everybody on the other side over there is concerned about safety of children; I don't doubt that one bit at all. I'm sure, I'd almost bet on it, that you are the same thing that I am, that all I want to do with this motion we're having today is for the Department of Education to have a serious look at this policy.

Now, whether it's changed, I don't think we're going to take and eliminate 1.6, no. Do I believe that the government's going to say, that's it, next year we're going to eliminate 1.6 and we will see no more 1.6? But I am saying to the minister, and I'm saying to the government, where safety is a concern. That's what this is all about: where safety is a concern. When little children got to walk along a road – and this time of year, do you know what? It's not even that bad.

Like I told you, when I came in this morning, with the way the rain was coming down, and looked at the north side hill in Torbay, and Piperstock Hill in Torbay, and know that those areas are where children have to walk along to school, I understand. I'd say there are a lot of employers in this province, and especially in around my area, that must be very patient with their – because you know when it's raining, or wet like this morning, that there got to be a little leeway to some parents who are probably late getting to school. Normally when you see weather conditions like we see today, you'll see big lineups of cars at the school, where parents are just going to say b'y that's it, that's all I can do, I'm going to have to be a little bit late and so be it. I can't send my child in those conditions. But that's what's happening.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in my district none of my towns have sidewalks. There are no sidewalks there. So looking at this policy, I'd ask the minister to have a look at the policy where sidewalks are. Maybe a sidewalk where there's no – maybe we can look at that and say okay, then, a child is safe enough walking around a sidewalk.

In Torbay, there are 17,000 cars a day that drive along Torbay Road. There's an elementary school, K-4. There is what we call a mid-school, 5-7, right along that road – 17,000. It gets worse, Mr. Speaker. It's going to get worse with no sidewalks, very little shoulders, once the snow comes. Then you have ice conditions that, again, it's dangerous. It's very, very dangerous.

I know the Member from – where is it?

AN HON. MEMBER: Somewhere in St. John's.

MR. K. PARSONS: – somewhere in St. John's who has sidewalks is over mouthing off to me and said: Why don't you have sidewalks? We don't live in St. John's. We do not have sidewalks. It's easy enough for you to say to have sidewalks. We don't have sidewalks.

Where's he to – what's the name? Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, I'm sure there are lots of sidewalks in your district. You don't have the issue. I do. I do have this issue and it's an important issue to me because I hear from the constituents in my area that that's their number one concern. It's my number one concern because I represent those people. That's my job in the House of Assembly to come in here and to advocate for the people that elected me. And, when I go to a school, or I go to a student council meeting the number one concern are children going to the school.

I don't care what you are, whether you are on that side of the House or on this side of the House, or you're in that part of the House or this part of the House, when it comes to children's safety we all have to have the same concerns – we all have to have the same concerns.

MR. KING: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: I don't what the Member for Bonavista is yapping off about now, but this is a serious issue. I wish you'd take it seriously.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

(Inaudible) I am not saying anything to the Member across the way. If he wants to tattle or pretend that I'm saying something just to grandstand and try to disparage what a good man –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KING: This is serious stuff we're talking about. This is the PC government politicizing children. Mr. Speaker, this is atrocious.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There's no point of order.

MR. K. PARSONS: There is no point of order. This is a serious issue. This is an issue that we brought before this House and they brought before this House and I think it's time for us as government, as elected officials, to take it as serious as it should be taken. I don't want to see anybody hurt. I don't want to see any child hurt at all. I don't want to see anybody hurt to tell you the truth.

I think for the peace of mind that this would give our small children and the families that this is a policy that we should address. Courtesy seating, as the minister mentioned, is okay, but he doesn't understand that it has nothing to do it with the 1.6. It should be looked at, and we need to look at this policy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise to the private Member's resolution today, and to speak to the 1.6 busing issue. This has been on the floor – I think the Member for Conception Bay South mentioned that he's been on his feet since 2015, early 2016, talking about this issue. We all, on this side of the House, would concur with that because it's been brought up so many times, and there's no doubt that the Members from this side realize the importance and the safety of our most precious resource, and that's our children.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, I always listened but it was never an issue with my district, only because it never had raised its head in my district. Never did I go home to my district and hear anybody – or talking to my CA: Was there calls with regard to the 1.6 busing issue? It had never come up.

