



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume XLVIII

THIRD SESSION

Number 42

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

Thursday

November 15, 2018

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

If I may, it would give me a great honour to introduce into the Speaker's gallery today some visitors from 5 Wing Goose Bay. We have with us Lieutenant Colonel Stéphane Racle, who's the Commanding Officer at 5 Wing Goose Bay; Master Warrant Officer David McDowell, 5 Wing Goose Bay; and 5 Wing Mitigation Officer, Mr. Tony Chubbs.

Welcome to you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Also, I understand in the public gallery today, I believe over here to my right, we have with us Mayor Juanita Stone and her husband, Bob, from Red Bay.

We have a great welcome to you. Thanks for being here with us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: You can't hide.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we have the hon. Districts of Cape St. Francis, Humber - Bay of Islands, Bonavista, and Mount Pearl - Southlands.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I rise today to recognize Ms. Mary Fleming of Torbay, who will be celebrating her 100th birthday on November 16. This is a milestone that few of us get to see. May has lived every year of her 100 years to the fullest.

Mary was one of 13 children born of John and Annie Mahon and, like many in her day, Mary was taken out of school at an early age to help

out at home. Mary later married Edward Fleming and had children of her own. In her early days, she helped her husband run a convenience store and barbershop in Torbay.

Mary was widowed when she was just 40 years old. Following her husband's death, she closed the store and went to work in retail and the food industry while raising her children. For a brief period, Mary also went to Churchill Falls and was among the first group of women to go there.

Mary has been blessed with good health and has been an active member of her community. She has enjoyed her independence and drove until she was 89, and remained in her own home until she was 98. I believe she's the oldest person in Torbay.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Mary Fleming is a remarkable woman and I ask all hon. Members to join with me in wishing her continued good health and much happiness as she celebrates this incredible milestone, her 100th birthday.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Humber - Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Jamie Brake of Meadows.

Earlier this year, Jamie was awarded Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador's Volunteer of the Year Award. This award recognizes a volunteer for outstanding efforts and invaluable contributions to the development of recreation.

Jamie, who is also the Mayor of Meadows, has been involved with sports for many years both as a player and a coach. He avails of every opportunity to complete training programs and is always eager to share his knowledge and skills with others.

Because of his vision to offer recreational opportunities in the town, programs like Learn to Skate, ball hockey, pond hockey tournaments and many other activities have been major successes under his leadership. It is not

uncommon in the winter to find Jamie in the early hours of the morning flooding the rink, or in the summertime ensuring everybody is ready when children arrive for the day.

Jamie also received NAPE's Community Volunteer Step Up Award this year and in 2019, he will be one of the hockey coaches for Team Newfoundland and Labrador at the Canada Winter Games being held in Red Deer, Alberta.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Jamie on this recognition and for his continued contribution to his community and the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista.

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, imagine making it to 80 years of age. Now, imagine being committed to an organization for 80 years. That is the case for Frances Sweetland of Bonavista who has been committed to the guiding movement for 80 years.

Under the guise of a cake walk, Ms. Sweetland was recently surprised by well over 100 Sparks, Brownies, Guides, Pathfinders and Rangers, past and present, to whom she is known as Brown Owl. Ms. Sweetland began her lifetime commitment to guiding in 1938 at age eight as a Brownie. She would later become a Guide and Pathfinder, and serve as a leader, commissioner, and even a cookie conveyer for our area, amongst other roles.

After the initial shock wore off, Brown Owl was presented with a number of gifts and well wishes from those who couldn't attend. The highlight of the evening was when 80 women each took a flower and formed a circle around the campfire and toadstool. Each dropped their flower in the basket, offering congratulations or a story as to what Brown Owl means to them.

For empowering women for generations, fellow leader Leigh-Ann Ryder said it best: "Brown

Owl was Girl Power before Girl Power was cool!"

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This coming Saturday, over 400 players and coaches from the Mount Pearl Minor Hockey Association will be hitting the doorsteps throughout the City of Mount Pearl, as well as the Southlands and South Brook areas, as part of their 7th annual Big Give Food Drive.

This year they will be joined by a number of other sports groups and community organizations including Scouts, Cadets, Lions, Kinsmen and many individual volunteers.

In addition to door-to-door collection, there will be food bins set up at Mount Pearl's four grocery stores throughout the day. All food and monetary donations will be in support of our two primary food banks located at St. Peter's Parish and Mary Queen of the World. This is a tremendous initiative, which not only fills a real need in our community but also teaches these young players the importance of sharing with others and in giving back to their community. I certainly encourage all citizens to please give generously to this very worthwhile initiative.

For residents who may not be home on Saturday morning, I encourage you to place your non-perishable items in a plastic bag and hang it off your doorknob or lay it on your front step and a volunteer will pick it up when they canvas your neighborhood.

An initiative such as this would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of many volunteers. I therefore, ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in commending the Mount Pearl Minor Hockey Association and all of the other aforementioned community groups, sporting organizations and volunteers for taking

up the challenge to ensure that nobody goes hungry in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to update Members on the 26th Annual National Conference on Public-Private Partnerships, which I had the pleasure to attend last week in Toronto.

This is an annual conference that is recognized as the world's premier event on public-private partnerships with participants from across the country.

As I spoke with participants from the rest of Canada, I was happy to hear their excitement as they spoke about what our government is doing to provide large-scale infrastructure projects in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Just yesterday we began the procurement of a new mental health and addictions facility – our fourth project since January 2017 where we are partnering with the private sector to build infrastructure at a cost that is reasonable to taxpayers.

Value-for-money assessments on long-term care homes in Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor and Corner Brook, the replacement of the Western Memorial Hospital and the new mental health and addictions facility have concluded that partnering with industry will be more cost effective than traditional procurement methods on these projects.

In this fiscal climate, this is a smart decision, making it wise for taxpayers' money.

The Corner Brook long-term care home is under construction, construction on both long-term care homes in Central Newfoundland and the West Coast hospital will start in 2019, and the

construction of the new mental health and addictions facility will start in 2020.

All these infrastructure projects that we are delivering are on time and on budget.

Finally, at this conference, Cory Grandy, Assistant Deputy Minister for Infrastructure in the department, became the newest board member of the Canadian Council for Private-Public Partnerships, recognizing his knowledge and hard work on these projects that are underway in our province.

Mr. Grandy and Ms. Andrea McKenna are leading our energetic team in the department that is embracing these projects to help our government deliver large-scale projects. They've hit the ground running, and I'm very proud of what they have accomplished in the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, these projects demonstrate our commitment to delivering services and creating jobs for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and we look forward to delivering more infrastructure projects in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. As the minister would be aware, our administration supported the concept of public-private partnerships, and I'm glad to see that his government has adopted work that we had already started.

The project that the minister highlighted is very important to the residents of those regions, and to the province as a whole. We, too, certainly welcome the construction of these facilities and look forward to their completion.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate Mr. Cory Grandy on his appointment to the

Canadian Council for Private-Public Partnerships. I have worked with Cory in the past, and it is nice to see his knowledge and competency recognized in this way. The value that members of the public service such as Mr. Grandy and Ms. McKenna bring to all projects throughout government cannot be overestimated. It is important that they be acknowledged for the great work they do.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advanced copy of his statement. I do have to make a comment, though. It's easy to have all the infrastructure projects on time and on budget, when only one is under construction yet.

In the meantime, I tell the minister that he says P3s are a wise use of taxpayers' money, but time will prove the inaccuracy of that statement. Auditor General reports across Canada show that infrastructure, built by P3s, does not save governments' money in the long term. In fact, the costs are higher.

We have a government that's running scared from our financial situation, and making short-term decisions to look like they are saving money, but they won't be around when the long-term costs of P3s become clear.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The World Health Organization has declared November 12 to 18 World Antibiotic Awareness Week.

Antibiotics are used to treat and prevent infections and illnesses. When antibiotic resistance develops, the antibiotics we use may not work for some or fail entirely. This means that conditions, like pneumonia or strep throat, become untreatable.

The number one cause of increased antibiotic resistance is overuse or inappropriate prescribing for prevention or treatment. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, antibiotic usage is the highest in the country.

Through the Provincial Antimicrobial Stewardship Committee and ongoing work by our partners, Quality of Care NL and Choosing Wisely NL, we are seeing positive behavior changes in prescribing patterns. This past year, we have decreased usage by 9 per cent.

All health care professionals have the tools and resources at their fingertips to help encourage more conversations with patients. One of the themes of World Antibiotic Awareness Week is Think Twice. Seek Advice. I encourage people to take the time to have a conversation with their prescriber to determine whether the antibiotic you are being prescribed is, in fact, the best course of action.

By working together and learning to use antibiotics responsibly, we can help prevent antibiotic resistance.

We can ensure the right treatment, gets to the right patient, at the right time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Since the discovery of antibiotics, they have served as the cornerstone of modern medicine; however, the persistent overuse and misuse of antibiotics in humans and animal health have encouraged the emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance.

The onus is on the Department of Health to educate people about the proper use of antibiotics, so they will not press their doctors for prescriptions that doctors know they don't need. Such an education campaign will help doctors resist the pressure to prescribe antibiotics when they are not needed.

People also need to be warned not to store antibiotics to take when they see fit. It's dangerous and affects us all. Antibiotic resistance is a nightmare scenario. What could be more frightening than a serious infection that cannot be treated because the antibiotics have been so overused that the bacteria is resistant to all of them. We all must do our part for good health.

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. With the highest rate of inappropriate use of antibiotics in the country, it is good to see this improving. And bravo to the folks on the Provincial Antimicrobial Stewardship Committee, Quality of Care NL and Choosing Wisely NL for the good work they are doing.

Since this government cancelled the Adult Dental Program, doctors are reporting the increased use of antibiotics for recurring dental infections because people cannot afford dental care. If the minister is serious about decreasing antibiotic use, he would reinstate the Adult Dental Program that he so recklessly cut.

Thank you, 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, we can all feel the tentacles of windy winter reach even into this Chamber.

I have a question for the Premier: Could he give an update if there have been any communities negatively impacted by the severe weather to the extent that they have required provincial assistance?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we've had some terrible windstorms in the last 24 hours. There has been a number of power outages. In fact, some are still ongoing, but our latest information is that most, if not all, will be back up by 8 p.m. tonight. As of when I left my office just a few minutes ago, there have been no requests from any community for assistance in damage that has been done by the storm. Mostly it has been power outages and that type.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the minister for that update.

According to the MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue – and this question is for the Premier – a tentative deal was struck in August 2018 for the former Marystown Shipyard after meeting with the Premier, the Mayor of Marystown, the MHA for Burin - Grand Bank and Kiewit.

I would ask the Premier, who is paying Kiewit for the asset?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I think it has been widely discussed publicly about the transfer of ownership between Kiewit to the Town of Marystown. It's something that we've been actually working with Kiewit. This is an asset that's been available. We see it as a strategic asset for economic development on the Burin Peninsula, and that is the reason why we got involved. That asset has been there for quite some time bringing really no work and no value to the people of the Burin Peninsula.

The Town of Marystown has always looked at that and saw significant opportunity for employment and development in that area, and particularly around the aquaculture industry that is developing on the Burin Peninsula. So, Mr. Speaker, that is the reason why we got involved, to help facilitate a transfer of that asset into the community of Marystown.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I'm sure the government of the province has laudable intentions, but the question had to do with how was Kiewit, who owns the property, which is a private enterprise, being paid and from where is the money coming from?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: So, Mr. Speaker, right now the way it will look, the money to Kiewit will come from the community, the Town of Marystown to support the transfer of the asset into the Town of Marystown. And, hopefully, what you'll see then is that at some point, as has been publicly discussed, there would be a company that would move in there and create a

centre of excellence for the aquaculture centre on the Burin Peninsula.

There is an asset right there that exists that could bring economic impact to the Burin Peninsula. The Town of Marystown are showing significant interest in making sure that asset brings employment to their community, indeed to the whole province.

That is our job as government, to help facilitate the movement of those strategic assets so they can be used appropriately for economic development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we can all share the goal of facilitating employment and growth in the province.

The question, rather, was specifically as to: Where is Marystown, who's not known to us as having a large war chest for these matters, getting the money, and what is the purchase price?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting that the community of Marystown is not capable. That's what he's saying, that's what he's suggesting. That the community of Marystown is not capable of getting involved in economic development in their own community, Mr. Speaker. I have more faith in a community the size of Marystown. I have more faith in the work they can do to actually bring employment to the Burin Peninsula.

I have more faith in the community of Marystown, obviously, than the Leader of the Opposition. Maybe his chief of staff doesn't feel that way, I'm not sure. Maybe this is the discussion he's had with him. Maybe he needs to be included in this decision, but the money for the transfer of that asset to the community of Marystown will come from the business

arrangement that, hopefully, Marystown will be able to get involved to bring jobs to that community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I realize that Standing Order 26(5) does say that: “A Minister may in his or her discretion decline to answer any question.” This is a creative way of doing that.

I would ask the Premier. Did the former Liberal candidate in the Winsor Lake by-election attend the meeting to which I referred earlier?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, the meetings that I had was with the Town of Marystown. I don't know which meeting you're referring to but there were quite a few that I would have had with Kiewit, with the Town of Marystown. At that point, there was no MHA from anywhere in any by-election or any election. It was with the community of Marystown and with the officials of Kiewit, including the MHA who done a remarkable job in advocating on behalf of the Burin Peninsula, Mr. Speaker.

We want to bring jobs to the community of Marystown. We want to make sure that the Burin Peninsula is well established to be actually involved in the aquaculture industry on the Burin Peninsula, unlike the deal that you could not get done, that your administration could not get done in 2015.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: The Premier is fond of attributing to me histories that I don't have, such as having had an administration already.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind Members –

MR. CROSBIE: The question is, has the environmental assessment been completed? And, if so, do we know the cost of the cleanup?

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have engaged a consultant to do an environmental assessment of the Marystown Shipyard. As a former mayor of a town that I spent many years in, I take exception to the fact that he's alluding to the fact that Marystown is not capable of doing their own economic development.