As the minister has mentioned, certainly, our government is committed to ensuring safety for all students, and recognizes the importance of

reviewing all necessary policies related to student safety. As part of the Liberal five point plan, we committed to reviewing busing distance, and we found that certain regulations deny bus services to children who live closer than the 1.6 kilometres from the school they attend. This policy has raised safety concerns among parents, especially for younger children, and also affects the extent to which children are able to participate in extracurricular activities.

A new Liberal government will review the distance criteria for school bus services eligibility, and implement a more flexible policy that meets the needs of students and parents. This proves that we have heard the concerns, and that we have listened to the issues raised and we are moving forward with a plan. The 1.6-kilometre rule is not new to either the present or the former administration. In fact, it's been in effect since the early 1970s.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, without giving away my age, I mean my hair will tell you that that's probably the era that I come from with regard to school, and certainly it's been an issue. In fact, it was an issue when I went to school, Mr. Speaker. I lived within probably 150 feet of the one mile busing policy when I went to school, when I went to high school. I remember the first day that I went over to get on the bus, certainly coming from a small community, the bus driver knew everybody, and he looked at me –

AN HON. MEMBER: You had buses back then?

MR. WARR: Absolutely – and he looked at me and he said: you know, I'm sorry, you don't meet the one mile zone, and therefore you can't get on. Mr. Speaker, I walked to school every day from then on. I have to say, as much as I wanted to get on the bus that day, I understood the policies that were in place.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the beautiful community, beautiful District of Baie Verte - Green Bay, towards the central, west side of the Island. My district consists of 42 communities, and within those 42 communities we have 11 district schools. I had the opportunity to meet with school councils, to meet with town councils, and certainly constituents, and again,

like I said, never did the issue come up until this past spring.

After the sitting of the House last spring, I went back to my district, and the first community I went into at that time was the community of Baie Verte, and Baie Verte has a K to 12 school, Copper Ridge Academy. I don't know what happened before that, but I know the more this got brought up into the House of Assembly, the more that people talked. I think they sort of wanted to get hard and fast on – the English School District wanted to get hard and fast on the policy again, and, obviously, it was going to affect that school. I had many meetings with parents, and certainly very concerned parents, and the issues with those parents, as most Members have said here, the safety of their children.

Baie Verte, for those of you who know the community, it's a very vibrant community in the north of my district, and one that's –

MR. LETTO: The mining capital.

MR. WARR: One that is the mining capital of Newfoundland and Labrador, I say to my hon. colleague from Labrador West.

Baie Verte built a new school. The school was built during the previous administration's tenure. They had a K to 12 school, beautiful school, but it's on Highway 410. Highway 410 is the main road heading through Baie Verte and lots of commercial traffic, lots of residential traffic and certainly lots of industrial traffic with two operating mines. One of the biggest contractors on the Peninsula is Guy J. Bailey Limited. They're carrying industrial traffic back and forth that road at all times.

Just before that school was built, Mr. Speaker, there were concerns then because the 1.6 school busing policy was in place. At that time, Cindy Fleet – I've had the opportunity to sit down with the superintendent of busing in my district, as I did in my district, and the superintendent of busing within our area of Nova Central. I had the opportunity to sit with both those people and finding that they had agreed to, with the people of that district, that busing would never be an issue because of where they actually built the school.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is winding down, so I will take my seat and offer my support.

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

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

I'm very pleased to stand and speak today to this private Member's motion. I think we're all recognizing that the most important thing in this motion is the issue of safety.

“BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the Government of Newfoundland to ensure the safety of all children by removing the restrictive 1.6 kilometre busing policy where safety is a concern.”

So this is not a frivolous resolution, or a frivolous motion from the private Member. This is serious, dealing with safety. It's not just get rid of the walking zone, the safe walking zone. It's making sure that children who are walking to school are walking in situations that are safe. I think that's what we need to remember as we're going through this debate this afternoon.

In 2013 – we've made reference to it earlier in this House. In 2013, there was a review done by Deloitte for the government and it was a review of the school busing, and it found that only 10 per cent of people favoured the 1.6 kilometre policy. But I think what was key is that it suggested reducing the zone for primary and elementary students. I'll speak more to that later, but to get to a point that was made again earlier today in the House by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, what Deloitte is suggesting is something that happens in other places.

The minister stood and named what the provincial standard was and he named a number of provinces, including Atlantic Canada. But one of the things he didn't recognize is that in some of the provinces, and in a lot of them, actually, while you may have a provincial standard, there are differences in some of the communities and differences rurally and in urban situations.

So, for example, when you look at what Deloitte says, reducing the zone for primary and elementary schools – in Ontario, for example, it's 1.6 kilometres for children under seven, it's 3.2 kilometres for seven to nine, and it's 4.8 for 10 and older. So they're doing exactly what Deloitte was recommending, and that is differentiating for younger children.

Another example is in Nova Scotia, where it's not with regard to children but it's where one of the cities has recognized that things are different in that city. The provincial 3.6 in Nova Scotia is actually being studied right now. In Halifax itself it isn't 3.6, it's 2.4. So you do have differentiation in some of the provinces.

Another example of that kind of thing; the rural policy in New Brunswick, which is different from the urban – the rural policy is 2.4 normally, but if you're 1.5 kilometres down a side road from a bus stop, you'll get picked up where you live.

So it's not as simple as the minister declared here earlier. I think this is what the motion today is looking for, a recognition that there are situations which offer greater danger than other situations, and why not get rid of the 1.6 rule, where safety is a major issue?

In 2014, we'll all remember a teenager in CBS was hit by a vehicle while walking home from school in a school zone. So he was walking home from his school in a school zone, and he was hit. Parents had expressed worry about the safety of children in school zones, and had warned the town an accident might happen.

Drivers were coming on this area, in particular, coming off a busy TCH access road and not slowing down in the school zones. Police had caught people going 95 kilometres in the school zone. This was made worse by the fact that there were lack of sidewalks, and the town said they couldn't afford to put more in – very special situation, and a child gets hit.

In 2015, there was a parent in CBS who complained her children were no longer eligible to ride the bus to their elementary school because of a change in enforcement of the 1.6-kilometre rule. Again, her concern was safety. Her home was slightly inside the 1.6 kilometre

cut-off. So, after many years of being able to take the bus, her children could no longer do so.

She noted that other parents were also concerned because drivers were – and I quote – flying up and down the road, and sidewalks are never plowed. This woman said she had suggestions on how to revamp the routes, but the school board and Department of Education were not interested in hearing them.

In 2016, the same issues were expressed by parents in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, and I'm sure we all remember this because it was in the news a lot. They organized into a group to address problems, typical of semi-rural suburbs: high speeds, narrow roads, narrow shoulders and roads not designed for current traffic volumes. I think the towns have asked the province for help in installing sidewalks. The minister might know more about that when he talks later. I would like to think that the province has listened to the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's.

The distance isn't the problem. The issue is the lack of sidewalks or roadsides, forcing students to walk on busy streets. This is the bottom line. From that perspective, the policy is obsolete because semi-rural communities, outside St. John's, have new subdivisions without sidewalks, and the courtesy seating policy is not dealing with the issue, and this is what the minister has to recognize. When he talks about yes, they're made some adjustments, and now you can have one courtesy seat per bus, et cetera, and he talks about having notified schools – in actual fact, it's only 25 schools that were notified that they could use the courtesy seating.

In 2017 – and this one is a stark one and it's not that long ago – a teenager was killed walking to school in Cow Head – killed, not just hit. A parent launched a petition saying that students were attending schools that were not designed for heavy traffic flow in school zones and were made to walk on rural community roads without sidewalks or shoulders to walk on, and catch buses on highways with cars speeding by.

I'm sure enough of us have been on the Northern Peninsula to understand the situation of a child from Cow Head who was walking to school. We know what it's like. As one parent said, there's

barely a sidewalk and in the wintertime there's nothing but ice and students are forced out into the road to walk to school, kids as young as four years old.

This is not a frivolous request here today. The request is saying let's assess the safety issues and where there are major safety issues such as the ones I just mentioned, that we remove the rule.

In May past, the English school board announced no more exceptions to this 1.6-kilometre busing rule, and we all know what happened. Previously, some buses have stopped inside the walk zone, but this was to be tightened up in the name of consistency, efficiency and treating all regions the same. That's a quote from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District.

I just mentioned how in places like Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, they just don't have one distance. In some places, they do it differently for age groups. In other places, they have some variation for rural and urban. And in some places like Nova Scotia, they are looking at what they have set as a provincial standard. I think the minister needs to look at what is happening in other places with a broader perspective than the narrow one that he presented here.

Students can still apply for courtesy seating – that can still happen – but they must walk outside the 1.6-kilometre zone to find a bus stop. To say that that is ludicrous is an obvious thing to say. It's really crazy. Protests have taken place since May in various regions, and I know that some of the Members in this House had those protests in their own districts. Those protests were going on and went on to first day of school.