Mr. Speaker, we will work with the Town of Marystown to make sure – we'll do what we can to make this deal happen. The consultant's report is due in the next few days, and when that report comes in we'll assess it and we'll make our decisions accordingly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Well, the salient fact I get out of that is that the assessment is due in the next few days.

Who assumes these liabilities – if I might ask the minister that – as well as future liabilities?

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's something we'll have to assess when the consultant's report comes in. We have no idea what the consultant is coming back with at this point. We do know the report is being done and the assessment is being done strategically and very thorough. When we do get the report, we'll have a better idea what's involved in that, and we'll make our decisions accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: May I ask the minister, or any other minister who could answer this: Has the Minister of Municipal Affairs authorized the town to take over ownership of the former shipyard?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, the line of questioning that's coming from the Leader of the Opposition, and the conversation that's actually occurring to his right about they've done the deal – he's saying that the administration that he had served in, that they had done the deal. If they had done that deal in Marystown, why are we asking those questions today?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about here – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Please proceed, Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So what we're talking about here is trying to facilitate a transfer of an asset, on the Burin Peninsula, for economic value, into the community of Marystown. They are prepared to take this on for economic development.

We are not talking about an environmental liability, like Abitibi, that the former administration put through in 2009, which put a burden on the taxpayers in this province. This is not about Abitibi –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: The Premier, again, is fond of sending zingers past my head, because I know nothing of the events to which he refers.

Has the Minister of Municipal Affairs authorized the town to take over ownership?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We will work with communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, no matter where they are. If there are economic opportunities that are available through them, we're more than willing to work with them.

I am very surprised today to see the Leader of the Opposition who is not aware at all that the party that he now leads, the liabilities that were passed on to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, as a result of the expropriation of the Abitibi assets.

So is the Leader of the Opposition saying today, as he stands and asks questions, that he is not aware of the expropriation of Abitibi?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I think we've gotten all we can squeeze out of that particular question, and the government may wish to take note that the Minister of Municipal Affairs will have to be involved to make this lawful.

Again, for the Premier: Can you confirm that there were other parties interested in obtaining the Marystown shipyard, including the Burry group in Clarendville? And did you have discussions with other parties?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I met with Kiewit and, at that point, they were not able to facilitate or close any deal, including the people that you just mentioned, and others.

Mr. Speaker, this was a private company that was looking at for saying –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I take exception from the Member opposite who is heckling and saying that they were not Liberals. That is not true and I ask, Mr. Speaker, if you would ask her, ask the Member opposite to just withdraw the statement that she made across this floor. That is not accurate what she's saying. Our job was to try and facilitate the economic development in the community of Marystown, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order to the question; please proceed.

PREMIER BALL: And our job there, the community of Marystown, with Kiewit, they put together the proposal that was accepted by Kiewit.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: It's not productive, in my submission, that during Question Period the parties involve themselves in dialogue with other people than the one asking the question.

So, final one on this for the Premier: When does the Premier expect the deal to close?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Only when it's ready, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Question for the Minister of Finance, I ask the minister: Does he take refuge in Standing Order 26(5) which says he may, in his discretion, decline to answer any question; or did he find out the names of the shareholders in the numbered company that owns the land leased to Canopy Growth?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This gives me a great opportunity to talk about the significant industry and jobs that we are creating for cannabis here in Newfoundland and Labrador since it became legal.

We have been able to incentivise and get over 400 jobs that are going to be coming through retail and production. The ones on the West Coast are going to be valued at \$54,000 in annual salaries, 120 production jobs; no money from the provincial government, no risk – all the risk is with the company to sell and produce here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Whereas the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune wanted government to take unlimited risks. With a product like cannabis, you could import your product and then export it, and then a company under an EDGE status would have to pay millions and millions of dollars – the province would, the taxpayers – to ship out that product for no value in return.

We have a good deal.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Again, for the Minister of Finance: Did somebody tell him not to answer my question?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing I can say is that by having two cannabis production facilities here in our province, and hopefully more – we want to see growth. I've been saying time and time again that we've been behind when it comes to cannabis production in the country. We didn't have any licensed facilities and now we're leapfrogging other provinces. We're finding ways to develop the supply chain, R & D and other jobs that are going to be created because of the incentive program that we have developed – that template. We've been able to secure supply through the contracts that we've put in place. There are a number of matters that are happening.

What the Member opposite is talking about is a private business matter. It's the same thing that he was talking about earlier in his line of questions, asking questions about business-to-business deals that would happen outside (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Question for the Minister of Transportation and Works: Is his department monitoring the moose fencing pilot project on the Trans-Canada Highway near Gallants, and what are the results?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, we are always monitoring accidents on our highways in our province, and we'll always work to ensure that the safety of our motorists is taken into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, we work with SOPAC. I met with SOPAC just a few weeks ago on ongoing discussions. I'm actually attending SOPAC's AGM on Saturday. We want to continue to work with SOPAC. Moose fencing is something that we've certainly looked at. We know the Members opposite were a part of a pilot project that was a flop with the detection system on the highway. We want to find the best way for the

safety of the people of our province and on our highways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Just so we're all clear on this, is the minister saying that his government will consider adding to the inventory of moose fencing?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we're continuously looking for opportunities to improve safety on our highways, and we're obviously looking for ways to do that. One of the main things we do is brush cutting, and that's why we dedicate \$2 million a year to brush cutting, and as well working again with groups like SOPAC.

But yes, we do look at moose fencing as a possible measure to help improve safety on our highways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Works. Minister, yesterday you admitted in the House that the numbered company involved in Canopy Growth requested a meeting with your department.

You said there was no meeting, but I ask the minister: Who from that numbered company reached out and asked for the meeting?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I just have to go back in my preamble to yesterday, and I take some offence to the questioning from the Member opposite. At one point yesterday, he actually asked me to come clean. Well, I can assure the Member opposite, I'm clean. Everything I do is in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the taxpayers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: I'm not interested, Mr. Speaker, in going into the gutter with the Member opposite. What I clearly said yesterday, very clearly said, there was an inquiry from the company –

AN HON. MEMBER: Check *Hansard*.

MR. CROCKER: Exactly, you can check *Hansard*.

Engineers in the Department of Transportation and Works, the very same competent public servants that a few minutes ago he was complimenting, had a conversation with an engineer from that company, which went no further.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, this is a simple question: Who requested the meeting?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, there was no meeting. He's fishing without a hook again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. CROCKER: It's unreal that the Member continues to ask these questions.

There was no meeting. There was a 10-minute conversation between two engineers. One of the things being in Transportation and Works, I often got to say, is I'm not an engineer. Mr. Speaker, that was a very technical discussion and that was it.

There was no meeting. There was no meeting. There was a request come in from a company about a piece of land, and in my next answer I will explain to the Member how this happens through the Registry of Deeds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And that was my question, who requested the meeting? I knew he said they never had a meeting. He said there was a request in, simple question.

So I'll ask: Minister, were these two engineers discussing the transfer of land on Mews Place for \$1 to the numbered company?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, it's unreal.

I can assure you, our engineers in our department are not the people that discuss land sales. It's the people in the Lands division that go out and assess value.

So if a company in this province wanted a piece of land which is owned by Transportation and Works and owned by the people of the province, they would go to the Registry of Deeds. You'd walk into 59 Elizabeth Avenue, and you'd go in and you'd see the land that the province owns – currently over 50 pieces of land in St. John's belong to the people of the province – and then they would reach out to us, which this company did, reached out to T & W and inquired about this land.

There was no meeting. There was a conversation that ended very quickly after the two engineers had a discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So we know that the officials in the minister's department were discussing the land on Mews Place. So once again, that's confirmed. He won't tell us who requested the meeting but we know they were there.

So once again, I ask: Minister, did you or the Premier's office give direction to your officials to transfer this land for \$1 to the numbered company? Simply answer the question.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. CROCKER: Absolutely, positively, not.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Natural Resources: Has Nalcor cancelled the Astaldi contract for Muskrat Falls?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have been advised that they have indeed done so.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the minister indicated it has been cancelled. My understanding is there was 30

days from the time that notice was given to come off the site to Astaldi to make, I guess, known that they could carry on. So I assume within that 30 days Nalcor decided that it could not occur.

I ask the minister. What contract obligations, and now for securities and bonds, what has been triggered in the contract to protect what's left there in bonds and securities?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These are important legal matters, and it is before the courts. As we can all appreciate, we want to ensure that those sureties are there because there are requirements moving forward. It is before the courts as we speak, Mr. Speaker, and as that process unfolds, I'm sure we'll be advised how things will progress.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, so the cancellation of the contract, does that impact the payment of non-union employees who haven't received payment for pensions and health benefits and for the non-unionized employees that are still not paid to date?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've advised this House several times this week and I think last, Nalcor has been working with a surety to work towards payment of wages for workers that stayed post the stop-work order of October 20.

As I've said in this House before, on October 18 the stop-work order was made. All employees were paid up until the 20; all employees, both non-unionized and unionized.

Subsequent to October 20, there were a number of employees at the request of Astaldi who did

stay on to do further work, Mr. Speaker. Nalcor is working with the surety to try and arrange payment, but that is – we were waiting on information from Astaldi.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I know in Question Period some days ago the minister referenced a figure of \$400 million.

Could she indicate what security and bonds are triggered now in the contract and what's the amount there to protect wages and penalties for work that's not completed by Astaldi up to date?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did say in the House there are securities, there are sureties, and there are letters of credit to the total of \$400 million. I don't have it at my fingertips what the breakdown is for each of those. I wouldn't want to hazard a guess this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I think I know the levels but I'll check on the exact ones which are letters of creditors which are surety.

Please be assured, there has been a lot of work done; 95 per cent of the work has been done by Astaldi. The critical path has not been impacted. We don't have any anticipation of any challenges to first electricity.

Mr. Speaker, things are happening at the site today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for that information.

She did indicate that the work – we heard a figure before, 90 per cent completed. So, obviously, there's a piece of work that's not completed.

Is the minister saying there is no adjustment to the first power indication? If work is not completed, has a process been initiated to have that work completed by another contractor?

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

MS. COADY: These are very important questions, Mr. Speaker.

I have been advised by Nalcor that the Astaldi work is 95 per cent complete and that it has no impact on the schedule, that the critical path is still being maintained.

The work of other contractors is ongoing. There is some outstanding work by Astaldi that they are making arrangements to have completed. That process is ongoing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Could the minister advise what the value figure is of the Astaldi work that's not completed to date?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, these are legal matters that I would like to consult with Nalcor to ensure that I have the correct figure as to what dollar figure there is in outstanding work.

I'm sure the Member opposite can appreciate, we want to make sure that we are protecting the work of Nalcor as we move forward in this project, but I will endeavour to find him some kind of an answer that would be satisfactory.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This issue we brought up here in the House, I'm just wondering – the minister for updating the general public. We haven't heard from the CEO of Nalcor or anybody else on this issue.

Was there a plan to update the public on this particular aspect of the project?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources for a short response, please.

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

I'll try to make a short response. Obviously, things are progressing through, from October 18 to 20, making sure that people got home safely, making sure that their wages were paid. Now Nalcor is working on the surety for subsequent wage payment to the workers that stayed on the site.

All those things are the most important first steps – are now moving towards the next step of Astaldi's contract being terminated. And the next step after that, of course, is determining who can fulfill the work that is outstanding.

I'm sure, in the near future, we'll get more updates.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, we learned the Waterford Hospital replacement will be built using a public-private Design Build Finance and maintenance model, a P3. This is will be the fourth one government has commissioned.

I ask the Premier: When Auditors General across the country have reported P3 models have cost far more than they should have, why does

he persist in saying P3s will be good for the province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we've engaged a number of consultants that have significant experience in doing this work across the country and the value-for-money analysis that have been done has come out that Newfoundland and Labrador would be the beneficiary.

Mr. Speaker, what is very different than what we seen from prior administrations in this province is that work, for instance, on the replacement for the Waterford Hospital, or the Western Memorial Regional Hospital and those long-term care sites, the services inside those facilities would be done by public sector workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's a very important and a very different distinction that we would have seen from the previous administration.

I can tell you now when you speak to the residents and the people who are looking forward to seeing those replacements of the buildings, they see this as a benefit for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, EY was paid \$1.7 million to evaluate the best financial model for building a P3 facility in Corner Brook. EY drew up comparison budgets and then recommended a P3 project. Then the same firm, EY, was given the procurement contract for this new project.

I ask the Premier. Can he explain this very apparent conflict of interest?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when you look for the consultants that are equipped and have the resources to do this work, companies like EY in this particular case was the group that

was chosen by the department and by this government.

Mr. Speaker, this really comes down to value for money for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the cases that we looked at, in all those cases, the value for money Newfoundland and Labrador would be the beneficiaries of that.

People in this province have been waiting for the replacement of the Waterford Hospital – it was opened in 1855. The best opportunity that we had to get a new facility for mental health patients in this province, Mr. Speaker, was to use this method and the value-for-money analysis that was done showed that Newfoundland and Labrador – this was the best option that we could use.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely do need a replacement for the Waterford. If the Premier is so concerned about value for money, I ask the Premier: Will he invite the Auditor General to review the P3 contracts now going forward and report to the House on her findings about this value for money?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, in this province, the Auditor General can come into the departments as that office so desires. In this particular case, I would welcome the Auditor General to go in and look at the analysis that was done.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I would even welcome the Leader of the Third Party if she so sees fit that she has the expertise in dealing with all of this, if she is so comfortable that there was a mistake that was made here and she wants to slow down this process, I would encourage her to come on and speak to the department herself, rather than sit in this House here, come and look at the information, get the technical analysis that has been afforded for you. I think you've done this already.

Mr. Speaker, we've done the analysis. The value for money is to the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are waiting to get those new buildings in place.

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.

We look forward to hearing of the invitation by the Premier to the Auditor General.

The people of the province are learning too late that the Muskrat Falls boondoggle could have been avoided if all the facts had been made public.

I ask the Premier, before he embarks on multiple mini-Muskrats will he make all P3 financial documents public so it can be determined if these –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: – projects are truly saving money and are in the best interests of the people?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the former leader of the Third Party, Mr. Speaker, sat in this House, as I did, from 2011 to 2015 in Opposition at that point in time. I think the former leader of the Third Party recognizes the position that I had taken on the Muskrat Falls Project, Mr. Speaker.