Then, finally, the minister did announce, or the board did, that they would allow one courtesy stop per zone; but, as I said earlier, it was only with regard to 25 schools. So again, the minister doesn't tell the whole story when he talks about the courtesy stop. Parents are telling the minister and telling the school board that it's not enough, and some children still have long or hazardous routes to walk.

The current eligibility distance is within Canadian norms – we know that – but the department should examine the feasibility of reducing the eligibility zone for kindergarten and elementary students, as was recommended in the Deloitte report. As I've said, there are many jurisdictions in Canada that vary school busing eligibility zones by age.

In the survey that was done, the majority of survey responses suggested that the school busing eligibility zone for younger students should be reduced. The department needs to look at initiatives in other jurisdictions to encourage being active, such as walking, biking, and safe walking routes, escorted walking measures for students to get to school.

We're not saying that everybody has to ride a bus, no, not saying that at all; but if it's an area that doesn't have sidewalks and doesn't have a shoulder, it's not going to be safe for biking either. So whether walking or biking, it still has to be an area that is safe. So walking, have escorts, parents can walk, older children can walk with younger ones, but no matter what we're doing we have to look at how safe is it in that area for children going to school in that area.

Districts should considering implementing a hazard policy that will recognize certain students are being temporarily or permanently eligible for transportation based on a hazard such as construction, or crossing a multi-lane, high-speed road. That was something, Mr. Speaker, that was recommended by Deloitte as well in the study that they did, that there should be a hazard policy.

So, we oppose the blanket 1.6-kilometre policy; it's not working. We ask the minister to organize a full review of the 1.6-kilometre policy, which would include thorough consultation with parents, schools, school boards and communities, as well as a jurisdictional scan, a full jurisdictional scan.

We need to redesign the policy to align with current road conditions, with a comprehensive definition of hazard. We also need a wider definition of the kinds of extenuating circumstances in families that would make them eligible for busing. For example, a single parent

without a car, with three children going to three different schools in the morning, needs to be considered for busing, regardless of where the family lives.

In urban settings, for example in Toronto, children of a certain age, older children get their free tickets for the TTC, the transit system in Toronto, but that transit system, which includes their subway and their buses, et cetera, is something so far beyond what we have here, that that kind of thing just wouldn't work for us. If we said, well, in the city maybe children could get buses. Well, we all know you would have to have a bus system that really worked for every area in the city in order for that thing to happen.

So we do have to look at the situation from the perspective of safety. We do have to look at the situation from the perspective of different situations, and we do have to allow for having different situations accommodated. And it means flexibility, and I urge the minister to look at it from a flexibility perspective. If there are cost associated with it, remember what the parents who did the survey with Deloitte said: that cost factors should not override the safety of children going to school.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

I've had the opportunity to listen to my colleagues in the House, as well as the Opposition, bringing forward some good ideas for the debate, and a lot of great topics and a lot of great discussion. I've heard them express their concerns, but I have an amendment that I'd like to bring forward here today.

I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that the private Member's resolution currently before the House be amended by adding the word "considering" before the words "removing the restrictive 1.6 kilometre busing policy" and by adding after the word "policy" upon further examination of the effectiveness of the additional courtesy stop within the 1.6 busing policy that was implemented this year.

The amended resolution shall read:

BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the safety of all children by considering removing the restrictive 1.6 kilometre busing policy upon further examination of the effectiveness of the additional courtesy stop within the 1.6 kilometre busing policy that was implemented this year.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We'll recess for a few moments to review the amendment that has been presented to the House.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The amendment has been found to be in order.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited that the amendment was found to be in order. It's very important because I think it gets to exactly what the Opposition is looking for as well.

We all in this House, all agree that we want to have the safest environment for our students and our children, as the hon. Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay said. They're our pride and joy, the most valuable resource we have. I know the Minister of Natural Resources would agree with that as well, that they're our best resource in this province. So I think it's really, really important that we had the opportunity.

The Minister of Education was very eloquent in what he was talking about here today, that he's willing to listen to any opportunities that are going to make any process or any policy that we have within our government stronger and for the betterment of the people of this province. We have to balance all that out, so we have to find research to ensure that that process is in place. We have to make sure that our students are safe.

I understand the concerns that constituents have in many of our rural areas. I have some areas in the City of St. John's that don't have sidewalks. Students have to walk to school on roads that have no sidewalks, and that's not safe either. So we have to make sure we put things in place that is looking at that.