I did not need an inquiry at the time, did not need people – we did our own assessment. We knew at that point that this project was not the best project for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I think the Member opposite would know that. We sat through filibusters here trying to slow down this project. We fought to have it put in place, put to the Public Utilities

Board, the former administration refused to do that, Mr. Speaker.

I will assure you that any future developments in this province will be to the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians (inaudible)

—

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Oral Questions has ended.

MR. BROWNE: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order, the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. BROWNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise on Section 49 of the Standing Orders. During Question Period there were questions raised with respect to the Marystown Shipyard. While the Premier was responding to one of those questions, the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune made a comment, heckling the Premier, saying that we were searching for a Liberal to purchase the Marystown Shipyard. We're just trying to put the people of Marystown back to work and they expected better of the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker.

I ask that you ask the Member to withdraw the comment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Do I have any speakers to the point of order?

I don't see it as a point of order. It is a disagreement between hon. Members.

Thank you very much.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Housing Corporation Act, Bill 40.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act, Bill 39.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

MS. COADY: Thank you.

During Question Period, I was asked when Mr. Marshall may update on the Astaldi situation.

There will be a Quarter 3 call tomorrow, and certainly he'll be available to answer Astaldi questions at the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

Further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At a time when the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are dealing with high levels of taxation, increased unemployment rates, increased food bank usage, increased bankruptcies, many are being forced to choose between food, heat and medications, Newfoundland Power and Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro are continuing to seek numerous power rate increases through the Public Utilities Board. Once the Muskrat Falls Project comes online, these rates are predicted to further increase significantly to unmanageable levels for the average citizen of our province. While government has indicated that they are working with Nalcor to mitigate these rates, they've provided no detailed plan as how they intend to do so.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitions I have here today are primarily from St. John's, Mount Pearl, Paradise, Pouch Cove, Conception Bay South areas. And without getting into it all again, time to time, we all understand that we are looking down the barrel of a gun in terms of where power rates could potentially go. I understand that we know how we got there. We know how we got there and we're learning a lot more every day as we watch the inquiry. As a matter of fact, it's absolutely infuriating. I have to say, it is infuriating, some of the stuff that's come out in the inquiry the last couple of days in terms of reports not being provided to top government officials and so on, allegedly, and not being given all the information. And it's very, very troubling, to say the least.

But really what this petition is talking about is not how we got here, it's the fact that we're here and people have concerns about where the power rates are going to go. The government has said they are going to look at methods to mitigate rates. Everyone's glad to hear that, but they're just looking for some detailed plans as to how that's going to happen.

On a related note, Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to see that Newfoundland Power has reached a settlement agreement on their proposed rate proposal, and for the next two years rates are going to stay the same as they are. The 8.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent increase in profit margin is now off the table I've been told, and that's good news. It wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador putting the pressure on Newfoundland Power and putting the pressure on the PUB. I'm very glad to see that happen. Power to the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to call Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

From the Order Paper, I would call Order 2, third reading of Bill 12.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that Bill 12, An Act Respecting The Protection Of Intimate Images, be now read a third time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act Respecting The Protection Of Intimate Images. (Bill 12)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting The Protection Of Intimate Images," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 12)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 3, third reading of Bill 32.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services, that Bill 32, An Act To Amend The Labour Standards Act, be now read a third time.

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

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I usually don't get up on third readings, but in this case I have to thank the minister, the acting minister at the time, for arranging for the people from the Assessment Agency to come forward. And you, too, Mr. Speaker, myself and you attended the briefing. I know it was requested by other Members who didn't show up, but we were very informed of what we got that day. I

just want to thank the people, especially Mr. Martin from the Assessment Agency for coming and spending an hour or so with us and explaining it.

Again, in the future it's probably something we should do when we do have questions about certain bills to get people in like we did. Again, I know you attended the meeting and I attended the meeting and it was very informative, and I just want to thank the department for that.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: 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?

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Labour Standards Act. (Bill 32)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill is now read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Labour Standards Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 32)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call Order 4, third reading of Bill 34.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that Bill 34, An Act To

Amend The Assessment Act, 2006, be now read a third time.

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

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the hon. Member had the wrong bills, but that's okay. I do accept the fact that when this bill was in Committee there was a request from the Opposition to have a briefing with the Municipal Assessment Agency to get some clarification on how we could go from three years to one year without costing the MAA any more resources and any more cost. I think the MAA has come back and pretty clearly defined how that could happen, is through technology and other means.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's ironic that they would talk about increased cost. Right now, the cost per parcel of land is \$27. That's what it costs municipalities. Because of what we're doing here today, and because of efficiencies found in the MAA, there's a good chance that price will decrease – decrease, Mr. Speaker – and not increase.

I'll have to say, the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis did attend the meeting; unfortunately, the Member who requested this briefing did not attend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER: This bill is now read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Assessment Act, 2006," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 34)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Motion 2.

MR. SPEAKER: Motion 2.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Member for the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave be appointed Deputy Chair of Committees for the remainder of the Forty-Eighth General Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Do I have any speakers to the motion? Seeing none.

Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 8, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act No. 2. (Bill 36)

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MHA for Harbour Main, that Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act No. 2, be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act No. 2, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act No. 2.” (Bill 36)

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I am pleased to stand today to speak to the amendments to Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act No. 2. We know that workplace injuries have long lasting physical and emotional impacts on many individuals and families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before I speak specifically to the amendments we are bringing to the floor of the House today, I would like to provide you with a brief overview of workplace injury rates and the improvements we’ve made. We know there have been significant improvements in workplace safety in our province. More and more workers are returning home safely to their loved ones at the end of their work day.

In 2017, for the third consecutive year, the lost time incident rate due to workplace injury or illness in Newfoundland and Labrador remained at an all-time low of 1.5 per 100 workers, which is among the lowest in Canada; 92 per cent of employers in our province are injury free. This is a direct result of the co-operation and hard work from all safety partners including employers,

workers, labour, industry safety associations, training providers and government.

As an example, our province now has eight mandatory safety training programs that are standardized and regulated for over 60,000 workers each year – about 25 per cent of the workforce. As a result, the rate of falls from height has declined 31 per cent since specific training requirements were instituted in occupational health and safety legislation. Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province with a provincially regulated occupational health and safety high school course: OHS 3203. We’ve had a dedicated focus on creating awareness among young workers, and we can now proudly state that workers aged 15 to 24 lead the province in workplace safety.

The injury rate among 15- to 24-year-old workers remains stable in 2017, for the second consecutive year, with a 1.3 per 100 workers, and remains below the provincial rate. They consistently have a lower lost-time incident rate than the provincial rate. Mr. Speaker, these young workers are our future. We must continue to arm them with workplace safety fundamentals to carry forward throughout their careers.

Back in 2000, the injury rate was more than double what it is today. Workers today continue to receive safety training, are more informed on how to identify workplace hazards and are using safe work practices. We also know the devastating impacts that workplace injuries are having on workers and families in our province today.

WorkplaceNL serves approximately 13,000 injured workers in our province every year. On average, 13 workers are still being injured, or falling ill, due to their work each day. We know that, in an instant, a person’s life can change forever. For some individuals, the effects are felt for a short period of time, and they are able to return to work relatively quickly, but for others, it may last a lifetime.

Reducing workplace incidents is everyone’s responsibility and, together, we must continue to find ways to ensure that everyone returns home, healthy and safe, at the end of each workday.

WorkplaceNL remains committed to maintaining a sustainable workplace injury system for workers and employers in this province. We also remain committed to finding ways to improve the system. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today that in this hon. House we will debate an amendment to the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act* to make retirement benefits available for more injured workers in our province.

The new retirement benefit will be a one-time lump sum payment of 5 per cent of extended earnings loss benefits, plus interest. For workers who are previously part of an employer-sponsored pension plan, the payment will be 10 per cent, plus interest.

This change will apply to all injured workers who receive extended earnings loss benefits from WorkplaceNL on or after January 1, 2019. This means that it applies to workers receiving benefits in 2018 that continue into 2019.

Workers will receive the one-time retirement benefit when they turn 65 years of age, even if they are no longer receiving extended earnings loss benefits at that time. Should an injured worker pass away before the age of 65, their dependant may qualify for the benefit. I would like to highlight this change, Mr. Speaker, as the previous program did not pay dependants. Injured workers will have the flexibility to invest or spend their tax-free lump sum payment according to their own choice.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment will make the calculations for retirement benefits easier to understand, and we have also reduced the paperwork involved. We have reduced the red tape. Injured workers can expect to receive their lump sum payment faster than before. Under the previous program, it could take up to two years to process the more complex cases.

These amendments will also increase the number of eligible injured workers. In fact, the previous program excluded approximately 45 per cent of injured workers, including those who did participate in an employer-sponsored pension plan at the time of their injury – many of whom were women. Therefore, the new retirement benefit program is more inclusive and equitable.

Mr. Speaker, the workers' compensation system in our province is fully funded at 131.6 per cent, as of December 31, 2017. It can now sustain a benefit increase for injured workers without increasing the average base assessment rate paid by employers. In fact, the average assessment rate for employers was lowered to \$1.90 per \$100 of assessable payroll for 2018, a 31 per cent decrease since 2013. Remaining fully funded ensures the security of funds to pay for the current and future costs of workplace injury and illness in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I referenced earlier, Mr. Speaker, the positive trends in workplace safety across our province, along with the lost-time incident rate at an all-time low of 1.5 per 100 workers, has resulted in fewer claims. This, in turn, has led to lower employment assessment rates. The change in retirement benefits we are debating in this hon. House today will have an initial cost of \$23.7 million. But there will not be any further additional cost to employers. These costs will be considered with determining the assessment rates to be paid by employers next year and will not result in a rate increase at this time.

Mr. Speaker, over the past several years we have made a number of significant improvements to workers' compensation system, with a view to improving the lives of the many individuals in our province who have experienced a workplace injury or illness.

Mr. Speaker, back in December of 2016 we announced the implementation of presumptive cancer coverage for career and volunteer firefighters. Our government recognized the need for a benefit that firefighters have been seeking for more than a decade and was already provided in most other provinces.

We also increased the income replacement rate for injured workers and updated the mental stress policy to make it more inclusive. These are but a few of the many positive changes we have made in the workers' compensation system to help improve the lives of injured workers.

Today represents one more positive initiative in our efforts to improve the workers' compensation system for injured workers and their families in Newfoundland and Labrador. We know this legislation is welcomed by many

injured workers in our province. It is one more step along our path to help reduce the financial, emotional and physical impacts workplace incidents are having on injured workers and their families and their communities.

Our government is proud of the amendment we are debating today. Proud of the fact that we are making retirement benefits available for more injured workers. This debate also provides an opportunity to continue the dialogue on workplace safety. Together with employers, workers, industry safety associations, employer and labour advocates we continue to build an even stronger culture of safety in our province.

Workplace health and safety is everyone's responsibility and we will continue to work together with everyone who plays a role in keeping our workplaces safe as well as supporting our injured workers.

As I have stated previously in this hon. House, it is important that we constantly review and amend our legislation to ensure it is meeting the needs of the people of our province.

I am pleased that we are here today to debate this amendment to the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly an honour and a privilege to rise in this House and speak to Bill 36, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act No. 2. Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill, as the minister just outlined, is to amend the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act* to repeal the currently monthly replacement benefit that is available to injured workers and replace it instead with a tax-free lump sum retirement benefit.

First, I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the background on the bill, Mr. Speaker. The *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act*

comes under the purview of Service NL and the Minister of Service NL, of course, is responsible for WorkplaceNL.

Under the authority of the act, WorkplaceNL administers a mandatory, employer-funded, no-fault work injury insurance system, and there are various benefits and services available to injured workers through WorkplaceNL. The pension replacement benefit that is being repealed with Bill 36 is one such example of the types of benefits that are available from WorkplaceNL for those injured on the job.

What is the pension replacement benefit, for the purposes of people who may be watching here today? According to WorkplaceNL's Injured Workers Handbook: if an individual is receiving compensation benefits from WorkplaceNL and they turn 65 years of age, wage-loss benefits usually cease.

Currently, in such circumstances with the act as it's presently written, in such instances a person can apply for a pension replacement benefit. In order to actually receive the pension replacement benefit, the individual must show a loss of retirement income from either the Canada Pension Plan or a registered employer-sponsored pension as a result of their injury.

So for the years they were receiving compensation, they were no longer paying into these pension funds and, of course, as a result, once they reach 65 their benefit would be reduced. If that was the case and they were able to demonstrate their loss of benefits, they may be entitled to the amount of pension lost due to their work-related injury.

In describing the current pension replacement benefit, during our briefing yesterday WorkplaceNL officials noted that the pension replacement benefit is not payable to a dependent or spouse upon the death of the worker. So, in such a situation, you have two people living as seniors on a fixed, reduced income and if the person who is a recipient of the WorkplaceNL pension benefit passes away, then there is no portion of that that can be availed of by their partner or spouse.

As well, 45 per cent of potentially, eligible injured workers do not qualify for this benefit

once they reach age 65. Often the reason for their inability to qualify is the difficulty in producing the required documentation to show how they suffered a pension loss.

The process of applying for the pension replacement benefit, another current impediment that was identified is that when you apply for the pension replacement benefit now, it can be a difficult and lengthy process as the relevant supporting documents have to be gathered and the actuarial assessments have to be carried out. We were informed yesterday in the briefing that this can take anywhere from eight months to two years, which is a fairly lengthy time frame for those who reach the age of 65 to continue on living without any type of additional supports.

So with the amendments that are being proposed in Bill 36, the monthly pension replacement benefit will be repealed and replaced with a new lump-sum retirement benefit. It will take effect on January 1, 2019. So we're just about a month-and-a-half away from that.

Any individual who is currently in receipt of the pension replacement benefit under the existing program, however, will stay on the old system. So there is a provision, Mr. Speaker, for grandfathering those who are already in the (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: – system to stay there. But anyone who turns 65 and is on Workers' Comp in 2019, they will fall under the new system which is being introduced through this bill.