The Minister of Education spoke quite heavily about the changes that were made with the courtesy seating policy with the busing in our province currently. I think we make every option, as a government, to try to fix those problems that may arise within the 1.6 kilometres within the school zone.

Mr. Speaker, I think the amendments we put in place here today strengthens what we're looking for and brings it more inline with what we can do after we look at the best practices and doing the research we've done on the courtesy seating plan.

So let me just mention what we did with the amended resolution that we brought forward: BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the safety of all children by considering removing the restrictive 1.6 kilometre busing policy upon further examination of the effectiveness of the additional courtesy seating within the 1.6 kilometre busing policy that was implemented this year.

As I mentioned earlier, this is what was brought in this year. I think we're evaluating that process to see how we can make that better. I think looking at this resolution, I urge my colleagues in the House to support it. I think it gets to exactly what we're looking to try to do. I understand the Opposition feel passionately about this issue just like we do, that we're all in this to make students safer and ensure they have the easiest access to school as best we can; understanding the ramifications of the distances we have and the geographic concerns we have within our province.

Mr. Speaker, it would be easy to say we wanted every student in this province to ride a bus to school, and that would be awesome if we could do that, but the policies we have in place allow us the best balance that we can, given where we

are today. I know we're evaluating where we are with the courtesy seating that's been there, and I think that's a good way forward on this, but we always have to do better.

I was really happy to hear the Minister of Education say that. He's always looking to improve on legislation and policies that will make the travelling public safer, whether it be from the *Highway Traffic Act*, which is what we've done with the Minister of Service NL this year and in the past couple of years. And I know the Minister of Education has worked hard on trying to make this process as safe as possible for our children. So I think it's important for us to do that.

Without going into any more than this, we've had great conversation. I'd like to thank the Members on this side for adding to the discussion. I'd also like to thank the Opposition Members who had the opportunity to discuss this today, too, because I think it's important that we hear from all sides. I think this amendment to the resolution allows us to balance both, what the Opposition was looking for and what we're able to deliver on to make it successful.

So thank you very much, and I'll be supporting the amended motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. Member for Conception Bay South speaks now he'll close the debate.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to thank my colleague, the MHA for Cape St. Francis; the Minister of Education for speaking on this resolution; the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, and the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

Mr. Speaker, we brought in this resolution, and it clearly states – in our resolution we wanted to ensure the safety of all children by removing this restrictive 1.6 kilometre busing policy where safety is a concern. Fairly clearly, that really

clearly states, it is removing this restrictive 1.6 kilometre policy.

The government opposite has proposed this amendment, which they're going to consider removing. They're adding in this 1.6 courtesy pick up. We're at a loss. If there are no seats on the bus it doesn't matter where your bus stop is to. The children I spoke about in my district cannot be picked up, no matter if you have a 0.1 kilometre from the school, no matter if you got in the parking lot of the school, it doesn't matter because there are no seats on the bus.

So that to me is a bit of smoke and mirrors, what I'm hearing over there. The saying goes, if you don't succeed at first try, try again. So the first one failed, then the second one – then they worked on the second one until they finally got something in that they wouldn't have to stand in their place and look at the parents and the children in this province and say we don't believe your issue is serious enough to vote in favour and support, something that all families in this province with children are not getting the bus, they want action on it, and government are going to stand in their place and vote against this. They kept trying until they got their amendment to save face. They don't have to do that.

And the same thing happened the last time, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: This is not the first time.

MR. PETTEN: This is not the first time for this, so I think it's not uncalled for me to remind the listening public, to remind the general public what happened.

This is terrible. It's just as well to say it's terrible. We'll keep fighting this policy. I can't understand, for the life of me, why this government opposite will not listen to the concerns of the families. It's the parents of children that are struggling to try to get their children to school.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's the bread-and-butter issues. It's not the big buildings. It's not the big freeways. It's not the big announcements. Trust me, that's where it's at. I say it to my colleagues and I say it whenever I have an opportunity,

that's where it's at. All the rest of the stuff will come. You can work on that; they're all important things, but you have to look after your own. The bread-and-butter issues have to be dealt with first.