What is the new retirement benefit going to look like? Well, it's calculated to be a percentage of a total extended earnings loss benefits which will either be 5 per cent or 10 per cent, depending on the circumstance of the individual, plus interest. It will be 5 per cent for persons just paying into CPP and 10 per cent for those who have also paid into an employer sponsored pension plan prior to their injury. It will be a tax-free, lump-sum payment at the age of 65 and all extended learning loss recipients will receive a benefit if active any time on or after January 1, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, a significant change in this new bill, or new law that's being brought forward, is that the new benefit will be payable to a dependant such as a spouse upon the death of the injured worker. It is projected that the average lump-sum payment is estimated to be about \$44,000. That will be the average payment.

Officials noted there will be significant upfront costs associated with switching to the new retirement benefit but they are projecting within the long-term it should result in savings. There will be an initial cost of \$23.7 million to WorkplaceNL's injury fund, but they are projecting that in the long run this will translate into a savings of \$700,000 in annual savings to the fund. In addition to that, they're projecting that the expense now being paid out to actuarial services is about \$200,000 a year. So that money will be saved as well.

The switch to a lump-sum payment is also going to come at a cost to government, though, Mr. Speaker, because government is a self-insured employer. WorkplaceNL officials stated there will be added budgetary pressure on some government departments upfront, but over the long-term there would be a future benefit liability savings of \$4.9 million. What that immediate pressure is going to be on some government departments upfront, we don't have the information provided to us on that but it should be reflected in the upcoming budget documents, I would think, Mr. Speaker.

Officials also noted that the switch to the new model will not impact employer assessment rates at this time. We were unable to get any clarity with respect to the quote at this time. We're still a bit unclear as to what that means in terms of future outlook. Will there be an impact on employers in the long run? Maybe that is something we can talk about when we get to Committee of the Whole and see if we can get some more clarity on that issue.

The positive impacts of the proposed changes were highlighted in the briefing we had. These include – and I'll just reiterate them again for anyone in the public who may be watching this with keen interest and are currently recipients of this benefit that will be impacted.

It is projected, by department officials, that more people will be covered under this new retirement benefit because there'll be a greater catchment area in terms of the need to demonstrate your pension's loss won't be there. So more people, the 4 per cent to 5 per cent of people who are now falling through the cracks will most likely be encompassed in this new benefit.

It's predicted that this will be, in particular, of benefit for women, and up to 54 per cent more women will be covered. All extended earnings loss recipients will receive a benefit. The new benefit will be payable to a dependant upon the death of the worker, which again is something that isn't happening now and certainly will be of significant help in reducing financial hardships once a person's partner has passed on.

Individuals will be treated more equally and the process will be far less cumbersome for injured workers and WorkplaceNL, so it's anticipated there should be a substantial administrative savings as well, Mr. Speaker.

Workers' compensation boards in six provinces now across the country have a benefit payable at age 65, based on a percentage of financial benefits. And these are – I'll explain some of them now – Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia provide for 5 per cent of benefits, while New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Yukon provide for 10 per cent of benefits. I guess what the bill here is proposing in Bill 36 is that the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador will actually be using a hybrid of these and the rate will be from 5 to 10 per cent, depending on the individual's own circumstance.

During our briefing yesterday, WorkplaceNL officials stated that there has been frustration with the current model, but the real driver to make the amendments is the growth in the liability of the current system. That liability was \$22 million in 2007, which represented about 3 per cent of the value of the injury fund. But here we are 10 years later, and that amount has grown from \$22 million to \$104 million, which represents 9 per cent of the injury fund. And going forward that number would continue to climb. So by introducing this new measure, they're hoping to cap the liability where it is and, moving forward, minimize any future

liabilities for the taxpayers of the province, and for the injury fund – the business taxpayers, I guess.

Officials stated that representatives from the Federation of Labour and the Employers' Council sit on the WorkplaceNL board and, as such, were consulted. They said that the response has been positive. It was not indicated whether representatives of the injured workers or other groups were consulted, Mr. Speaker. We made some effort to reach out today, but we didn't have a whole lot of time before the bill was called. So we certainly would like to do more consultation before really finalizing where it is those most impacted by this bill, where their thought processes are on these changes.

Officials said that an average of 200 clients will turn 65 each year, and about 12 per cent of clients could have been better off under the old program, as their monthly payment could have been more beneficial. That speaks more to longevity, Mr. Speaker, if someone lived a very long life, and they would draw a monthly benefit. So it's anticipated that about 12 per cent of people will be impacted by the lump sum.

In terms of the proposed amendments now, Mr. Speaker, I'll just briefly give an overview with respect to these. Subsection 2(1) of the act is amendment to add a definition for employer-sponsored pension plan which includes, under section (j.1)(i) "a pension plan that is registered with and certified by the Superintendent of Pensions under the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997* or an equivalent Act of another province or of the Parliament of Canada; and (ii) a pension plan that is established under an Act of the province."

Section 75 of the current act outlines requirements for the pension replacement benefit paid to eligible injured workers in receipt of wage loss benefits at the age of 65. It is based on the principle of compensation for demonstrated pension loss and provides monthly pension replacement benefits. It is not payable to the dependant's spouse upon the death of the worker. But, with Bill 36, section 75 will be repealed and replaced with text outlining details and requirements for the new retirement benefit.

Just again, for purposes of increasing awareness to our listening public, the new retirement

benefit will be a percentage of the total extended earnings loss benefits, plus interest, and it will be a lump sum, non-taxable at the age of 65. The payment will be 5 per cent of eligible earnings for workers without an employer pension plan, or 10 per cent for those who have an employer-sponsored pension plan, Mr. Speaker.

All extended earning loss recipients will receive the benefit if active and in time on or after January 1, 2019. The new benefit will be payable to a dependant upon death of a worker. So again, I've said that several times, Mr. Speaker, but it's important that people realize some of the changes and these are beneficial changes in terms of the portability of the benefits being payable to a dependant.

Mr. Speaker, these proposed amendments will come into effect on January 1, which is within about a month and a half or so. But we do still have a lot of questions surrounding the bill. It is a rather significant change and one we certainly would have appreciated more time to do more research with. Some of the questions we have outstanding and that we will be posing in Committee of the Whole pertain to how does this impact the other benefits that a person at the age of 65 would have. For example, in the past, at the age of 65 you received a monthly benefit, which was spread over 12 months and factored into your total gross income. From your total gross income, Revenue Canada determines your eligibility for the Guaranteed Income Supplement. If you cannot receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement, you cannot receive the provincial drug card because it's a stipulation you must be in receipt of the GIS in order to avail of a provincial drug card.

Many people think that automatically at the age of 65 you will qualify for a drug card, but such is not the case. It really does depend on your total gross income. So how does this impact from a taxation point of view and a calculation of other benefits that seniors receive? Will this lump sum, then, have to be written off over the next three or four years and thereby prevent someone who is on workers' comp from availing of the GIS and drug card?

So, these are some of the types of outstanding questions that we have and that we will

hopefully be able to get some more clarity on once we get into Committee of the Whole.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time, and look forward to the rest of the debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

MS. PARSLEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in this hon. House today to speak on Bill 36, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act.

Like all MHAs in this House, we have heard the stories of workplace incidents that have forever changed the lives of our constituents. Too many times we see the tremendous impacts that workplace injuries have on their physical, emotional and social health.

While it was just last week that I became parliamentary secretary to the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PARSLEY: – I am aware of the tremendous work that has been done to help improve the lives of injured workers in our province. I have learned of the tremendous effort that is underway by many dedicated individuals to help improve the lives of injured workers in our province.

As the Minister of Service NL said earlier back in December 2016, our government announced implementation of presumptive cancer coverage for career and volunteer firefighters. This coverage represented a benefit that firefighters had been seeking for a long time, and was already provided in most other provinces. It means that firefighters diagnosed with specific cancers are presumed to have contracted the disease as a result of their work, and their adjudication processing faster through WorkplaceNL.

They can now receive wage loss benefits, medical aids and certain other benefits through Workplace NL, while health care costs

associated with firefighters' cancer treatments are paid through the medical care plan.

Earlier this year, our government initiated a review of WorkplaceNL's mental stress policy in order to explore options through a modernized approach of work-related mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Changes were made to the policy to recognize that work-related mental illness issues may be caused by exposure to multiple traumatic events.

It also includes events that are an inherent part of our occupation, such as first responders, witness fatalities. The revisions, all in our policy, to be applied more fairly across their occupations. The worker must have a diagnosis from a regulated health care professional such as a physician, nurse practitioner, psychologist, psychiatrist, and demonstrate exposure to one of our most traumatic events.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL has indicated publicly on many occasions, work continues on this very important matter. Our government also increased the income replacement rate from 80 to 85 per cent of pre-injury net earnings. This increase has certainly been a benefit to injured workers or their dependents. It gave us the ability to improve the lives of approximately 13,000 injured workers or the spouses of deceased workers, and that is significant. It is especially significant given the income replacement rate that has not increased since 1998.

Mr. Speaker, last February, WorkplaceNL and Service NL launched a new five-year workplace injury and illness prevention strategy. This plan was developed in consultation with injury prevention partners and stakeholders and is aimed at helping protect workers from hazards in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, serious injuries have increased by 21 per cent over the last decade. These types of injuries can be devastating to injured workers and their families. We also know that young workers, those aged 15 to 24 years, have a lower injury rate than the provincial rate. We need to continue to provide a solid foundation of safety awareness to that generation so they will carry that proactive safety culture throughout their careers.

Our workplace safety programs also need to respond to the aging demographics of our workplace. While we need to maintain a focus on preventing workplace injuries, we also maintain focus on those who have already been injured. The amendment to make retirement benefits available for more injured workers in Newfoundland and Labrador is a wonderful example of this effort.

When an injured worker turns 65 years old, they will receive a one-time, lump-sum pension payment of 5 per cent of extended earnings loss benefits paid by WorkplaceNL, plus interest. Those injured workers who were members of an employer-sponsored pension program will receive 10 per cent of extended earnings loss benefits, plus interest. Plus, one of the greatest aspects of this amendment is its impact on the number of injured worker who were previously excluded under the previous program. Given it had excluded approximately 45 per cent of injured workers, this change we're debating today is significant.

I am proud to stand with my colleagues today on a bill that will have such a profound, positive impact on the lives of so many injured individuals. It reminds me of why I chose to serve the public of my district and the province in the first place – to make a difference. It represents one of the most important issues we have to tackle as a government for injured workers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to say how delighted I am to rise to speak to these amendments. I think it's important to also highlight, once again, the fact that there will not be any additional costs to employers as a result of this bill. I think it's also important to highlight the fact that a dependant spouse will now be eligible for the benefit should an injured worker pass away before the age of 65. This was not the case under the previous system.

We will continue to work to improving the workers' compensation system in our province, for both injured workers and employees. We will also continue our efforts to help keep safety foremost in everyone's thinking, as one workplace injury is one too many.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It is good to stand today and speak to Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act.

I have to say, before receiving the bill and being briefed on it, I was not aware of the situation that existed with regard to the monthly pension replacement benefit which is paid to people on workers' compensation when they turn 65.

Knowing what the situation is – and it's been outlined by the minister and also by the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. Knowing the current situation and the inequities that are in the current situation, I think it's really good that government is bringing this bill here to the floor. It'll do two things: it will make things better, both for people receiving the benefit and for their spouses, especially when the person receiving the benefit dies; and, it'll be better also internally in government with regard to the red tape. Because even the administration that's involved is difficult both for staff and also for the workers receiving the benefit.

We are told the documentation that the person who is on workers' comp has to produce in order to receive the benefit is quite extensive. It includes old records of pension payments, et cetera, and there has to be an actuarial assessment done. It can go on for months, sometimes up to a couple of years. So it seems to me the system we have really is not working well, especially for those who should get the benefits and for their spouses. It's extremely important I think that the government has taken action on this and has brought this bill forward.

We are told by the officials that it will not affect employer assessment rates, and I think that's important as well. So while the lump-sum payment will benefit the recipient, this new way of paying the benefit will not affect the employer assessment rates. That's something we would be happy about as well.

Moving to the lump-sum payment will mean a future liability savings to the government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: I won't be crass and say that's the reason the government is doing this. I would hope they're doing it mainly for the recipients, and I'm sure they are, but it's also not a bad thing that government will save money by using this new method without the recipients themselves suffering a loss of income.

Some of the positive impacts; the average benefit, the lump-sum payment will be \$40,000. The new benefit will be paid to the spouse if the worker is deceased, and more people will qualify for it. I think that's really important. Fifty-four per cent more women will qualify – because so many women aren't part of a pension plan and they will qualify for it.

There will be no more long waits. A small group who has yet to turn 65 may have been better off under the monthly payment. If they live long enough, their monthly benefits might be higher than a lump sum. That's more a possibility for somebody with a high earning, like a miner at IOC, for example. But it would be a small group, and the majority, a larger group would benefit from the new system.

There is one question that we have, and we can ask it in Committee if the minister doesn't get to it when she stands again, and it has to do with the income tax. Will CRA consider this lump sum payment taxable income?

I remember – and we haven't had a lot of time to work on this. I know there was a good briefing yesterday, but it was only yesterday. But I do have a memory of something happening a few years ago with regard to payments to public service sector workers under one of the agreements, and there was lump sum money involved, and the lump sum payments were taxable under CRA.

So that is a question for us. People may need a tax-free savings account or a similar mechanism to spread the money out over a number of years and not be taxed. So it is a serious question, and

I hope that we might get an answer from the minister.

I know that six other provinces do have some form of lump sum benefit, so perhaps this is an issue that has been dealt with. Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia pay out 5 per cent across the board; New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Yukon pay out 10 per cent; and we will pay out 5 per cent or 10 per cent, depending on the source of the pension.

It brings us in line with several other jurisdictions in the country, which is good. As I said, perhaps because it already exists, this issue of potential for its being a taxable income has been dealt with, and I certainly hope that we will get an answer to that. As it happens, this won't be grandfathered. People who are the existing monthly benefit will stay in that system. So the new system is for moving forward. I think it's going to be effective January 1, 2019, so this coming January.

So we'll be happy to support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

The motion is that Bill 36 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: Carried.

CLERK (Murphy): A bill, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act No. 2. (Bill 36)

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

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

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act No. 2," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 36)

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 36.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act No. 2.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act No. 2." (Bill 36)

CLERK (Barnes): Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of questions for the minister. The first one is: Why are these changes being made now at this point in time?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: We are now responding to a request that was in the stat review and the injured workers and individuals who represent injured workers are looking forward to this change, as is the Employers' Council.

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

MS. PERRY: Can you provide some elaboration for us with respect to what the proposed changes are being driven by?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, they are being driven by the requests from the Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council, requests from the Newfoundland and Labrador labour representatives, and the individuals.

There was a stat review completed by the previous administration. There were extensive consultations done and this was one of the recommendations that was put forward.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

How many individuals are currently in receipt of the monthly pension replacement benefit?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I can't get the exact number that's receiving pension benefit right now. I will get it for you though. There are 1,300 clients in receipt of WorkplaceNL benefits.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Minister and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can you tell us what the amount of the average monthly benefit being paid to an individual is currently and, furthermore, can you confirm for this House that all of those individuals will continue to receive the monthly benefit once the new system comes into effect?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So, it's done on an individual basis, as you are aware. Each individual is based under the MCAE for that particular year and the percentage of their income. I can't give you an exact amount because the individual range, the incomes are totally varied.

The individuals that are presently receiving the pension benefit today will continue to receive the same pension benefit that they're getting. Right up until December 31, 2018, individuals will be under the old system. January 1, 2019, they'll be under the new system.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The lump sum payment, as we understand it, is going to be tax free. Is the monthly benefit that individuals are receiving under the current regime tax free as well?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, this is a tax-free benefit and there are 1,200 individuals receiving the pension plan today.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Are the lump sum payments for these benefits consistent with what is occurring in other provinces? I also understand that the average lump sum payment is going to be approximately \$44,000. Is there any data available with respect to what will be the absolute minimum and

absolute maximum of these lump sum payments?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Again, the minimum and maximum are based on the individual's income. You could have an individual that was receiving minimum wage when they were injured, or an individual that was receiving over the MCAE, which is \$64,375 right now, and they would get 85 per cent of that amount. So it's totally dependent on the individual's income at the time at of injury.

Some provinces are doing 5 per cent; some provinces are doing 10 per cent. We alluded to the 5 per cent for individuals who can't prove that they were attached to a previous pension, so it reflects the different impacts that the injury had on potential retirement savings into the future.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The briefing highlighted the positive impacts that these changes will have on workers, but can you provide any detail with any items that may have been considered by your department, with respect to how injured workers might be negatively impacted with this change?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: As with any income that you receive in that particular year, it's going to affect your income line; therefore, what we are doing here is we are allowing individuals – so this is a lump sum payment at 65. However, the individuals have an option that up to a year from their 65th birthday – so they can receive this payment. They don't have to receive it in that calendar year; they can wait until the next calendar year, but it has to be by their 66th birthday. We are going to give them that option, so it doesn't have that actual impact on their income on that particular year.

It's like with any lump sum payment that an individual receives. It is going to raise their

income for that particular year, but it's not taxable. So that's the impact.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could individuals, with a more generous pension plan, be paid a lower amount under the new system?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, it is possible. The actuaries use mortality charts, so it's totally dependent on an estimation of how long an individual would live.

It is possible that there may be a small percentage of people, that if they stayed on the old pension plan as it exists today, and they lived longer, they could receive more money. However, this change is a more equitable and equal change, and it also enables beneficiaries and spouse to get a payment, which they wouldn't have gotten before.

So this type of change to the pension benefit plan allows people to have a lump sum payment at once, which individuals wanted. If an individual passes away, their spouse or their dependants could qualify for funding, which they can't now.

If an individual is on extended earnings loss, let's say, after January 1, 2019 and they're off for a couple of years and then they go back to work, well, in the future, at 65, they're still entitled to a percentage of this pension benefit payout at 65 based on the length of time they were off on EEL. So, there are a number of benefits with this change that are not existing today.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can you confirm that the tax-free lump sum payment will count as part of an individual's gross income?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, it will count as a part of an individual's income for the year that they received the funding.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Was any consideration given to any implications that this could have on individuals who avail of programs where gross income is a factor in determining program eligibility, for example, the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, social housing programs like Newfoundland and Labrador Home Repairs, GST credits, access to legal aid – can you tell us how this will be impacted?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Right now if an individual receives a pension plan and it affects their income – they receive that amount per year, so it's a long term. With this, they're going to receive it in one year, so it will be an impact on that particular year or when they determine – when they decide to take it, like within a year.

WorkplaceNL will continue to pay the necessary health care costs related to the work injury. If an individual has an extraordinary medical cost, they can apply to the Assurance Plan within Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Plan. What I think you're getting at is if this bumps a person's income up so they no longer qualify, it could happen for that one year that they take the money; but if they wait until the next year to take it, that will be their income so it may not effect it the same way.

There are a very small percentage of people that are in that bracket. But again if you have extenuating medical circumstances that require the funding, you can qualify under the Assurance Plan.

This plan as a whole is a much better plan than the present one that exists today.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can you outline for us what the implications of the proposed changes will be for employers?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: The cost of the current PRB program is projected to continue to escalate.

In 2007, the program liabilities were \$22 million. By 2017, they have grown to \$104 million. The actuaries are projecting an annual savings of \$700,000 in the benefits cost, plus an additional annual savings of \$200,000 in actuarial costs is expected, compared to the continuing current PRB.

So there will not be an impact on the employers with this. The employers want this change. This is a way of being fiscally responsible because this plan is just growing out of control.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is a very important issue because of course employers are very much a part of this equation as well, and they are what fund the workers' compensation system, so we need to ensure that we have balance for both groups.

One of the difficulties I'm having with respect to being expected to approve this bill today is we really don't know what the future effects on rates are going to be for employers. We don't know if the rates will go up or if they will go down.

Has there been any research into – I know it's clearly stated in our briefing that there will be no change at this time, but do you have insight with respect to future as to whether or not there will be increased cost to the employer or a decreased cost?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Well right now, the injury fund, we're overfunded. We were 131 per cent and then we had the income replacement

benefit, we went from 80 to 85 per cent which decreased us, and our objective and goal is to get it to 110.

So, this right now will not have an impact to employers, and the fund is very healthy, and funded. In actual fact, I anticipate there will be a decrease in the assessment rate to employers. That's the anticipation in the next year, not that this is going to have an impact.

This is funded, and this will actually be a better program, as we move into the future, for the employers.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Minister, and thank you Mr. Chair.

So can you give us any further detail with respect to how the injury fund itself will be impacted?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So, December 31 the injury fund was at 131.6. Our objective and goal is to get to 110.

We introduced the income replacement rate. We went from 80 to 85 per cent. That brought the injury fund then down to 124. Again, like I said, we're moving towards 110. We have one of the lower assessment rates. We're on par to lower with the rest of Canada. New Brunswick just increased theirs dramatically.

For the employers, this overall program will actually help make this program more fiscally responsible.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Will you be able to provide some more detail for us with respect to the upfront cost to government?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I can, in one second.

Right now, government – we are aware that between January 1, 2019 and March 31, 2021, there are 21 employees across different departments. The estimated impact – this is a total estimation impact based on 44,000 – for January 1 to March 31, about 176,000; from April 1 to March 31, about 484,000; and from April 1 to March 31, 264,000.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland – my apologies.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was wondering if the minister could just comment on – currently, under the wage-loss system, it's my understanding that when someone reaches the age of 65 a benefit could terminate, but there are provisions to allow for – if someone can demonstrate they have a deficiency in their retirement income from CPP or registered employer pension plan as a result of it, they may be entitled to the amount of pension lost due to the workplace injury.

Under the new system, is there any provision if someone can demonstrate they've had a loss of other retirement benefit that they will be accommodated with the new lump-sum payment, or would there be any accommodation for this under the new system being proposed?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So that is the 10 per cent, that's the difference. So it's 5 per cent for individuals that cannot show they have a wage loss from a pension they previously paid into or a pension loss, and the 10 per cent component is for individuals who can show they had previous pensions. There is that allotment to allow because individuals show that there is an actual demonstrated pension loss.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister for that. I'm just wondering, was there any assessment done based on those individuals you just referenced to be better off or

not as well off, or there would be no significant change in their financial position based on coming from the old system to the new system to demonstrate retirement eligibility after 65?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So, overall, this new benefit is a better benefit. And there's probably – because, again, as I explained earlier, it's based on mortality rates. So there could be a group of people – I can't hear, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Thank you.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: There could be a small group of individuals who would live to be 90 or 100 that possibly could have received more money under the old system than the new one. So that is certainly possible, but, overall, the new package is better for employers, is better for injured workers, is better for dependent spouses, dependent children. Overall, it is a more equitable program, and more people will receive the benefit under the new program.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Would you be able to provide for us some more detail on the \$4.9 million future benefit liability savings for government as a whole?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So the \$4.9 million is a one-time savings. And the difference between the future liability for government under the current PRB, in the proposed retirement benefit, actuarial work was determined that the new model is expected to cost government \$4.9 million less than the current model. So that was actual actuarial work that was completed to arrive at that number.

Again, it's based on – they use mortality factors to determine.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Minister.

Can you provide to us some information – can you explain the growth in the liability of the current system as it presently stands in terms of its growth to \$104 million where it sits today?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Really, what I can say is, like, in 2007 it was at \$22 million and it has grown to \$104 million. So it's showing that this particular program that we are using is not sustainable and it is not fiscally responsible; therefore, making this change to a new benefit that the injured workers support and the employers support is the best way to go.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Minister, and Mr. Chair.

Can you tell us which groups were consulted in the drafting of this legislation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Consultations were done as part of the stat review that was done in 2013. There were 15 consultations in 13 communities; 65 written and verbal submissions.

So this was a recommendation from the stat review, this exact change.

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

MS. PERRY: Can you tell us if there were any discussions with the injured worker – well, I know the injured workers through the provincial consultation process, but with respect to the Newfoundland and Labrador Injured Workers Association, Workers' Advisor, the Federation of Business, those types of entities. Were any of these directly consulted?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: During the consultation phase that happened back in 2013 by the previous administration, they were included in the consultations. Since then, we've worked with the Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council and the Federation of Labour, which are the representations at the table.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if the minister could comment on the – there was an actuarial analysis done to see the lump-sum component of it and paying out – when someone receiving extended earnings loss (inaudible) at 65 is supposed to be paid out until death.

I'm wondering, in the actuarial analysis, what age was used for both male and females in doing that analysis?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I will have to get that answer for the Member.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you.

So I guess, in the briefing, am I understanding there was reference made to the initial cost of about \$24 million to the injury fund? But a \$700,000 in annual savings to the fund and an annual actuarial savings of roughly \$200,000.

I assume those numbers are directly linked to the ages that were used for a male and female in the actuarial analysis to determine what the savings are, because those individuals who exceed the ages that you used for your analysis, that would be money that would never be paid out under this system.

So would that be correct, and these numbers would reflect those changes?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, and the mortality tables use the age of 83. So that's correct, what you just said.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: They just came back and told me the age is 83 in the mortality tables.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This will be my last question, but I understand my colleagues have a few left as well.

What is the plan, once this bill is passed, to inform stakeholders, particularly the employers and the affected injured workers, about the changes to the retirement benefit?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: The way it works right now is that if an individual passes away, for example, the family usually contacts Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation to say stop those EEL payments. Also, we have an agreement with Health and Community Services in the event somebody passes away, to inform us that that individual has passed away.

Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation will contact all individuals who are receiving extended earnings loss on January 1, 2019, and inform them of this change to the pension plan.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to revert to the age that was identified by the minister in regard to age 83, in regard to the actuarial analysis and paying out lump sum. Those individuals, when they hit the age of 65 in 2019 and they're on extended earnings loss and they get a lump-sum payment, if those individuals live beyond the age of 83, they're not entitled to benefits any more from the system, even though they have a work-related injury.

Is there any assessment done at that point in time of what programs may be available to them either provincially or federally to offset the fact at that point in time – even if they invest their money and they had to draw down, and up the age of 83 after the fact that would be spent. Is there any, after that time, any programs or any analysis done to what would be made available to them to offset that loss of income?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Jurisdictionally, no, there is nothing. We've done jurisdictional analysis on that to see; however, WorkplaceNL still does provide the medical assistance, and any other programs and assistance that they provide for injured workers.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister for that. I guess my issue is related to the lump-sum payment upfront. There are very many pension plans that people are entitled to. Some do have the ability to provide lump-sum payments, others do not.

I guess my question is just – in regard to those individuals long-term, they had a work-related injury. They received a lump-sum at the age of 66 or 67. That affects – because that is, while it's not taxable, it would go into their annual income and be reflective of what benefits they could draw down over the next number of years, because that's probably prorated much like severance. When you receive severance, if you're entitled to EI, that's prorated over a bunch of years; therefore, you're not entitled to certain benefits.

Such an individual, at the age of 84, has not drawn down on any of those benefits because they were deemed probably not eligible. So I'm just wondering, from that perspective, at the age of 84, what benefits is that individual entitled to that had a legitimate work-related injury, but because you brought in this new lump-sum program they're not entitled to benefits after that point?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. So you're using the age 83-84, that's a mortality table. So that's just a table that the actuaries use to determine an amount. That's not a factual number, because I could live to be 90 or 95 and I will still receive the benefits that WorkplaceNL give to me for my health benefits or what have you, but I will receive my lump-sum payment at 65.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: I won't belabour the point, but my point is you receive that lump-sum payment. So normally, we would hope, most people would take that and invest it, and they would draw down on that amount similar to what the wage would be, I suspect, if they had received biweekly extended earnings loss right up to when they died.

So if you took that money, invested it and drew down similar to what you would have earned on the old system, my point is the actuarial age used is 83 or 80 or whatever, but in that point in time, if someone lives beyond that date, if they just drew down what they were entitled to every two weeks ...

Mr. Chair, it's hard to hear here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

We got issues with wind blowing here today. It's 50 per cent of the noise, the other 50 per cent is with the Members, and I certainly ask for your indulgence here. I'm just having trouble hearing the speakers.

Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) wind blowing.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Well, there is wind blowing. I'd say to the Members, this is an important issue. It's of people's lives, and that's what this legislation is all about. So we don't think it's wind, we think it's extremely important. That's why we're asking the questions.

So with this particular issue, Minister, as I said, if someone receives a lump sum at the age of 66, they invest it and they draw down on it as if they had gotten biweekly extended earnings loss cheques up to the age of 83 or 84, whatever the case would be. The likelihood is they are out of benefits at that particular time, even if they drew down from their own investment.

My point is, what individual after that age, what's available to them, who had a legitimate work injury and after that date basically have drawn down all their funds?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Chair, what I can say is that an individual receives a lump sum and they invest it, they're going to get the interest on that investment also in addition, as opposed to just receiving it biweekly.

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

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

Minister, I got some general questions. I know the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune asked a similar question, but my concern is with a drug card. Once a person turns 65 and they do get a lump sum of \$44,000, is the maximum that they can receive, what effect is that going to have on that individual who – because of their income beforehand, they could use their drug card. Now that they go into a different tax bracket and have a different income, obviously, it's going to have an effect on things like the drug card.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So as I alluded to earlier, at 65 years old or one year up to the 66th birthday, the individual can take this lump sum. So it can be in the future calendar year as opposed to the present one. It can impact them for that particular year, but only for that particular year; however, some individuals when they move over to this pension plan after 65, they have a higher income for a longer period of time and it impacts them for a longer period of time.

With this particular one, yes, you're right, it can have an impact on that one year.

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

Sometimes drug cards are – I'm not sure what the total amount of money is, but sometimes individuals have to pay out huge amounts for prescription drugs or whatever it is. In cases where they may receive \$20,000, yet they may have drug expenses that exceed \$20,000, is there anything in place for people that are affected like that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes. If a worker has extraordinary expensive drug costs unrelated to work-related injury they may still be eligible for coverage under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Plan, the Assurance Plan. So that is possible. There is a possible program in place.

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

MR. K. PARSONS: So what changes have we made to accommodate that? Because it's based on a person's actual income of what they can apply for under that drug card. So what changes have been made to their prescription drug plan to accommodate people who find themselves receiving, like I said earlier, \$20,000? If their expenses exceed that amount, are there some changes that have been made to the drug plan?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: The insurance plan exists today. People with extraordinary costs can apply to that. WorkplaceNL will still continue to pay an individual's medical costs related to the injury. They will continue until their death.

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

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

My question is sometimes the drug coverage is not related to the worker's injury, it can be related to something else, and that's what the drug –

AN HON. MEMBER: It could be cancer.

MR. K. PARSONS: It could be anything. It could be cancer. Someone could get cancer; someone could have some different kind of ailment. So I'm just wondering, what changes would be made to make sure that a person who could find themselves – they get this extra bit of money, but also find themselves in a position where it could cost them extra dollars to live.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: For that particular year, as today, they can apply to the Assurance Plan, under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Plan.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: No.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: But, Minister, because their income is affected by the amount of money that they receive, in some cases, they won't qualify for these benefits. Because the benefits are based on the amount of income that you take in and if you show that your income is up over \$40,000 or \$50,000 then, obviously, your benefits that you can apply for are reduced big time. So, I'm just wondering.

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

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

Maybe I can shed a little bit of light on this and, hopefully, not muddy the waters. With regard to financial assessment for the NLPDP and the plans, and indeed now our home support and personal care home programs, as of November 1

we've moved solely to an income test; that is line 236 of the CRA Notice of Assessment. Those areas where there have been pension payouts that have been received by individuals, CRA, the Canada Revenue Agency, determine what is regarded as allowable or taxable.

There is precedent established from other pension payouts where CRA have not regarded those payouts as lump sum and, therefore, line 236 is not changed as a result of a one-off, one-time injection of funds from a plan such as that. That determination is not the jurisdiction of this government. It's federal; it's the Canada Revenue Agency. I don't know if that helps.

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Actually, Minister, it does help a bit but it leads me into another question. I know that there are seniors in the province that avail of nursing care homes and whatnot, and sometimes it's based on the amount of money that they have whether they get subsidy to the homes. So an individual who is applying for a home at the age of 65 all of a sudden receives a supplement from workers' comp at \$64,000, or \$44,000, or \$20,000 a year, they won't be able to apply for that supplement because there you have more than X number of dollars.

An example I'll give you is that an individual goes to a home and as long as they have less than \$10,000 in their bank accounts then the government can't force them into paying any more money, so what effect will that have on the individuals that are applying for long-term care?

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

MR. HAGGIE: That was, in actual fact, the substance of the changes we announced to the financial assessment on November 1. This was what the seniors groups have been lobbying for. It will not matter one cent how much money you have in your bank when you apply for financial assessment. You could be a multi-millionaire in terms of cash, but the facts of the case are if your income, as assessed by CRA online 236, is below the threshold, you will be eligible for subsidies.

It is based solely and only on financial income, as assessed by CRA. No other criteria. Your bank account, investment stock portfolios, whether you have three cabins in the country, that's all irrelevant. That will not have any effect. It's line 236.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister mentioned 236 of CRA, and he indicated there's precedent in terms of how they may rule on that, but are we expecting them to rule a certain way or have we got something definitive from CRA in regard to the change you're making, related to the benefit that's now going to be accrued to an individual, and it's definitive that it's not going to affect them?

Because we're going into an area here – if it's definitive that it's not going to affect them and CRA has ruled on it, well that's fine; that's definitive. But if we're suggesting we're going to wait and see, and CRA may indeed not rule in the favour of the individual, well obviously that causes some significant concerns.

And your drug program now, as I understand it, would not cover an individual in that case because it's based on income, and they could be over the threshold.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: What I can say is six other provinces are doing this. What I can also say is that some clients who are injured never qualify for the provincial drug program, and what I can say is that it may have an effect on the year that you take it, but just that year, as opposed to the long-term effect.

So there may, in fact, be somebody that may be affected if they decide to take it at 65. If they wait until they're 66, they may not.

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

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

I just want to follow up on the question. The minister mentioned something I said when I spoke in second reading.

Yes, we know six other provinces have done it, but I did say in second reading, and now I'll ask the question: Did the minister and her people actually look at what has happened in the other jurisdictions from this perspective with regard to CRA? Did they look at what has happened there?

Have there been improvements based on the fact it is going on in six other places?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Nothing has been brought to our attention. So when we did a jurisdictional scan, we didn't find that this change would have a significant impact to individuals' lives.

So the answer to your question is, to our knowledge, there is no impact on an individual. However, there is a potential that there could be, if an individual takes the income at 65 and it raises them above the threshold that particular year. If they wait until they're a day before their 66th birthday, it may not have the same impact.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to comment on the fact that an individual that turns 65 and having the knowledge or understanding that if they take it what the implications are going to be. I'd like the minister just to speak to that in terms of informing people of the possibility of the significant impact it could have on their medical care related to their drug card.

The minister has admitted that in that particular year, depending on when they took it, it could put them in a situation where the income would disqualify them for access to, as my colleague said, the actual drug card. So knowing that, is there any willingness to put in place something that would, in this particular circumstance related to this pension benefit, to assist them in that year that they would take that benefit that

could disqualify them from the drug program? Because it could be a significant cost outside the work-related injury. It could be cancer drugs, it could be a number of areas where they would have coverage, only for this, and if this would take place then that would be a particular year where they wouldn't have that coverage.

So is there any willingness to look at how you might accommodate it in that particular year and to provide that assistance?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Very important question. Yes, there is willingness. So everyone will be based on an individual basis. Everyone will be informed. WorkplaceNL will in fact inform individuals. This is a conversation I just had with my staff this week about communication and plain language and making sure that people understand impact. So each person has a case manager and the case manager will, in fact, speak with each individual to ensure that they understand the implications.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Fortune – or, I'm sorry – Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: A little bit of a difference, me and her. She's a very nice person; I'm not.

Minister, you just mentioned a minute ago, you said if they want to take it. So is there a choice to an individual whether an individual, like said earlier when I talked about the drug card, if a person says, listen, I'm better off if I don't take this, is there a choice to the individual to take the supplement or not to take it?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So the pension replacement benefit, or the retirement benefit, as it's going to be called, will be there. When an individual turns 65 they can take it at 65, or they can wait until the next fiscal year to take it at their 66th birthday or the day before their 66th birthday. That's the latest – between 65 and 66 years old. So you need to take it, I mean it's a pension replacement benefit. Right now today when you turn 65, you're no longer receiving the WorkplaceNL extended earnings loss, so it's

your income that you will receive as opposed to your EEL that you're receiving today.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I apologize for not speaking to second reading, but I actually had a constituency issue I had to deal with, so I kind of missed that. I apologize for that, but I thought it was fairly straightforward. I have some concerns now, to be honest with you, as this conversation goes on.

First of all, I'm just seeking clarification from the minister, because I'm listening to some of the comments the Member for Ferryland – not his most recent comments, but the ones he made a little while ago, talking about getting your EEL cheque right up until you're 85 years old and so on.

First of all, I just want to clarify, because my understanding of the system and what we're doing here is that basically if someone is on workers' comp, they're getting their extended earnings loss up until age 65. Once they turn 65 there is no workers' comp benefit per se. They would then go on OAS, CPP and if they were entitled to any kind of a work pension or whatever.

Really, the pension replacement benefit, as I understand it, is based on the fact that you're saying, look, if I was working for the last 10 years before I was 65 and I never got injured on the job, I would have paid more money into Canada Pension, I would have paid more money into my pension plan; therefore, instead of being entitled to \$500 every two weeks – I just chose a random number – from my employee pension, I would have been getting \$600. Now I'm only getting \$500 because I hadn't paid into my pension plan. Therefore, the extra money that person would be getting beyond 65 would be that \$100 every week or two weeks that they're losing on their pension that they would have got had they not been injured on the job. That's the only amount we're talking about.

What's being proposed here, as I understand it, is that pension replacement amount that they would get from workers' comp to say in lieu of

the pension money that you're not getting, we're going to pay all that upfront in a lump sum, a one-time lump sum. That's what I understand is what's happening here.

So before I get to another question I just want clarification. Am I sort of in the right ballfield as to how I'm perceiving this?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. So the individuals that would have been paying into a pension, like, say government employees, and you get injured and you lose that pension benefit, you will receive the 10 per cent because you can prove you had a potential loss from a pension. The other individuals that can't prove their attachment to a pension would receive the 5 per cent. So there's a 5 per cent and a 10 per cent.

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

MR. LANE: Yes, thank you, Minister.

I appreciate that. I'm not necessarily talking about the dollar amount that the lump sum is. The premise, though, I'm speaking of is the reason why you get that new benefit, the 5 or the 10, the reason why you're getting the 10 in a lump sum is kind of replacing the fact, if you will, that had I been – if I never got injured at age 55, that would have been 10 more years that I was paying into my pension plan. So that means my pension benefit, when I retired, would've been higher than what it actually is because I haven't been paying into it for the last 10 years because I wasn't working.

So what would've happened in the past is that in addition to me now collecting the workers' comp benefit, the EEO would end at 65, I would get my OAS, my CPP and my work pension, if I had one. But in addition to that, workers' comp would be reimbursing me a monthly amount in lieu of the lower pension cheque because I had been injured.

What you're saying is instead of doing that and paying somebody out beyond age 65 month after month, or every two weeks, or whatever it is, we're going to basically say: Okay, if you live to

age 85 we would have paid you X amount, so here's a lump sum in lieu of that. So we'll make a one-time payment to pay you for that. Then, once you turn 65, there are no further benefits coming out of workers' comp. Is that correct?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: No warnings loss, yes.

Is that correct?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes. So no more retirement benefits. You'll receive the retirement benefits at 65. You do get other benefits from WorkplaceNL, health benefits, assistance and stuff like that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Minister.

I understand you can get health benefits and all that, but I guess my point is that your EEL payments are done. You now go on OAS, CPP and a work pension. You get a lump sum in lieu of the money you would've gotten to replace the lower pension. Okay. So we're good on that.

So back to the other questions which have been raised, then, is that if I get a lump sum and it's \$30,000 or \$40,000, or whatever it is, depending on if I had a work pension or I didn't, or if I could prove I had an attachment to a pension or I couldn't, there's a set amount, a lump sum. Whether I take that at age 65 or I take it at 66 – either or, I do have that option – it's either going to impact my drug card and my ability for other government programs and supplements and so on at age 65 for one year, or it's going to impact my drug card for age 66. Whether it's 65 or 66 is irrelevant, the fact is for that particular year when I collect that money, that's going to impact my ability to a drug card and any other benefit.

If I had a lot of medial expenses, beyond my workplace injury – because I'm not talking

about the workplace injury now. I'm talking about maybe I got a heart condition and I got a load of pills that I have to take everyday and it's really expensive. Perhaps there's cancer or any other type of ailment that had nothing to do with my workplace injury, whatever benefit I got in that lump sum is going to be cancelled out by all the money I'm going to have to pay out of my pocket because I'm not getting a drug card anymore.

That's how I understand how this could work. Whether at age 65 or age 66, that is significant depending on the circumstance. Now, it's fine if you're a healthy person and you don't need a drug card and you're not – fine, it works out good for you perhaps, but if you're someone that has a significant medical issue and would spend a lot of money on prescription drugs for that ailment that's non-work related, then for that year that you claim that lump-sum benefit, that is really going to impact you in terms of the money you gain is going to be in this hand and out the other hand paying for drugs.

The Minister of Health and Community Services talked about line 236 in CRA, and that's all fine and good. I appreciate his input, but the fact of the matter is right here, right now today, having to vote for this, we don't know definitively – from what I'm hearing, there is no definitive answer to say, yes, we recognize that could happen and as a result we've put a clause either in this piece of legislation or going to, or there's going to be a supplemental clause put into the prescription drug program, for argument sake, to say anyone who receives a lump-sum payment for workers' comp benefit for this situation, that will not be counted as income for the purposes of applying for a drug card.

I think that's what other Members are saying. Unless you can say for sure that legislation or that change is coming – not it could come; not the case worker is going to talk to the clients on an individual basis, not that CRA may or may not have precedent to include it in line 236. Unless we can say for sure there is going to be a policy, than this is problematic for me, as one Member, because it's going to be problematic for injured workers.

That's not so much a question as a statement at this point in time I guess.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: So what I can say is under the current pension replacement benefit program, some injured workers' eligibility for other programs are impacted for the long-term today. So, under today's program some individuals, when they turn 65, because of their pension replacement benefit that they receive, they're impacted, as the pension replacement benefit is paid on a monthly basis for life.

So, there is an impact today for some individuals. This is not new, but I understand that you're saying there's a category of individuals that may be impacted for one year. Yes, that's true. However, today, the plan that exists, the present plan, there are individuals that impacted for the rest of their life from the time they're 65-plus.

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

MR. LANE: Minister, I do appreciate what you're saying, but I think we have to bear in mind here now – let's say, for argument's sake, somebody, when they retired, all they're getting is OAS and CPP, then they wouldn't be impacted. If that's all they're getting, they're going to apply for a drug card and they're going to get that drug card. There could be someone who has a small workplace pension and they're going to still get a drug card, or maybe they'll get – I think at certain levels they got a proportion one, like we'll pay 50 per cent, or 40 per cent, or there's a sliding scale.

There could be an impact based on the overall annual income to say, well, I would only be getting \$10,000 a year on this pension, but I'm only getting \$8,000 – because of my workplace injury; I didn't pay into it.

So now, under the normal system, we're going to up that \$8,000 to \$10,000. Could that have an impact? Yeah. It could add \$2,000 or \$3,000 onto your annual income, but we're not talking about adding two or three – and that may or may not have any impact. It might have zero impact, depending on what your salary is. It could have a proportional impact.

If we're going to say to someone, we're going to tack on \$40,000 or \$50,000 onto your income from this year, that's going to have a huge impact on somebody who has significant medical issues, beyond the workplace injury issues that requires a lot of drugs and whatever else that they would have covered under their drug card. That could have a huge impact.

As a matter of fact, potentially – and I know these are examples and you can say you're cherry-picking the extreme examples. I would say there are people that it won't impact at all because if you're a healthy person, you don't need a drug card – you get one, but you never use it, fine. But if you're someone that has significant medical issues and potentially you're looking at \$40,000 worth of drugs and pills that's now covered by a drug card, now all of a sudden you're saying that got to come out of your pocket, well guess what? The \$40,000 that you got from workers' comp in this hand you're gonna hand right over to the drug companies in the other hand; you're getting nothing. Plus the fact you're losing your monthly benefit you would have been getting.

For people in that situation, it is a real, legitimate issue and I really believe it should be addressed.

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

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

I'd like to know from the minister if when making these decisions to come ahead with the lump sum – because I have to take back what I said in second reading; I'm not prepared to vote for this bill at the moment. I'm definitely am not because there are too many questions being left wide open, we're not getting answers to.

When I look at the problems that were put forward to us in the briefing, the problem was problems with the existing rules and administration of the benefit as it is. Was any thought put into looking at the rules that were problematic such as not transferable to a spouse if the person on workers' comp dies? If the rules were a problem, couldn't we maintain the same system and make the rules work better? I mean,

I'm very concerned about this, especially when we know that the consultations took place in 2013, five years ago. I'd be really interested in knowing what some of those people would be saying now if they saw this bill, some of the people who were consulted.

As I said earlier, we haven't had much time to do any research on the bill because we really only got it yesterday – yesterday afternoon actually. The briefing in the morning – the bill wasn't even available to go into the hands of people at the briefing. We didn't get it until the afternoon.

There's research that needs to be done that we don't have the time to do. I have to ask the minister, so I'll repeat the question: Did any thought go into looking at some of the existing problems and deal with changing rules to make the system that we have work?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: One hundred and four million, the system that we have does not work. It doesn't work for the employers and it doesn't work for everyone as a whole. Also, the fact that the changes that were made were the changes that were asked for: lump sum payment was asked for in the consultation; a plan that was put in place so that the spouses and the beneficiaries could benefit in the event the individual passed away; if an individual's on EEL and then they went back to work, that they would receive this at 65, again to supplement the pension plan that they paid into that they lost at that time.

So those were the number of issues that were identified on the consultations, and outlined in the stat review, for this particular change.

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

MS. MICHAEL: Would the minister be able to bring forward now the names of the organizations, the names of the groups that did ask for the change as she is saying?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I don't have them here right now. I know there was 15 consultations in 13 communities; there was 65 written and verbal submissions; and there was consultation done with the Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council and the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, seriously, I do appreciate what you're saying. Nobody here, I don't think, particularly if it came out in the stat review and it's what people wanted, nobody is arguing the lump sum. If the lump sum works better, fine. If that's what people want and they think it's better for them, fine. Nobody is arguing the fact that there would be a death benefit. That's all good stuff. I support all of that stuff.

But the concern that I have, as has been raised by the Member for Ferryland or Cape St. Francis, whoever raised it originally, now that it's been raised, is that there needs to be some provision put in place, perhaps not even this piece of legislation, but there needs to be something in policy – I don't even think it requires legislation, as a matter of fact; I don't think it does.

It may be just a matter of the Minister of Health and Community Services to instruct his staff, potentially, to look at a way, under the drug prescription program, and who qualifies for a drug card, to place a provision in policy that basically says, in the event of an individual who receives a lump sum retirement benefit from workers' compensation at age 65 or age 66, that that one-time, lump sum payment will not impact a person's ability to receive a drug card that they would normally be entitled to. That's all. I think that could be done in policy.

So, that's really the only issue. Everything that you're doing here is all good. Bravo! I applaud it; it's good. But I think that is a legitimate concern that could be looked after, perhaps under a different department, through policy, and I would certainly like a commitment that that would at least be explored.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I was just informed that non-taxable income will not affect the drug card.

CHAIR: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if I could ask the minister –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Just ask the minister, coverage under the workplace health and safety for employees of the public service is self-insured. So I understand it's a dollar-for-dollar reimbursement; it's not done particularly on assessment rate. So with this change and change to a lump sum payment, obviously there will be a significant payout or possibly could be more than normal to public servants who were injured in a workplace injury.

Has there been an estimate done on what that payout would be in the first year in regard to the cost to do that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: You mean the cost to government?

MR. HUTCHINGS: Yes.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, I said that earlier. So there are 21 individuals affected from January 1, 2019 to March 31, 2021. And the costs are: January 1 to March 31, \$176,000; April 1 to March 31, 2020, \$484,000; April 1 to March 31, 2021, \$264,000. So those are the estimated costs that have been completed.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One final question or point related to what the minister just said. Just for clarification and for the record, what I think I just heard, but I just want to make sure, is that because this lump sum payment is considered a non-taxable benefit, then what I think I just heard is that this will in no way impede somebody from getting their drug card. If that is the case and you can confirm that categorically to be the case, then great legislation and I look forward to voting for it.

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

MR. HAGGIE: The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands assessment is accurate.

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK (Murphy): Clause 2.

CHAIR: Clause 2.

Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CLERK: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

CLERK: Clause 3.

CHAIR: Clause 3.

Shall clause 3 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 3 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act No. 2.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 36.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 36.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

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

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 36 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 36 without amendment.

When shall the report be received? Now?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MS. COADY: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow, thank you.

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

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

MS. COADY: Motion 3.

MR. SPEAKER: Motion 3.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, the following resolution:

WHEREAS section 7 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* provides that the Law Clerk of the House of Assembly is to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on nomination by the House of Assembly;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Ms. Kimberly Hawley George, Q.C. be nominated for appointment as the Law Clerk of the House of Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any speakers to the motion?

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a few comments in regard to this particular motion which looks at the permanent position of Law Clerk of the House of Assembly, Ms. Kimberly Hawley George.

We, in the Official Opposition, certainly recognize the contribution she makes in terms of her role. We would support this motion. In this particular case, she served in a temporary position since October 2, 2017. As a Member of the House Management Commission, we made the recommendation to bring this to the House and to vote on it here as the motion.

Again, on behalf of the Opposition, we certainly have no problem with this motion. I've certainly dealt with the Law Clerk in the past in her temporary position; recognize her competencies and her work ethic in regard to this, and her ability to work with us here in the Chamber, which oftentimes is detailed. Sometimes not always an easy task, but we have challenges, and happy to work through with her, and recognize her abilities and support this motion and we moved the motion for her to be in the permanent position.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Any further speakers to the motion?

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'm also very happy to stand and speak to the motion, and that we've had the pleasure of working with Ms. Kimberly Hawley George, as she has done this in an interim position. We have found her to be generous in her work, and we have every confidence in the expertise that she brings to the job.

We are very happy and pleased that she is appointed to the position, and we look forward to continuing to work with her. We thank her, as well, for the great work that she has done to date. This is a great appointment.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Is the House ready for the question?

The question is the – oh, I'm sorry, I apologize.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I join with the House of Assembly in echoing the kind words to our Law Clerk, who's being acting the last period of time. She has been deliberate in her considerations for this, she's been effective, she's been kind – as I echo the words of the hon. Member who spoke before me.

We would be pleased to have her continue in this role and continue the good work that she's doing on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I thank you for that.

Any further speakers to the motion?

Is the House ready for the question?

The question is that the Motion 3 now be moved by the House.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Motion 1.

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

MS. COADY: This is debate continuing.

I have a question that's already before the House, so the first speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Who would like to continue the debate?

MS. COADY: Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I recognize the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands to continue the debate on Motion 1.

Thank you.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I assume that's democratic reform? Is that correct?

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure to stand and speak to this once again. Of course, just to refresh everyone's memories, and even my own, I do believe there was an amendment to this bill, or to this motion, brought forward by, I think it was

the Official Opposition. I thought it was significant at the time because, as opposed to the current motion which is basically urging the government to act on democratic reform, it was basically removing the urge part and basically saying that there would be a committee and there would be a House committee as opposed to a government committee.

In other words, it would be Members of the House of Assembly that would be able to get the process going and have the ability to get it going sooner rather than later, as opposed to leaving it in the hands of the minister whenever he decided, if he decided, to actually get anything moving on this important matter.

I have to say I was disappointed with the fact that that motion, or that amendment, was voted down a couple of weeks ago, or maybe it was three weeks ago. Because it's certainly something that was promised in the last general election, three years ago. Here we are, three years later, and we're still no further ahead in terms of getting the ball rolling on democratic reform – democratic reform that I would suggest a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador were actually hoping they would see. There's a lot of people out there that are not necessarily feeling great about the way things currently operate and they would like to see changes. They would like to see significant changes.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was really sort of – this is related to the topic – delighted to attend a meeting down at the Convention Centre, as was the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels was there. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs had been there earlier that day. It was the Eastern Regional Service Board. As I sat back and I watched some of the deliberations, there was approximately 40 people representing various towns from Clarenville to St. John's, inclusive, and mayors and councillors from different joint councils. It was actually chaired by the mayor of Flatrock, who did a really good job I have to say. He's a good guy.

It was really interesting because you had 40 people, 40 elected leaders, 40, you know you could argue type A personalities, which we all tend to be when you get into public life, but they were all able – and some represented urban areas

and some represented rural areas. They had some issues in common, but they had a lot of issues that were issues of their own, different perspectives in terms of population sizes and the various issues related to their areas. And as I said, some things were very common and other things were diverse.

As I sat back and I watched the deliberation, it was really interesting to watch because here you are with 40 people, all sat around a table, all having input – can you imagine? All having input into the discussions and reaching consensus, where they could. Where they could reach consensus, they were actually voting on certain things as to what they thought were priorities and what they thought weren't priorities. It was moderated, as I said, by the mayor of Flatrock, and it was really wonderful to see.

As I sat back and I watched it, I thought to myself, when we talk about democratic reform on the provincial level, why is it that we cannot have a similar type of system, if you will, here? Why can we not have all parties coming together to review legislation, as an example, before it hits the floor? I know that when we're in the House of Assembly you get to debate legislation; we know how it works. But we also know – and this is not tied to this government or the former government, or the government before that or the government before that, but we all know how it works.

Tom Marshall, when he was here – good man by the way, in my view anyway – said it one time. It always rang true to me; I always remembered it because it was a catchy little phrase he said. He said: Oppositions have their say; governments have their way. That's what he said, and it was so true. And how often, when we're here in the House of Assembly, and a piece of legislation comes forward – and again, I say to my colleagues on the other side of the House here, this is not a slight against you as the government because it's just the way it's always been. It's not about any particular party or person.

But how often do you actually see amendments made and passed? How often does it happen? I don't know if I can ever remember. In seven years, it might have happened once or twice with

some sort of little, subtle change but, for the most part, it doesn't happen. I know, sometimes, for political purposes there are things that get thrown out there in debate that I think we all know, even the person saying it sometimes knows that boy, that's really a stretch what we're being critical of certain things.

I think if we all reflected on it, sometimes we know that that happens from time to time. I've also seen situations where a Member in the Opposition brought forth a legitimate point, a legitimate point that could have easily resulted in an amendment that would have strengthened the legislation, but when does it ever happen? I don't recall seeing it happen, certainly not very often. Not enough that I can remember it anyway.

Why is that? If we had all-party committees reviewing legislation before it came before the floor of the House, in theory, everyone can see the legislation upfront – not a briefing. I know we get briefings and I'm not saying – because the last time I mentioned this, I think the House Leader said oh, you're saying that we don't give briefings.

No, that's not what I mean. Yeah, we get briefings the day before, sometimes two days before, sometimes it's been the day of – it's happened. It doesn't happen very often, usually it's the day before but it's kind of here's the legislation, here's what we're doing and you can ask some questions and they explain it to you; but it's not like here's the legislation, here's what we're proposing to do, what do you think. Do you see any problems with this? Do you see anything that you could do? Is there anything that we've missed? Is there anything that could be done to strengthen this piece of legislation?

That's not how the process works. Also, unless things have changed in the government side since I left – I doubt it has, but maybe it has, I don't know. I doubt it. Again, it's not about this government; it's no different over here. Members even in the government side, they get a briefing. They'll pick two or three people to say you're going to speak to it, you speak to it, you speak to it and they get a briefing the same as we get. Here's what we're doing, here's how it is.

They don't get a briefing saying here's what we're proposing to do in this piece of legislation, what do you think of this? Do you see anything we should change? That doesn't happen. It's done, it's a done deal.

When it comes to the floor of the House of Assembly it's a done deal. Government has a majority. So it doesn't matter what we say over here, it's going through as-is anyway. That's the system, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's not about any particular party or individual, it's the system. I would suggest that's a system that we could change for the betterment of the people.

That's not saying that Opposition Members are going to take over the government and run the departments or tell ministers how to run their – that's not what it's about. I'm not talking about that. Of course, the government has to govern. The Premier has to be the Premier and do what he has to do. The ministers have to run their departments. We all understand that. We agree with that, but when it comes to things like legislation, as an example, why can't everybody have some input, including government's own Member?

Like I said, I went to that meeting yesterday, representatives from all communities, from Clarendville in, and everybody having input. That doesn't mean everyone got their way. It doesn't mean that every point that someone brought up resulted in a change or that everybody agreed. If there were contentious things they voted on it. It was a majority rule type of situation, but everybody had an opportunity for meaningful input.

That is something we could and should be doing to improve our system here provincially. It's something that definitely should be on the agenda for democratic reform. I'm disappointed that three years into a mandate and we're not even talking about any of these things at this point in time; still talking about if we're going to form a committee or whatever – I think it's a committee – and we don't know when it will be formed. We're ticking the box that a motion came to the floor about democratic reform. Done – when there's nothing done.

Mr. Speaker, that's one aspect. There's also the aspect around finances, the contributions that

can be made to political parties, to candidates; the amount that can be spent by political parties and candidates during elections. Why is it so high? Why does it need to be so high? We have debates. There are going to be leadership debates, whoever the leader – well, right now we know who the leaders are; assuming they're still here and they're still the leaders when the election comes around, whenever that is.

There will be a leadership debate. There'll be debates. It will be on NTV. It'll be on VOXM; probably be one at MUN, probably be one out on the West Coast somewhere, and maybe one up in Labrador. It'll be televised. It'll be on the radio. People will be able to hear what the party platforms are, what the leaders stand for, what the parties stand for. That opportunity will be there. People will be able to make a decision based on that.

Why do we need all the advertising? Why do we need to spend thousands and thousands of dollars on advertising, on big buses with the leader's face on it going around the province? Why do we need all the election signs? What's wrong with having a designated spot in each community – or two spots or three, depending on the size of the community – where everyone puts one sign so that everyone knows who the candidates are? End of story, no more signs.

Now, if someone wants to put it on their private property, that's a different debate. That's up to an individual, I would argue. But certainly, public spaces, why do we need a big sign war? Spending money that we don't have, and being more and more dependant on corporate donations and union donations and everything else, and stressing ourselves out about trying to raise the money.

If you're a new person who's not already established and don't have connections, or you're not financially wealthy yourself, it's a real struggle. How does that create a level playing field? So that's something else, Mr. Speaker, we could and should be looking at.

Conflict of interest legislation; that needs to be reviewed. This whole concept of blind trust and Chinese walls – I think was referred to at some point in time. I didn't even know what a Chinese wall – the only Chinese wall I knew about was

the Great Wall of China, until it came up a year or so ago. But Chinese walls, conflict walls, all this stuff, what's that all about? That's not me saying it, this is the general public. They have concerns about this stuff. It needs to be reviewed.

Recall legislation; we need to explore recall legislation. Unlike what some people who were against that concept would say: Oh, that's going to result in by-elections every other week. That's not true. They've had recall legislation in BC for years. They don't have by-elections every other month or ever other – that's simply not true, because the threshold that would have to be established to result in a by-election and Members getting thrown out is pretty high. It would be a significant campaign; door to door to door to door, and convincing everyone to sign up petitions and everything else, signing that they want their Member gone.

So unless it's something totally egregious, totally, it's not going to happen anyway. But what it does do, the fact that someone would even have the ability to do it and they try it, even for a couple of weeks, sends a message. It sends a message to the Member, sends a message to all Members, that people are watching and people are prepared to take action if they think they're failing them in doing your job in representing them. So it's something else that could and should be looked at.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm starting to run down on time. I have one email here, it's only a short one, but it came from a lady. I'm not going to identify her name because she didn't say I could identify her name, but a lady from Bonavista, actually.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. LANE: And it's not about the Member for Bonavista, I'll say, and everybody woo-woo – no, no. It's not taking shots at the Member for Bonavista, it's about all of us.

MR. KING: I have a lot of them.

MR. LANE: It's about all of us.

Anyway, her comment is – and she asked me would I bring it up in the House of Assembly, so

I am. She said: Mr. Lane, I watched with great interest as you spoke in the House of Assembly about election reform – and that was the last time. Limiting large buses for candidate travels, posting fewer election signs, are excellent ideas. Would you also be willing to rise in the House and suggest to the Liberal MHAs that they should not make – now, she’s saying the Liberal MHAs but she’s only saying that, I believe, because they happen to be the government. If it was a different government I’m sure it would apply equally. So I will say that, but that’s her words, not mine.

They should not make election promises regarding spending that are not realistic. By now, all adults in this province are well aware that we are facing financial disaster. Spending more funds when an election is coming is a common strategy. We all know that debt is a disaster.

So basically what she’s talking about is the fact that when election time comes around, a lot of people feel, and they’re not wrong in feeling that way, by the way – and again, that’s not about this, that history. All of a sudden it’s an election year and there’s cash coming out of our ears, despite our financial situation. New fire trucks for everyone, cutting ribbons here and there, asphalt going everywhere, big announcements. That’s what happens. Traditionally, that’s what happens. This lady says that should be cut out.

Now, I understand as well, realistically, we can’t say because there’s an election coming up in a year’s time that we’re not going to pave any roads that need to be paved. That would be silly. We all know that. You got to be realistic but a lot of people feel – and she’s not the only person to feel this way because I’ve heard it and I’m sure we’ve all heard it – that, come election year, there always seems to be extra cash to do extra stuff: more announcements, more photo ops, more ribbon cutting. That’s the perception that people have. That’s the perception they have. That’s the perception this lady has and she’s not alone in that perception. She asked me to raise it, so I will.

Yes, and I say to the minister about the roadwork and the multi-year plan, I support that. I wish I knew where communities fit on your plan. That’s the only flaw I would say, but

knowing exactly where communities could say where am I on this list and so on, that’s the flaw in that plan. But, other than that, the concept of a three-year plan or multi-year plan, good plan. I support it.

Mr. Speaker, time is winding down and I guess I’ll just finish up by saying that democratic reform is an important topic. It’s too bad that nothing is going to happen between now and the next election of any significance. I hope that it’ll be something that will be taken seriously and there will be a serious look at making reform, in consultation, of course, with the people because a lot of people are not satisfied with the status quo.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s certainly a delight to follow my colleague here in the Legislature. I should correct at least one thing that the Member said, was that this is not the ticking of a box; this motion was brought to the floor of the House in the spring sitting and it was not able to be passed due to some amendments that were brought to it.

So, there was certainly a willingness on the part of the government to bring this forward in the spring session and the Opposition tried to attach amendments to it that changed the spirit of the motion. But, in any event, I have my colleagues rattled up over there, Mr. Speaker. But it is true; the record will show that there were amendments brought to the motion.

Mr. Speaker, this is wonderful, on this Thursday evening of November, to discuss the very important topic, which is democratic reform. We certainly have much to consider in this debate, and I’m very much looking forward to the formation of this committee.

Some of the thoughts that I decided to speak about today, there are a number of issues I think

that this committee would want to consider, and should and ought to consider. One, being the voting age. It's currently sitting at 18, and I see no reason why it should not be lowered to 16, perhaps, or another age that will be appropriate.

I would think that this committee would bring forward a cross-jurisdictional scan, not only Canadian jurisdictions but in other countries as well. Perhaps the voting age wouldn't be lowered immediately for provincial elections; perhaps municipal elections is something we could start with.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a big believer in starting habits early, and they continue. Oftentimes where the voting age is at 18, young people who are in high school miss out on an election during their high school time, and it's not something that is inbred in them during that time of their lives, when so much development is occurring.

So, if there was an election held during their high school years, it would be very likely that most people would participate, most people would vote, and that would be a habit that they would continue on with, Mr. Speaker. It's no different than the changes, I believe, that we've brought forth to impaired driving legislation, where now drivers that are 22 years of age and under are prohibited to have any blood alcohol content, and that is starting the habit early. People will get the habit of not having any alcohol and driving. So, by the time they reach 22, they're already six years a driver and they have that habit established.

I do believe that it would be worthy of the committee to examine the voting age, what's done in other jurisdictions, and how it could be applied here. I think also the committee ought to consider the voting method, and how we vote. Right now, of course, people would know that we have at least one, if not two, advance polling days during a writ period, special ballots are available as well, Mr. Speaker, and then the election day itself.

Perhaps it could be examined – other jurisdictions do as well – how municipal elections are carried out in different places. For example, what is interesting is that in municipal elections, there can be a proxy given to someone to vote on your behalf, but not in provincial.

These are all things that can be considered, whether there should be mail-in ballots, whether there should be online voting of a certain kind.

Of course, if online voting was to be considered – and it may sound like it's happening in a land far away but you would really have to consider the role that foreign actors would play in online voting, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that there was adequate cyber security surrounding ballots and the counting of the votes. The last thing you want to do is have an election that its legitimacy is being questioned. Those are very important facets that I think the committee would have to examine.

Another thing that we often hear with respect to democratic reform is the system of voting. Whether that would be first past the post, whether that would be proportional representation, whether there would be lists, Mr. Speaker. Of course going around the world, so many different types of election systems are out there. We have first past the post, where the candidate with the most votes wins. The party with the most seats forms the government usually.

Do we transition to a new system? I would caution that any change of that variety would require great care, Mr. Speaker, because the last thing you would want to do – we already have low voter turnouts. The last thing you want to do is confuse any elector out there with what type of system it is that they're voting with and potentially result in voter suppression. That would be unintended but perhaps would be a consequence of any change.

I would certainly suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the committee not making any rash changes, certainly not rash like removing a number of seats from the Legislature months before an election. Those are rash decisions that affect the institutions and our democracy and should not be taken lightly.

The other issue, of course, with respect to the voting method – and I tangentially reference this – would be our boundaries. We have set out in legislation that there should be a boundaries commission appointed every 10 years, but, Mr. Speaker, we saw that usurped in 2015 when the government of the day brought in legislation in

January to convene a hastily convened electoral boundaries commission to cut eight seats out of the Legislature. The jury may still be out on that one, but I think there should be protections to protect against those types of actions, Mr. Speaker, during an election year. Because it's very important that the people of the province have confidence in their democratic institutions and the way they're voting and the people who they are voting for. So that's something very important that I will suggest the committee also take great care to examine.

The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands also raised the issue of political financing, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that is an issue that requires great thought and debate amongst this committee. Newfoundland and Labrador has no ban, no limit, even, on union or corporate donations. We know some parties avail of union donations more than others; some parties avail of corporate donations more than others. There's no doubt about that.

So I think it's time for a healthy conversation of whether or not there should be a limit imposed on donations of any kind, whether they be individual, union or corporate, and where those donations are coming from and how they are disclosed. Because, again, it goes back to the legitimacy of how the public views its elected officials to ensure they have confidence that people were elected fairly and squarely, that everyone came to the election from a level playing field and those who – one, it's not because they were outspent by others; but, of course, we need to be consistent.

Whatever is done, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the committee, we have to be consistent. If there is a limit imposed upon unions, it should be imposed on corporations. If it's imposed on corporations, it ought to be imposed on unions as well. So we have to take great care to be consistent and fair in the application of all rules.

We also have to be realistic. We have to be realistic in a province the size of Newfoundland and Labrador with an aging population. We have to ensure that we make political finance rules which are realistic to the province in which we live and do not put a burden on people seeking office to the point where only retired or rich folk

can run, because every person should be equal to seek election in this House.

I often joke that I'm probably the poorest MHA, Mr. Speaker, because I was so young when I was elected. I didn't come here, as many do with an established life behind them. So for young people it's important that they have a level playing field to enter politics and to be able to run a campaign. And for women or Indigenous persons, it's very important that finances not be a barrier.

I can't speak for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, but you're much older than me, is all I can say.

Mr. Speaker, I say this not about me, I say this about any person out there who wants to offer themselves for public office, whether they be from any party, should have the opportunity to put their name on a ballot, but not be deterred because they can't afford to do so. So my comments on political financing are premised on that, that whatever we do, given the circumstances, where we live, let's make rules which are fair to everyone and can engender the greatest amount of participation in our democracy from people who will want to put their names forward.

The other piece I would say about political financing that I think the committee should consider is the need for political signage. You know, I've often heard people say that this is something that affects the environment, it affects towns get cluttered up. People are left feeling uncomfortable: should I put this candidate's sign on my lawn, or should I put another candidate's sign on their lawn. But unless there's a ban for everyone, it's one of those things that you could call a necessary evil that, unless it's banned for all, all must participate because it's part of an election campaign. So I certainly would encourage the committee to review signage as a tool in elections.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I would also urge the committee to review the operations of the House of Assembly, particularly amongst this committee structure and how it operates. You know, in this Legislature, and we're probably unique amongst most in the country, we often devolve into Committee of the Whole to

examine legislation, and we just saw that here some moments ago.

I think there would be great value in having standing committees that met regularly and examined legislation in depth and in detail. It could call witnesses and have public consultations with stakeholder groups, with people who are interested, and I think it would give legislators a great opportunity to review and peruse legislation, but I think it would also lead to greater debate in the House. Because once the bill has arrived here, they would've been hashed out, friendly amendments could be offered, amendments could be offered and accepted or rejected, but all that would've happened at the Committee stage, and I think it would lead to better legislation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly in favour of the setting up of this committee. I think it's a wonderful idea. It's something that probably some people would say is boring or not as exciting as other matters, but for those of us who have been studying this for some time, and for those of us who are interested in it, it is quite dynamic. I think the better system that we can forge, that we can make together, the greater our democracy and our institutions will be stronger.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Considering the hour of the day, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the House do adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

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

Thank you.

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