Sometimes, and a lot of times, and I've seen it in this Legislature, that's lost. Because as I said when I spoke earlier, and I'll say it again, it's about people, it's about families and it's about children. If you don't look after that stuff, Mr. Speaker, those big buildings and those freeways mean nothing – absolutely nothing. If you don't look after those core issues, let's be honest, when all the dust settles, while all we do in here, and all the rhetoric we get on with, guess what you got when it's all said and done? Your family; we all can count on our family. Every family's alike. It's the most important, precious thing to each and every one of us.

Your child is beyond that. Parents come to me with the legitimate concerns, and I will not back down from this argument; I'll keep fighting it. We'll live to fight another day. My colleagues and I, we feel strongly about this issue. The people that don't fully grasp it, I respect that; but when you get down to it, you talk and you listen to parents and they call you and they're emotional, they're upset, they're stressed, but they're reasonable.

As I said earlier, I have people in my district, families and people in my district, they care. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? I care too, and I will not stop caring for those people. I know a lot of Members opposite, everyone in this House feels similar to what I'm saying. I'm looking for action. I don't want inaction. We're asking for action, not inaction, because right now government, with this resolution, it's inaction.

You can't save money on the backs of the safety of the children. Policy cannot override safety, Mr. Speaker. That's a basic concept.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. PETTEN: I just heard someone reference about the number of years back; that's not the rhetoric you need in this conversation because I am very serious. If anyone doubts that, they'd better think again because I'm serious about this issue.

I'll go back to it again; we can talk about all the issues that are very important to the people of this province and there are lots. There's nothing more important to a family than your child and the safety of your child. I don't care where you live, who you are, that is paramount in every family.

The minister can get up and he can mention Alberta, he can mention any other province and their policy, BC and how far they got to walk; I'm not representing anyone in BC, Mr. Speaker. All I see is Conception Bay South, Newfoundland and Labrador, and this is the Newfoundland and Labrador Legislature – I couldn't care less what BC are doing. I care about the children in this district and mine and this province we live in. I'm caring about them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: They can worry about their own issues, Mr. Speaker. Respectfully, they can deal with their own issues. I'm talking about our policy in this Legislature and it needs to be changed. It needs to be changed.

Mr. Speaker, we got a government over there that, like I said, if you never succeed at first, you try, try again. So, they're going to bring in their amendment and they're going to be proud of it. We're going to make sure, though, the people, the people, Mr. Speaker – remember that word – will know how they voted. They will know what they did.

There's such a thing as social media and people actually pay attention to social media. They will pay attention to this.

AN HON. MEMBER: That sounds threatening.

MR. PETTEN: There are no threats to that, Mr. Speaker. I'm just making an observation. That's an observation, Mr. Speaker. People will see this on social media. How you construe that into a threat well, that's their own prerogative.

I'm not going to go much longer. I think I'm made my points, but I just want to say I'm very saddened. What dollar figure – we know there's a lot of money being spent across the way – lots. I'm not going there because, again, my issue is about this policy here in general today, but

there's a lot of money being spent. So, how much money – can the minister get up, instead of reading a policy that he's not really read that much by what I've seen, go and examine how much this is going cost, put some interest, pay attention to this, Mr. Speaker.

They had Members over there today reading from a policy. They never even took the time to prepare a few notes and give a few debates. That's sad. That's how serious they take this issue, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what, we take it serious. I take it serious. My colleagues take it serious. We're not going to stop fighting for this. They can do their amendments every time but we will come around again. This day will come again and I guess they'll try their amendments again. But guess who watches when all the dust settles? The people, and they'll be watching in 2019.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Having no further speakers, I'm going to first call the vote on the amendment and then on the main motion, or the amended motion as required.

The amendment is: That the private Member's resolution currently before the House be amended by adding the word "consider" before the words "removing the restrictive 1.6 kilometre busing policy" and by adding after the word policy: upon further examination of the effectiveness of the additional courtesy stops within the 1.6 kilometre busing policy that was implemented this year.

All those in favour of the amendment, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: Motion carried.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Opposition House Leader ready? Is the Government House Leader ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): Mr. Andrew Parsons, Ms. Coady, Mr. Haggie, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Warr, Mr. Davis, Mr. Edmunds, Ms. Haley, Mr. Letto, Mr. Browne, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Bennett, Ms. Parsley, Mr. King, Mr. Dean, Mr. Holloway.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Crosbie, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Petten, Mr. Lester, Ms. Michael, Mr. Lane.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes 20, the nays nine.

MR. SPEAKER: The amendment is carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

MR. SPEAKER: We're now going to vote on the amended motion.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

It being Wednesday, and in accordance with Standing Order 9, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon.