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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

Today we have several guests visiting us and I'd like to recognize them. First of all, in the Speaker's gallery I would like to welcome Ms. Alison Coffin, the new Leader of the New Democratic Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Joining us today in the public gallery, I'd like to welcome Kevin O'Shea and Nicole Kieley who we will recognize in a Ministerial Statement this afternoon.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: We'd also like to welcome Terry Pike from Pasadena who's visiting. Where's Terry?

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Also, I have two neighbours joining me. I have Alexander and Elizabeth Saunders from Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Alexander just had his tonsils out, so he's going to be rather quiet up there today but he's feeling better.

Good to have you both here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: And finally, watching us out on the broadcast, I would like to acknowledge that we are being viewed by Mr. Blackler's Social Studies 1201 class from Grandy's River Collegiate in Burnt Islands. They are watching us this afternoon.

Hello to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: As I said, our ratings are going up. It's good to see.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we will hear from the hon. Members for the Districts of Exploits, Topsail - Paradise, Torngat Mountains, Bonavista and Terra Nova.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to mark the recent passing of Jim Kennedy of Bishop's Falls on Friday, February 1, 2019.

Jimmie left in his wake a legacy of hockey prowess and community service highlighted by Herder Memorial Trophy championships with the Conception Bay CeeBees, Corner Brook Royals, and the Grand Falls Cataracts, culminating with his induction into the Newfoundland and Labrador Hockey Hall of Fame.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Volunteering, be it for coaching, civic events or being a member of the Lions Club were just some of his vast array of community involvement as well.

The giving spirit and social fabric of the Town of Bishop's Falls, and, indeed, our province, is all the better because of his having been here.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me in raising our hockey sticks to salute the master of the poke check, Jimmie Kennedy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I recognize the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mrs. Bertha Parsons, a resident of Meadow Creek Retirement Centre in the beautiful District of Topsail - Paradise, who celebrated her 100th birthday on January 24, 2019.

Born in 1919, Mrs. Parsons celebrated her birthday always on February 4 until she applied for her passport a number of years later, and to her surprise she determined she was born on January 24.

Mrs. Parsons was born and raised in Salmon Cove. There, she met her husband, Reg Parsons, and they were married in 1939 at George Street Church in St. John's and together they raised three children. Mrs. Parsons was a stay-at-home mom who never got her licence, but was an active member in the church. She earned extra money back in the '50s and '60s by doing clothing alterations such as cuffing and hemming pants for a dollar.

Mrs. Parsons said her favourite story was when she was 14 years old where she went to Labrador on her father's schooner for the summer fishery and she got shipwrecked off Smokey, Labrador. After being stranded for two days, they were picked up by the SS Kyle. Onboard they gave her the best bowl of rice soup that she'd ever tasted, and she had her first cup of coffee.

Up until the passing of Mr. Parsons in June of 1991, Mrs. Parsons has lived alone and kept house until September of 2017, until her move into Meadow Creek Retirement Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in wishing Mrs. Bertha Parsons a happy 100th birthday.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I think 100 years gets you a few more seconds.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize some incredible talent that comes from the North Coast of Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, in preservation of our culture, the Indigenous people of our land sometimes look towards language, but we also look towards

preservation of tradition when it comes to everyday life in our customs.

Mr. Speaker, our heritage is an integral part of preservation of Indigenous culture and an important piece of preservation of traditional garments. In our case, Ms. Chantelle Evans of Makkovik and Ms. Donna Dicker of Nain earlier this year designed traditional garments for the renowned extreme cold clothing company, Canada Goose.

Chantelle and Donna were among 14 Inuit seamstresses from across Northern Canada that made the traditional and unique Atigis as part of a Canada Goose program and campaign highlighting Indigenous clothing. Atigis is the Inuit word for Parka.

Mr. Speaker, Donna and Chantelle descend from a long line of families who, for many generations, made traditional clothing from materials harvested by our people along the coast. Chantelle and Donna are both very honoured to have their traditional garments showcased by the Canada Goose Company in New York City earlier this year. Their traditional garments of Atigis, Mr. Speaker, are valued at anywhere between \$5,000 and \$7,500.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Chantelle and Donna on their creativity, and in the preservation of our cultural clothing by bringing it to a part of the world eager to learn about it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, on February 12, I had the privilege of attending Canada's Agriculture Day at Anthony Paddon Elementary in Musgravetown. Supported by Agriculture in the Classroom NL, students were first introduced to a number of different displays and hands-on exhibits that support the agriculture industry. This included vermicomposting, beekeeping, getting a milk moustache, having their blood pressure taken and even seeing a hen lay an egg.

Students, teachers, staff and guests were entertained by The Swinging Belles and bored by us politicians, including the MHA for Corner Brook, who tried to answer questions on agriculture. Finally, Chef Roger Dewling and his team provided a healthy lunch with locally sourced products, including from Lester Farms.

An event such as this couldn't happen without significant support. I'd like to acknowledge the NL Federation of Agriculture, NL Beekeepers Association, Agriculture and Agrifoods Canada, Fisheries and Land Resources, Dairy Farmers NL, School Milk Foundation, Eastern Health, local farmers and countless volunteers.

The communities which Anthony Paddon serves have a significant agricultural history and it is important to acknowledge this. I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the students, teachers and staff of Anthony Paddon on hosting such a successful event.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

MR. HOLLOWAY: Mr. Speaker, in the summer of 2017, the idea of establishing a farm and market in Clarenville came to life.

For some, a farm and market in a community that is mainly known to be a service centre was timely, innovative and unique.

The initial response from vendors, the business community and residents living throughout Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador was positive and steady, topping at 18,900 visitors in the first year. In 2018, following the construction of a permanent building, the number of visitors increased to 24,600.

On February 28, the Farm and Market's board of directors received the 2019 CBDC Tourism Business Award of Excellence during the annual Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador conference in Gander. The award is given in recognition of outstanding commitment and passion in the Newfoundland and Labrador tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, what remarkable achievement!

I ask all hon. Members to join me in extending congratulations to board members Keith Pardy, Bonnie Critch, Krista Reader-Chatman, Lori Hann, Krista Butler, Steve Cardoulis, Ross Traverse and Danilo Diaz.

Together, you have demonstrated that with a strong vision, dedicated volunteers and support from the community, great things are possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

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

Before I begin, just a shout-out to those bright, young minds in Burnt Islands that are watching, and their principal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here today to mark the success of the Sexual Violence Legal Support Service, a program that in its first six months of operation has served over 50 clients.

When someone is exposed to sexual violence, the experience can be life altering and the impact profound. We recognize that the survivors of sexual violence need support on many levels – and they need to know their options.

Mr. Speaker, the Sexual Violence Legal Support Service trained 20 lawyers who provide up to four free hours of legal advice to survivors of sexual violence and is available anywhere in the province, and by phone or email for those who experienced sexual violence here but now live elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the program is a partnership with the Public Legal Information Association of

Newfoundland and Labrador and the Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis and Prevention Centre and was made possible through federal funding. The success of this program can largely be attributed to Kevin O'Shea, Nicole Kieley and their teams. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for making this service possible and for helping survivors, who are primarily women, regain a sense of control.

Mr. Speaker, I know there is still work to be done to expand this service as we further our goal of increasing access to justice for all. And I can tell you that this government is committed to doing just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the minister.

I commend the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, PLIAN, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis and Prevention Centre for collaborating with the government on June 19, 2018 to launch the Sexual Violence Legal Support Service. I particularly want to congratulate Kevin O'Shea and Nicole Kieley for being instrumental in making this program a success.

As the minister said, the support provided through this program enables survivors, primarily women, to learn their rights, talk about their options and take charge of the circumstances they find themselves in.

For the more than 50 survivors of sexual violence who have availed of this service, the support they have been receiving is invaluable. Having endured life-changing trauma, they are now able to reach out and find a helping hand of someone who will walk with them, listen, offer sound information and provide the resources they need to regain their sense of control. This is the kind of program that needs to be expanded so that other survivors can also have access.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister. Congratulations to Nicole Kieley, Kevin O'Shea and all the lawyers who have made the Sexual Violence Legal Support Service such a worthwhile service.

Sexual violence is endemic in our society and still much more work must be done to address this terrible fact. Not only must this service be expanded but educational programs for men and boys on male violence and toxic masculinity are needed to change this culture.

Bravo to the ongoing work and bravo to every woman who finds the courage to step up and report what is happening to her and to seek justice. Hopefully, this will empower more women to seek justice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements my ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize Stigma Awareness Week which began on Sunday, March 3, and will conclude Saturday, March 9.

This annual initiative was established in 2016 by CHANNAL to bring attention to the negative impacts of stigma and discrimination on the lives of individuals and families living with mental health and addictions issues.

Stigma is a negative stereotype that often creates an invisible barrier preventing people from accessing crucial supports to help them recover.

CHANNAL is organizing several events through the province in recognition of this week. In St. John's, they are hosting a Wellness Wednesday event, as well as an Open House on Friday. Later this month, there will be a variety show –

showcasing amazing talent from the community. It's still not too late to participate, so I encourage people to go to the CHANNAL Facebook page for entry details.

There's also going to be a variety show in Stephenville and mini wellness workshops in Grand Falls-Windsor.

Government is committed to addressing gaps in mental health and addictions through *Towards Recovery: The Mental Health and Addictions Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*. One of the accomplishments worthy of noting is that the wait-list for counselling services has been reduced by 68 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we take great pride in working with organizations such as CHANNAL to strengthen programs and services for those with mental health and addictions issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his remarks. Mr. Speaker, Stigma Awareness Week is a time when Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can come together to reach out a hand and help some of our most vulnerable. For those living with mental health or addictions issues, stigma can create challenges in coping with day-to-day activities and leave them feeling alone, even amongst their family and friends.

The good work of the people of CHANNAL has helped to break down barriers in this regard. They have worked tirelessly to inspire hope for recovery and improve the quality of life for individuals living with mental health and addictions issues.

Mr. Speaker, it is also good to see that the work of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions is indeed going into effect. Thanks to the *Towards Recovery* plan we are

now seeing real improvements in mental health and addictions treatment for the people of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister. And I want to thank all those who have helped start the process of transforming our mental health and addictions programs. It was the passion and compassion and commitment of individuals like Andy Jones, Mary-Lynn Bernard, Mary Walsh and Mark Gruchy who were leaders in pushing for change and who so courageously stepped forward, and groups like the Canadian Mental Health Association and CHANNAL and Turnings and people living with mental health issues.

Together we created the Community Coalition for Mental Health, and together we pushed for the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. It was there that the real transformation started. There's still more work to do and there is no turning back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Before I continue with Oral Questions, I would like to recognize Marcella Drover. She's the town clerk from Gaultois.

Thank you for joining us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Premier said that the Atlantic Accord fiscal arrangement review is now a bit of a math exercise and that there's a very fulsome analysis being done for that negotiating table.

I ask the Premier: Why did he not do the math and the fulsome analysis before he started negotiating with the federal government?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, just imagine, here we are – we stand in this House today with the number one priority facing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that would be electricity rates and many other issues that people are dealing with. We are negotiating with the Government of Canada.

The Leader of the Opposition would prefer that we do this publicly, maybe on FaceTime or on Twitter, like some of the other people he aligns himself with. But, Mr. Speaker, we are having, currently, productive discussions with the Government of Canada, working towards a deadline of March. There seems to be some confusion from the Leader of the Opposition even about that deadline, because yesterday he was asking questions and saying start it sooner.

Mr. Speaker, I know I'm running out of time, but this is an important issue and we are having productive discussions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is essentially asking the public to trust him to do secret negotiations.

Yesterday, when asked by the media, the Premier said: Of course, we're looking for a dollar figure – but would not tell the media what figure it was.

In the interest of creating public support for this critical negotiation: Will the Premier table in the House the amount he is looking for and the analysis that informs his request?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, how stupid would that be? How stupid would it be to put your negotiating – what you're looking for on the table so that everybody could see? That would not be in the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We will not negotiate in public, Mr. Speaker. That would not be a good negotiation.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, I want to point to some of the success that we have seen in negotiations for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; I speak of Canada Fluorspar, Grieg Aquaculture, Tacora in Lab West. The Wabush Mines when the PC government walked away from that, Mr. Speaker, restoring benefits and pensions to people that the PCs had walked away from. We have had successful negotiations. Mr. Speaker, we will not negotiate in public.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

AN HON. MEMBER: Look at how (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CROSBIE: In the world that I come from, Mr. Speaker, what the Premier refers to is called a monetary demand and you tell your client what you're asking for, in this case the public of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier could not tell this House what years were under review. Now that the Premier has a chance to check on this, what years are under review?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, we come from different worlds. The Leader of the Opposition comes from a world – for the very disclosure of that amount of money, what the Leader of the Opposition would do is charge contingency fee. So it's in his own best interest to actually get that number there.

What we are negotiating to is a successful negotiation – building on the successive negotiations that we've had for the last 3½ years, Mr. Speaker.

I will remind the Leader of the Opposition about Vale going underground, creating jobs for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that some of the work that's been done with West White Rose, which they could not get done, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned CFI that took 17 years and could not get done. We will build on successes.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: I can't help but think, Mr. Speaker, that if the government opposite was put on contingency fee it might spur some activity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSBIE: The ironically titled *The Way Forward* stated: our government's primary focus is encouraging conditions that support private sector job creation and economic sustainability through private sector growth and entrepreneurship. Yet, from December 2015 to December 2018 employment levels dropped by 5,000.

I ask the Premier: What happened to his focus on job creation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, to the preamble; when he talked about contingency fees, obviously, he was referring to put the contingency fees into people like himself. What we are interested in doing is putting money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when I talked about successful negotiations, I also want to mention the success we've had with our collective bargaining. We have gone through some of the worst times in the history of this province, based on former administration decisions that's been made, Mr. Speaker, and what we've come out of there with is labour certainty which was important for services that are delivered to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Sir.

The Department of Finance 2018 economic update states that from July 1, 2017 to July 1, 2018, 9,328 people moved forward from Newfoundland and Labrador toward a future in another province. That's more like the fail forward.

Mr. Premier, why are people moving away under fail forward, and when will the government learn to fail fast by calling an election?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Good question, Mr. Speaker.

I'm looking forward to that election –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: – because I want to remind the people of the Opposition here today, where is the plan that you plan on taking to the people during that election? We have seen nothing only crickets, I would say, Mr. Speaker, from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, here is what we have done in the last 3½ years. Next year, Newfoundland and Labrador will lead this country in GDP. That's economic activity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Lead the country, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen six consecutive months of job growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what *The Way Forward* is doing, Mr. Speaker, fixing the mess of the past and creating a bright future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order!

MR. CROSBIE: We all admire GDP growth, but perhaps the Premier could explain to the House how GDP growth equals job growth.

The PC caucus counted more than 25 businesses that have closed their doors in the last year or two. These closures are happening because consumers have to make tough choices with their disposable income.

Will this upcoming budget provide relief for consumers and businesses?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: What the upcoming budget will do, Mr. Speaker, is continue with the stability that we've put this province back. We will be fixing electricity rates; electricity rates that were caused by a decision of the party that you now lead – shoulder the burden.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, what doesn't get discussed often enough is I did not support that project. Your party did support that project, I say, Mr. Speaker; that is the PC party. They went as far to put in legislation to make sure that ratepayers would shoulder the burden of the complete cost.

We will change that, Mr. Speaker, because ratepayers cannot afford it. That will put money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the forth and final year in office of this government, they have admitted they cannot grow the economy and hired McKinsey & Company to develop an economic plan; however, this plan has not yet been received by the taxpayers.

I ask the minister: Can you provide an update, and when will this be released to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've indicated publicly and to the Member opposite that the report that's done will inform budget 2019 and the report will be released to the general public after the budget.

Officials in all government departments that are affected by the report, Mr. Speaker, need time to analyze what's in the report and to make recommendations to government and to Cabinet on how we carry forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister: Has he received the million dollar report, and is there any updated cost on the economic diversification report?

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

MR. OSBORNE: I did receive the report, Mr. Speaker, on February 28. And I didn't hear the second part of his question but I'll be happy to answer it.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I asked the minister was there any update in the cost. Originally, it was little over a million dollars. Is that cost still constant of what it originally was thought it would be?

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

MR. OSBORNE: The contract for the report that was done was a fixed-price contract. The price did not change. The contract was the contract.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said that Cabinet – and he just referenced this a few minutes ago – will need some time to review, and government plans to form a committee made up of key individuals who will help steer government on the right action based on this report after 3½ years.

I ask the minister: Who are these key individuals and why haven't you had access to those key individuals over the past 3½ years?

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

MR. OSBORNE: I thank the Member for his question.

We have had access to those key individuals. They've put ideas forward that have been used in *The Way Forward*. We've diversified the aquaculture industry; we've diversified the agriculture industry and grown both of those, creating thousands of jobs.

We've done *The Way Forward on Advance 2030*. We've got 85 exploration wells off the coast of the province right now that are registered with the province that we can't wait to drill and find more profitable oil projects in this

province. We've got *Mining the Future*, which is going to see five new mines by 2030.

The bureaucrats and government in this province have been doing a solid job on diversifying the economy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, they've done a solid job, but now he still needs to spend over a million dollars to tell him what to do after 3½ years. It doesn't make a lot of sense.

One of the focus areas for McKinsey and Company is to develop opportunities for expansion of the ocean and aerospace technology sectors. Given their importance of developing this province's ocean technology sector, and success we had with our administration over a 10-year period, why did the minister and the Premier stand by and let the Ocean Frontier Institute awarded to Dalhousie and not the Marine Institute or Memorial here in Newfoundland and Labrador? Why did you let it go?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, our success in this area has been proven. We've negotiated with the federal government on the Ocean Supercluster, which is a huge benefit to the Atlantic region and, in particular, this province. More than 50 per cent of this country's ocean business, ocean economy, is right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We saw the announcement on PAL Aerospace just yesterday. Part of the reason they got that announcement yesterday, I would say, is because of the investment we put into PAL just a couple of years ago, creating 150 jobs for the Force Multiplier project, which allowed them to get this contract again.

Our reputation, our record, is solid on fixing the mistakes from that administration, where they refused and did not diversify the economy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: The minister has just defined why the Ocean Frontier Institute should be here in Newfoundland and Labrador and not in Dalhousie, and they sat quietly by when the federal government put it in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, he mentioned the oceans cluster. Maybe the minister can tell us: How much money is guaranteed coming to Newfoundland and Labrador under the ocean cluster plan?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're very pleased with the work that we've been doing to grow our ocean economy – the largest ocean economy in the country. And when it comes to the Ocean Frontier Institute, there was \$40 million invested in Memorial University – the largest single investment in the history of the university. That is quite significant as to what's happening.

We're working with industry. We're working with academia. This is why we created Regional Innovation Systems pilot projects in last year's budget, working with the industry, working with academia, working with government to grow the economy. The Ocean Supercluster is hundreds of millions of dollars. Just Kraken, for example, secured another significant contract. They're growing their space, a 20,000 square foot space. The contract with PAL was \$128 million and over 250 new jobs. This is quite significant.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, another minister confirming why that Ocean Frontier Institute should be right here in Newfoundland and Labrador and not in Nova Scotia.

So I'll the minister again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I will not tolerate interruptions – final warning.

Please continue.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask the minister again: How much money is guaranteed to come to Newfoundland and Labrador through the ocean cluster program – what's the number?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, the Ocean Frontier Institute is here. There is significant investment that's happening with Memorial University with the Ocean Frontier Institute, in terms of senior management, in terms of research and other activities.

When it comes to the Ocean Supercluster and our ocean economy, this is something that companies within Atlantic Canada and other parts of the country competitively put research dollars and investment dollars on the table. Some people have put millions of dollars, whether they're in the oil and gas economy, whether they're in aquaculture or the fishery. These are our local companies who put dollars on to say we believe in the ocean opportunities here in our province. That's being matched by federal government dollars, and it's going to lead to thousands of jobs in the ocean economy, and that's going to lead to opportunities here in our province, right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And what an opportunity to have that Ocean Frontier Institute right here in Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: – that was missed.

So I'll go back to the Minister of Finance and ask him. He referenced before the report wouldn't be available until after the budget, yet it's going to be involved in the budget process.

If you have it now and it's available, why not release it to the public? People can have a discussion on it and that can flow into any budgetary process. Why not release it?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, again, officials in the department need to analyze what's in that report so that we can continue the momentum that we've seen with *The Way Forward*. I did hear the Member say a week or so ago that he was afraid that we'd use this report to do our election platform.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is we've seen absolutely nothing in terms of a platform by the Opposition. We will have the report released in time for them to use it. Maybe we'll actually see something sensible from them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, last year Newfoundland and Labrador attracted a measly 1,275 immigrants – the lowest number of any province in the country.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister now admit that *The Way Forward* is not working?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to thank the hon. Member for the question. He should know better; he was in this department before. The highest number of immigrants coming to this province came this past year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: It was 1,525.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Year-over-year growth of 25 per cent, the previous year, which was 25 per cent over the year before that. It's working; it's only a two-year plan. I'd like to ask the other administration when they gutted that department, when they were here in government, that's the reason why we're not further ahead than we are today. But we're doing very well and we're continuing to do well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, the Maritime average is 3,784. Why is the minister satisfied that we only have one-third of that? What specifically is *The Way Forward* doing to address it?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: We're not satisfied with 1,525. We want more than that. That's why we created *The Way Forward* on Immigration – something that you guys never did. We're competing for immigrants to come to our province. Our success rate is strong. Our retention rate is in the top tier of the Atlantic provinces. We're doing the best we can.

There's a three -year plan coming forward in the very near future, an additional three-year plan. I look forward to seeing how you're going to try and poke holes in that one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, the nearest province to Newfoundland and Labrador in attracting immigrants is Prince Edward Island, with over 2,100 new immigrants in 2018.

Why is the minister satisfied to be attracting half the number of the lowest province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: What I'm not satisfied is a 16 per cent retention rate, which is what PEI has. That's not what we have. Our retention rate is very good. So, we're attracting the immigrants coming to our province with the plan that we had. In two short years, we've increased 25 per cent year over year in 2017; 25 per cent again in 2018. We're impressed with where we're to. Do we have further to go? Absolutely, and we're going to do that with the launch of the next three years in this plan, something that was not done in the previous administration at all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, *The Way Forward* set immigration targets of 1,700 by 2022, which at the current trend we will not hit. Ontario, by comparison, welcomed over 132,000. PEI, on the other end, welcomed 2,100.

Why is the minister satisfied that we lag so far behind the rest of the country?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: It's your colleague that wants to slow this process down in Ottawa, it's not us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. DAVIS: We've hit 90 per cent of our target as of this year; this current year, 90 per

cent. Our target is 1,700 new immigrants, or new immigrants coming to this province by 2022. We're going to hit that target this year and we're going to exceed it. We're going to focus hard on trying to go much further than that, and I'd like to see what you're going to try to do with that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, in the seven years previous to this administration taking over, the annual immigrant increase was 515 in year seven. *The Way Forward* sets that target at 1,700 by the year 2022. So, a seven year period from when they took office. Sadly, by the trend they're going, they might hit 310 in addition in that annual.

I ask the minister: Is this a way forward or a way backward?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: I invited the Member to come over and talk to me any time he has questions about anything that we're doing because, obviously, the numbers he's quoting are not accurate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: I just told him that 1,525 new permanent residents came here in 2018. That is impressive; 25 per cent more than it was the previous year before.

I would like to point out that the department, under the previous PC administration, was absolutely gutted. We built that department back up. So not only did we have to start hiring new employees and getting people back into the system again to try to handle the backlog that was created by them – lack of inaction. They can't stick their head in the sand years ago and try to make us responsible for their inaction then.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we've received a number of calls from families located on Thorburn Road for years. This year it was provided busing to the local school; however, they've been notified that they will lose their bus in the upcoming year because they are now only 1.56 kilometres over the 1.6 policy. Now these kids will have to walk down Thorburn Road on icy sidewalks with four lanes of traffic. In fact, we have heard numerous stories like this one from families from all over the province.

I ask the minister: When will you finally do away with this outdated policy?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And certainly a pleasure for me to speak on this 1.6, as I have continued the message over the last number of times that I've stood here in this House, that the 1.6 policy really goes back – it's not just something new that this government has created. The policy has been in existence for quite a number of years. They had every opportunity in the world to change it when they were in office. They did nothing about it. We have done something about it. We have put in a courtesy stop within the 1.6 to accommodate students –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HAWKINS: – that have an opportunity within that 1.6 to take advantage of a courtesy stop. They did absolutely nothing with that policy while they were in office, and we have done something with it. We're continuing to work with it. We now have 72 courtesy stops put in place, and we continue to do that as we have the requests come in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I need to remind the minister that it was our administration that had put in the courtesy seating, initially.

In the last four years there have been growth areas that now do not have access to seats on these buses. Courtesy stops mean nothing if there's not a seat for a kid to get on. That's a reality.

Mr. Speaker, Witless Bay has also fallen victim of some bureaucratic interpretations of the 1.6 policy. For some students, they travel more than 1.6 on the way to school because of a one-way street; however, when returning from school they travel slightly less than 1.6 kilometres. For this reason, they are not provided busing. Once again, we hear many stories like this one from a policy that is not working.

I ask the minister: When will you finally do away with this policy?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the first thing I'd like to acknowledge is that courtesy seating is different from a courtesy stop. And a courtesy stop –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HAWKINS: A courtesy stop enables a bus to stop within the 1.6 kilometres at a safe stop to enable students, where there are empty seats, to get on the bus.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I challenge the Members opposite – within the country of Canada there is

a policy, and the policy is that if you're within the 1.6 it's the parental responsibility to get students to school in a safe manner. Like every other province in Canada. There is not one single province in Canada that does not have a busing policy, and there must be a good reason for that, Mr. Speaker (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, while other provinces have policies, we worry about the safety of the children that are going to and from schools in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: So our policy should reflect, our primary objective here, Mr. Speaker. And I do have to clarify again, courtesy seats were ensuring within the 1.6 that people had a seat on that bus. In this case, courtesy stops mean nothing again if there's not a seat available.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard from a number of people in the busing industry that the numbers being put out there about the costing of offering or reducing or eliminating the 1.6 busing is not accurate.

Can the minister tell me where these numbers came from to justify keeping this 1.6 outdated policy in place?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Courtesy seating makes no availability either if they don't have them on the bus. So, Mr. Speaker, we have continued to work with that. We are making progress.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, we have 72 – we have 166 different routes have now been reviewed. There are 72 courtesy stops that are in place that will enable students to take advantage of the

empty seats that are on buses. This is something we are continuing to work on, Mr. Speaker, and we want to make sure that safety is number one, and we've always said that from the beginning and we'll continue to say that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

On February 19, the Minister of Natural Resources spoke to the media about the PUB interim report on rate mitigation, saying we are cleaning up Muskrat Falls. Concerns about skyrocketing Muskrat Falls power rates were already concerns to people when her Liberal government took the reins almost four years ago.

I ask the Premier: Why has he and his minister only now chosen to deal with this problem?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's just not now choosing to deal with this problem. If the Member opposite would remember, that it's under my leadership that we led the longest filibuster in the history of this province against this project. Unfortunately, at the time the project got sanctioned.

Mr. Speaker, what we did in taking government was to put in place a review of the project. Mr. Speaker, that was done. We put in a new CEO. We put in a new board.

As a matter of fact, if you're looking through some of the information that's coming out of the inquiry that I called, Mr. Speaker, you would see that more oversight should have been there from the beginning. It also expressed the fact that there needed to be more expertise on that board. So we have taken a number of steps, Mr. Speaker, to get this project under control.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said she would like to see a rate mitigation plan presented to the public before the general election.

I ask the Premier: How could his government in their fourth year not already have a plan for rate mitigation to present to the people of the province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that our party will have the electricity rate mitigation plan in place; however, based on the requests that I saw yesterday, I doubt very much that the NDP would be ready for a rate mitigation plan. And I know that the current PC Party won't be ready because all they've come up with is bail out or blame it on somebody else, because they would never want to take credit for their own actions.

Mr. Speaker, we will have a rate mitigation plan in place. I fully suspect this will be a priority for all of us that are in this election.

Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear, I did not support this project, and this project should never leave this tax burden on the backs of ratepayers or taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, and it will not.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, since the release of the PUB interim report, the Minister of Natural Resources has been musing on options for reducing crippling Muskrat Falls power rate increases. When speaking to the media, the minister talked about doing a full series of work around electrifying vehicles.

I ask the Premier: When will he instruct his minister to end her musings and bring something

concrete to this House and to the people of the province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, well, I think the word musing – we take this very seriously and this is not a joke, I can tell you. People that I'm talking to – in particular, we're seeing people within all parts of society, our seniors, our middle-class families and business leaders that understand the impact of electricity rates will be very profound on this province.

Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with this issue. We've put in place a number of measures. We've brought back the PUB, Mr. Speaker. The PC Party did not do that. They actually, in fact, kicked him out during the early stages. I doubt very much we'd be in this situation today if that wasn't done.

Mr. Speaker, we are taking this issue very seriously. We will have a rate mitigation plan in place to take to the people of this province that will not shoulder the burden of this project on ratepayers or taxpayers.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, electrification of this province such as converting public buildings to electric heat and promoting electric cars will not be cheap, we all know that.

I ask the Premier: Has the minister done the cost benefit analysis on what appears to be simply musings to date, and will government table this evidence that the work has actually been done?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, we all know that under the current legislation that was put in place by the PC Party that regardless of the amount of electricity that was used in this province, ratepayers will have to pay all of it. That is in legislation that we're seeing that was put in place.

We also know that if you increase the demand through electrification using vehicles or buildings that are currently on fossil fuels that we convert those to electricity, but you have to do the cost analysis that would make sense. So, we've identified a number of areas right now, a number of facilities around our province that would be able to actually electrify. Mr. Speaker, we are also working with the federal government on some of the clean energy money that's available to support those upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, we will not leave any stones unturned to keep electricity rates down in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will move that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider a resolution for the granting of Interim Supply to Her Majesty, Bill 55.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The loss of the jawbone collection program for moose and caribou in the province has resulted in the loss of important data and research about big game. Jawbone collection represents the entire moose population.

The jawbone is the first indication of animal health. To maintain the resource like the moose and caribou, which are important as food sources to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, the population needs to be sustainable by the food source that is available to them. If there is no scientific data collection, we are unable to determine the health of the big game animals and the physical condition of the animals or condition of their habitat.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows:

We, the undersigned, call on the House of Assembly to the urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the jawbone collection program for moose and caribou in the province.

Mr. Speaker, it is widely known that both moose and caribou populations are in decline throughout North America, and Newfoundland is no exception to that. Within the past five years, the monitoring of our moose herd has been, I guess, put on the backburner. There has actually only been five aerial surveys in four years, whereas biologists recommend five per year. This population is not only important as a food source, but having a healthy moose population in our province is also a big economic contributor.

Many of the small towns in rural Newfoundland benefit by the recreational hunting and purchase of supplies and overnight stays. They also benefit from imported hunters, and big game outfitters employ many people in rural areas and, you know, without a healthy population this will not be able to continue, and rural

Newfoundland and the province as a whole will suffer economically.

It's very important that we reinstate the scientific evaluation of our moose and caribou population, not only for economic and immediate food sustainability, but also for the future generations of our province who will also want to enjoy them.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources for a response, please.

MR. BYRNE: Well, thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the intervention of the hon. Member.

He expressed the concerns that he would reflect on from the petitioners about the scientific integrity of our moose studies, of our moose evaluations. He indicated that there have been five moose surveys of moose management areas in the last four years. That is absolutely false and incorrect. In fact, this past year alone, the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, our experts in the Wildlife Division, have conducted over seven moose management surveys in this one year alone and we may get up to 10 moose management surveys in this year alone.

Now, Mr. Speaker, speaking about the jawbone program, which is a way to assay the overall, the age structure and sex of the moose herds and what's been harvested. What I can tell the hon. Member is that because of a lack of resources that were in place while the PC government was in place, there has been a stockpile of jawbones that have not been able to be assessed and assayed. So that has resulted in a pause of the program.

I see the value of this. This government brought back – we brought back our coyote and wolf subsidy, our bounty program. We're looking at the jawbone program, but what I can express to the hon. Member, do not promote false information on the floor of this House.

Up to 10 surveys will be done this year –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, your time has expired.

Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand in this House today, Mr. Speaker:

WHEREAS the successful proponents of the new hospital in Corner Brook are scheduled to be announced in the spring, with construction anticipated to begin in the fall, and this is estimated to be a four-year construction period and there are experienced local tradespeople and labourers in the area;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows:

To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage companies that are awarded the contracts for the new hospital to hire local tradespeople and labourers at no extra cost to the taxpayers so that they can work in their own area, support the local economy and be able to return home to their families every evening.

Mr. Speaker, I was very encouraged by the minister's statement yesterday that they are working with local companies to encourage local hiring and to encourage companies to buy local. I am very encouraged in that.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the ironworkers were heavily involved up on the site and they petitioned the site. I was told by certain people that they were going to be hired and it never happened. It just never happened. For whatever reason, it didn't happen.

Again, I'm very pleased that the government is taking steps to ensure that local workers will be hired. The petition that I have here is people from Lark Harbour and Benoit's Cove. There are people here from Meadows, Gillams, Meadows again, all around the whole Humber -

Bay of Islands, the Corner Brook area, that people are concerned about the work in the area.

These people – and I spoke to the ironworkers union last Friday – assured me, the ironworkers, that they can get enough workers from the Humber - Bay of Islands, Stephenville - Port au Port area, maybe out Baie Verte that way, down the Northern Peninsula, that they would have enough workers, ironworkers, to do that job, four-year job, in the immediate area.

So I'm encouraged that the government is looking at it and meeting with local contractors in the area, working with local contractors in the area. Last year I must say if those tradespeople were hired, there was going to be no extra cost because the deal that we worked out with the company was that it'd be no extra cost to bring the workers in – they did from PEI – and the ironworkers put up \$100,000 from their kitty to try to get local people working. That is what you call true commitment for their workers in the area.

I ask the government to consider this and work, where possible, to ensure that local workers are being hired.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works for a response, please.

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

I thank the hon. Member for the petition, and he outlined some important issues. You know, any time we're doing projects in this province, and they're publicly funded projects, it's important that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians benefit from those projects.

Just yesterday morning, I met with TradesNL and had a discussion around ways that, going forward on projects that the province are actually in partnering with, that we can make sure that we're doing our best to engage workers from this province.

Just last fall, we were in Corner Brook and we hosted a day where we had the two proponents that had been selected to actually bid on the new acute-care facility in Corner Brook to come in, and we had a hundred businesses from the province show up in Corner Brook that day. We actually exposed these businesses to the companies, one of which would be building the building – it was almost like a speed dating, Mr. Speaker, where companies had an opportunity in two separate rooms to go in and to present to the proponents that will be building these facilities of the things that we can offer as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Because there's one thing that I heard yesterday in the meeting with Trades NL: If you look at the productivity of Newfoundland and Labrador workers, it's unmatched by anybody else in this country. I agree with the hon. Member, it's something that as a government we need to do and we will continue to work with groups like Trades NL and the Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Association to ensure that every single opportunity is afforded to Newfoundland and Labrador companies and Newfoundland and Labrador workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There have been numerous concerns raised by family members of seniors in long-term care throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly those suffering with dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive, debilitating conditions, whereby loved ones have experienced injuries, have not been bathed regularly, not received proper nutrition and/or have been left lying in own waste for extended periods of time.

We believe this is directly related to government's failure to ensure adequate staffing at those facilities. Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to instate legislation which includes the mandatory establishment of an adequate ratio of one staff to three residents in long-term care and all other applicable regional health facilities housing persons with dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive, debilitating conditions in order to ensure appropriate safety, protection from injuries, proper hygiene care and all other required care. This law would include the creation of a specific job position in these facilities for monitoring and intervention as required to ensure the safety of patients.

Mr. Speaker, today we have petitions here from people in Carmanville, Clarke's Head, Wings Point, Gander Bay, Bonavista, Stephenville, Carter's Cove, Georges Point, Rogers Cove, Victoria Cove and so on. A lot of these are certainly from the Gander Bay area, Mr. Speaker. Others that have been presented and others that I know are coming in are coming from all throughout the province and from Labrador as well.

This is a very important issue. I'm sure there will be debate that could be had on perhaps what the appropriate ratios should be and could be, what the mix of staff should be and so on in long-term care facilities. Obviously, the petitioners have done their homework and they believe that they've come up with what they believe is an acceptable ratio, what they believe should be in place for seniors but, at the end of the day, we're talking about our moms and dads, our grandparents and one of these days, God willing, us, if we live that long and end up in a long-term care facility.

I don't think there's anybody in this House of Assembly that would believe that it would be acceptable for a person to go an extended period of time without being fed, for someone to be capable of being injured, for people who could be lying in their own waste for an extended period of time – I know the staff don't want that, but there has to be enough staff to go around (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Your time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a response, please.

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

I'm delighted to stand here and, once again, like to recognize the sterling work done by the staff in long-term care centres throughout the province. I was fortunate enough to spend a morning at Lakeside Homes in Gander last week and, indeed, to the points raised by the gentleman opposite, watched with what care the staff in both the kitchen and on the floors made sure that the meals were served to the residents, hot and ready to eat. We have full-time dieticians available to provide consultation for long-term care facilities. I would challenge the assertion that the food supplied there is anything but healthy and nutritious.

We, through the RHAs, are working on pilot schemes to involve local growers of produce to strengthen the agricultural industry, particularly in Central and Western, whereby fresh, local produce will be supplied to long-term care. I was pleased to announce in Goose Bay there will be culturally appropriate country foods at least once a month for those residents of Indigenous background in Goose Bay who wish to avail of those. As that rolls out and is successful and cost allows, we will increase that.

So, I would really challenge some of the assertions here. We also have patient safety legislation which mandates the RHAs do just what the Member opposite is calling for with regard to long-term care residents.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

WHEREAS there are many parents of school-aged children throughout the province who live inside Newfoundland English School District's 1.6-kilometre zone and, therefore, do not qualify for busing; and

WHEREAS the policy cannot override the safety of our children;

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

Mr. Speaker, we speak on this, we stand on it, we talk on it. We've had public meetings. We ask questions in the House of Assembly, and anyone who wants to listen to us, we continue to talk about an issue.

I do not care what happened pre-2015. I was elected in 2015, and I've said that before. I'll say it again and I'll say it again today, it doesn't matter to me. The past is the past. On a go-forward basis, we're living in the here and now. Time is now, it's 2019. It's time to change the policy.

We listen to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development get up day after day after day and tell us what the previous crowd never done – what they did do, what they didn't do. That means nothing to the children of this province that are walking to school day in, day out with no sidewalks, with icy shoulders. A lot of time there's nowhere to walk.

I live in a rural area. My district hasn't got a lot of sidewalks. I live in Conception Bay South, but that – trust me, part of my district is very rural. No different than anyone else across the way. The parental zone is, if you haven't got a vehicle to drive your children to school and you can't afford to pay for a taxi, there's no public transport. No different than a lot of rural areas. But I'm in a growth region, Mr. Speaker, and that's the problem. It's a lot of young children.

The schools are at capacity. Every school up there is brimming. There are new schools being built. It's a growing area.

The minister stands up day and day and also speaks about the courtesy stops they implemented. But this administration implemented courtesy seats. Most of the routes in my district are at capacity, the buses are full. So you can put 50 stops between 1.6 and the school, it means nothing – absolutely nothing. It sounds nice. It's confusing, it's muddying the waters.

The problem is children have not got a way to school. They have to find their own way to school. It's putting a lot of stress on young families, and it's time for it to change. I don't care who changes it. I really don't care. It should be changed. This blame game is silly. It's nonsense, and I'm tired of it, Mr. Speaker.

Then you read in the media recently, this week, it's going to cost \$8 million. Well, tell us how you arrived at \$8 million, because in lots of parts of this province that's not an issue. School busing is not an issue in certain parts of this province, Mr. Speaker. To say it is a blanket cost of \$8 million, tell us how you are going to get to that figure. But every time – it's insulting to the people and the families of my district, and my colleagues districts, to stand up and say: oh, we done this and you never done that. Do something about it and make a change.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What's muddying the waters is the fact that they're trying to play politics with 1.6 busing, Mr. Speaker, and that's really unfortunate.

The Member opposite talks about \$8 million. As a matter of fact, it is north of \$10 million to remove the busing.

MR. PETTEN: (Inaudible.)

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Member, or give me an opportunity to respond.

I'd like to ask the Member, if in fact it's \$12 million, where would the Member opposite suggest we get the \$12 million? It equates to 112 teachers. You want to take it out of the classroom, is that what they're suggesting?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HAWKINS: They want to add it to the debt, maybe, like they did the last time, that \$2.7 billion debt because nothing meant anything to them. They could put on whatever they wanted to put on.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. As I've said before, there's not one single province in this country that does not have a busing policy, and there must be a reason for that.

Mr. Speaker, what does he mean by eliminating 1.6? Does that mean you pick every single student up? We're doing a taxi service, we pick up every single student at their door? Because if we don't – what they're arguing is a safety issue. So if any person has to walk any distance, it's a safety issue; if that's the argument you're putting in there.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's important for all of us to understand that we work through this process. The courtesy stops we put in are working in the areas that were looked at, and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, third reading of Bill 46.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker I move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL, that Bill 46, An Act to Amend the Marriage Act, 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Marriage Act. (Bill 46)

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 Marriage Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 46)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation – I got it right this time – that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 49.

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.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 49, An Act To Amend The Historic Resources Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Historic Resources Act." (Bill 49)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did speak at second reading but one thing I neglected to do, shame on me for doing so, I did want to make mention of the tremendous work that's taking place at the Admiralty House Museum and archives and the annex in terms of our culture, our heritage, doing an amazing job down there. In an effort to stay relevant, I didn't make mention of that but, for the record, just hats off to those people.

Thank you.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One question that I had about the bill is how does government determine the amount of grant that the foundation gets? Each year we've

noticed it has been decreasing. So can you explain why the grant has been decreasing?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When it comes to the Heritage Foundation, it's one component of organizations that would be funded through Heritage within the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation. We would also have a Heritage division in the department that would support entities, like the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands would have mentioned, Admiralty House. We provide CEDP heritage grants to over 120 organizations throughout this province.

Whenever anybody is looking at allocation, it would be going through the normal budgetary process. So that would be done in consultation with the board and the executive director. When they have put forward their budget, they had highlighted where they could find efficiencies within their budget over the last couple of years.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Minister.

This is the second time we've made this change. Today it's the *Historic Resources Act* and we previously did the *Arts Council Act*. So are there many more acts that we can expect this change will be required?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: I thank the Member opposite for her question. I remember when we had brought the *Arts Council Act* forward, the Member asked that question. At that time, I had highlighted that when the Comptroller General had done the review, we had become aware that the *Historic Resources Act*, our Heritage Foundation, would not be falling in line with the FAA and we would be bringing forward this legislation.

To my knowledge, this is the only other entity and the only other piece that would be required within the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation to meet these standards. So this was the piece that I had identified in the fall, and it's brought here in the spring to bring our entities in compliance with the Comptroller General. But to ensure that there is proper accountability, the Auditor General will continue to do an annual audit, and that's basically what we're here talking today in this particular bill.

So I thank the Member opposite for her question.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Historic Resources Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 49.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 49.

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 and 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 49 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 49 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time presently, by leave.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call Order 4, third reading of Bill 49.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of TCII, that Bill 49, An Act To Amend The Historic Resources Act, Bill 49, 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Historic Resources Act. (Bill 49)

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 Historic Resources Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 49)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act, Bill 50, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resources Secretariat shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act, Bill 50, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resources Secretariat to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act," carried. (Bill 14)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act. (Bill 50)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 50 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I moved, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act, Bill 51, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act, Bill 51, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Forestry Act," carried. (Bill 51)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Forestry Act. (Bill 51)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 51 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Remove

Anomalies And Errors In The Statute Law, Bill 54, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Remove Anomalies And Errors In The Statute Law, Bill 54, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill, "An Act To Remove Anomalies And Errors In The Statute Law," carried. (Bill 54)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Remove Anomalies And Errors In The Statute Law. (Bill 54)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

Thank you.

On motion, Bill 54 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

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

At this time, I'm going to call from the Order Paper, Motion 1 – or sorry, Motion 2; my apologizes. I would move the following motion:

THAT the amendment to Standing Order 92, which was adopted provisionally on February 27, 2018 be adopted permanently with suborder 92(2) amended by the substitution of 60 seconds for 90 seconds speaking time; and

THAT this change comes into force on the date of its approval.

The permanent Standing Order will read as follows: (1) Every Member offering a petition to the House shall confine himself or herself to the statement of the parties from whom it comes, the number of signatures attached to it and the material allegations it contains. In no case shall the Member occupy more than three minutes in so doing, unless by permission of the House upon question put. (2) A Minister, in his or her discretion, may reply to a petition and the minister's response shall occupy no more than 60 seconds in so doing.

(3) A Minister's response under Standing Order 92(2) may be given on the day the petition is presented or the next sitting day only. (4) Where, in a session, multiple petitions of the same subject matter are presented, a minister may respond to each petition in the manner contemplated under Standing Order 92(3), but only one response to a petition with the same subject matter may be made on each sitting day.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Are there speakers to the motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

AN HON. MEMBER: Mr. Speaker, (inaudible)?

MR. A. PARSONS: I was going to –

MR. SPEAKER: He's going to.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) oh, okay.

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

And I appreciate the enthusiasm for the Member that – to speak to the Standing Orders.

MR. SPEAKER: We have a lineup, yeah.

MR. A. PARSONS: I say that with all sincerity, actually.

Mr. Speaker, this is a motion, and we've done this – I'm proud to say that in the last three years we've probably stood up more in this House with motions for amendments to Standing Orders than you saw in maybe the decade or two prior to that, and I don't think I'm exaggerating by any means when I say that. I can say that in my first four years in this House when I sat on the other side, I don't know if there was a meeting of the Standing Orders Committee let alone an amendment or a change.

So I'm very proud to say that, and the credit for that has to go to the people that sit on that committee, which I would note for anybody that's watching, it's a bipartisan committee. It's made up of Members of all sides, as well as the staff of the House. The Speaker sits not as a voting Member but as someone that oversees the House and its procedures.

So I look across the way to my colleague, the Deputy House Leader for the Official Opposition, to the House Leader for the NDP, my colleague in the back from – the Highway District, I call it –

MR. REID: St. George's - Humber.

MR. A. PARSONS: – St. George's - Humber, and my colleague the Deputy House Leader for government, the Minister of Natural Resources.

Again, it's important that we talk about this because people sometimes get lost. When we talk about committees of the House, sometimes people get confused. Even people within this House that sit in this House get confused about committees, committee structures and how they work.

One of the standing committees of this House, a committee that's struck at the beginning of the session is the Standing Orders Committee. For people that may not be aware, the Standing Orders are the guidelines for which Members operate. It basically guides – in layman's terms, it's a guide to how this House operates, its procedures and everything that we do here, whether it's a private Member's resolution, legislation, even the procedures for debating a

bill. And, again, it deals with, in some cases, the comments that we make in the House, the language that we're allowed to use.

So, what we did as Members of this Committee is we sat down three years ago and instead of trying to change everything at once, as Members we decided let's list out all the things that we'd like to fix with how the House operates and let's go at them bit by bit and piece by piece, and I think we've done a pretty good job of that.

One of the things we've discussed is filibusters in this House, which many people in this House have sat through. But we changed that procedure, which according to some training that I received in the last couple of weeks, and we talk about sleep deprivation may not lead to good decision making, well, I would say yeah, yeah. We could tell by the results of some of those debates, maybe the best decisions weren't made. But what I would say – and again, I'm being facetious here – but that's one Standing Order that was changed.

We talked about just different resolutions. We talked about the schedule for which the House sits, and one of the things we talked about were petitions. Now, having had the opportunity to sit on both sides of this House, I fully believe in the importance of petitions in this House, an opportunity for a Member of the Opposition or a Member of the government to stand up and read into the House an issue or concern for the people they represent or people across this province, and it's an opportunity to present that matter in public in the House of Assembly. It's signed by at least three Members of the House – or of that community, three Members must sign the petition, and then it's a chance for three minutes to stand up and read that issue.

And I can tell you that I've seen the range. I've seen them be repetitive, and I don't say that in a negative connotation. I say that with positive intent. Sometimes you have to stand up and present your petition on multiple occasions for it to get the impact that it needs to have success, and we have seen positive things come out of this House through the presentation of petitions in this House.

One of the changes that we made, and we made it on a provisional basis, on a pilot process or

pilot project, if you will, was having been on this side, one of the things that I brought up some time ago, having been in the Opposition, one of the greatest, I guess, back and forth occasions that I ever saw in this House was when I was in Opposition and the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, Bay of Islands at the time, was very well known for presenting petitions on the Corner Brook hospital, and presented them repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly. On one particular occasion, the – I can't remember if he was the premier at the time. I can say his name, Tom Marshall, whether he was the premier or the Attorney General, but he was a Member from the Corner Brook area, stood up and responded.

Now, the amazing thing is the Standing Orders did not allow for him to do that. It was only done by leave of all Members, and it led to what I consider an excellent debate by two Members concerned about an important topic that mattered to them, that mattered to the people they represent, it mattered to a lot of us. And it was a great example of debate but one that was not allowed by our Standing Orders.

I've seen other occasions where Members have stood up and enter petitions, and I know that ministers – and I can say that when I was in Opposition, and I can say it now because certainly it frustrated me, because I had a Member on the other side stand up and make a petition that was relevant to me. I wanted to stand up and respond to that petition, and in order to do so you had to be given leave by the other side. I never had the leave given to me to respond to that, and I found that frustrating.

I also didn't find it conducive to the purpose of the petition, which is to present to a Member, to a minister, to a government, what's the government's position on that issue. Now, not everybody is able to stand up and speak to that, depending on if it's the first time that you've heard it, depending on the subject.

So what we did, we brought this issue up and we debated it, Members of the Standing Orders Committee, and we said why don't we allow for an opportunity for the relevant minister, on the same day that a petition is entered or a following day, to be able to stand up and respond to that petition. And we've tried it out and I'd like to

think, given the fact that we're moving here today to make it permanent, that it was successful.

Now, like happens on numerous occasions in this House, sometimes the petitions or the responses can be a bit of that political salesmanship, a bit of that show that goes on, and that's fine. That's part of the job that we do, but I also think that on a number of occasions when a Member presented a petition that ministers were able to stand up and speak to that petition and basically speak directly to the people that wrote that and give the government position or their position on this particular item.

I'd like to think we've made the process better than what it was, and for that the success goes to the Standing Orders Committee, as well as the Members and ministers that have made this a success and have tried it, and I think it has worked out quite well. So what we had to do, where it was only provisional, we had to come into the House and debate this, making it a permanent feature.

The one change I will note that we brought up, before it allowed a minute and a half, 90 seconds for the response, and what we've decided is to make the response 60 seconds. Because in many occasions when the Member in the Opposition reads the petition, they have to read the preamble, they have to read the text, and that actually eats up a fair amount of the time, which I think is three minutes that they get to enter their petition. When they have to read the prayer that comes with it, that takes up a bit of time but they do get some time to talk about the issue itself.

We still have an opportunity for ministers to stand up for 60 seconds, which does not sound like a lot of time for anybody. It sounds like a small amount of time, but for anybody that's stood up in this House or have done an interview, we talk about 45-second questions and 45-second answers. It's a significant amount of time. It's enough time to allow you to state your position quite clearly. The fact is with petitions, you know you will get an opportunity to speak again.

So, what we're standing here today is we're clarifying and making permanent the fact that

this is an opportunity for petitions to come in, for responses to go back. They will be 60 seconds in length. Everything else with that clause still stays the same. To those out there that talk about changing, you know, maybe someday allowing e-petitions and things like that, I say, I agree. Anything we can do to make this more accessible is something that we're all interested in. But with that comes technological challenges and comes cost issues as well, which we've heard about. So these are a work in progress.

But what I will say is that we've made significant progress with not just this Standing Order, but a number in the last few years. And on that note, before sitting down, I would again say to those that say that we cannot make things happen through committees, I say, you know what, this Committee, in and of itself, shows that progress can happen when people sit down and use their experiences in this House to hopefully make our procedures a better thing, and this is something that I hope will continue on into the future.

On that note, I thank my colleagues on the Committee, I thank the Speaker and the staff – again, these committees are not successful without the staff that help provide us with the background information, the interpretation and, in some cases, the institutional knowledge of how things have worked over time. So I thank the staff for their efforts as well and I look forward to the comments from my Members on the other side.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just stand briefly and then speak on this issue, Mr. Speaker, on the Standing Orders, and also congratulate the Committee for doing the fine work.

Mr. Speaker, I remember that debate very well with – he was the premier then – Tom Marshall. And because of that debate, and as the minister just stated earlier, that we were giving leave to each other back and forth to have a debate –

because of that debate and that leave, where there was interaction, I remember when I brought up something to then Tom Marshall – and I always gave him credit for that – was I gave him names where single bunker units for radiation was used in PEI and Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Because of that exchange that we had back and forth, to Tom Marshall's credit to this day – and I said it then and I'll say it again, probably – that Tom Marshall, that Sunday morning, picked up the phone and phoned those people. And he was told then, yes, single bunker units can be used. He then ordered a \$500,000 study for a radiation unit for Corner Brook. Right now, with the new hospital, there's going to be a radiation unit in the new hospital in Corner Brook because of that exchange and because of Tom Marshall picking up the phone and phoning two people – one person in Sydney and one person in PEI – to confirm what we were saying that it could be done. So I just want to recognize what the minister said and recognize Tom Marshall for his contribution also in that.

The only thing that I look at, if you want to change it a small bit, is give the ministers up to a minute and 30 seconds. Some may not take it. I know if I'm going to present a petition in this House, a prime example, I'm going to give a heads-up to the minister because I want a response from him; I want him to work with me to help solve the petition.

I say to the Minister of Transportation and Works, when we're working together to ensure local workers are being considered and doing everything possible in Corner Brook, that's why we're working together, that's the goal that we have.

So, the petition that I would present – and I'm sure most people here, if I'm going to present a petition, I'm going to give the minister a heads-up because I want a government response. I want interaction with the government because I want results. I just don't want to stand up and start beating your chest and say look what I'm going. I want results.

I remember when I presented petitions on the hospital and the radiation unit in Corner Brook, it was a tough battle. I had a lot of support in the

Liberal caucus at the time, but, after a while, petition after petition people started asking questions and people started getting more information on it. As a result, this year, the new hospital with a radiation unit and a room for the next available PET scanner or next available best technology is in the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, petitions do work. They do bring up issues, but I would just consider that if we're going to revert to a minute, I have no problem personally – now, I don't know if anyone – I won't even make a motion but if we want to do a friendly motion to give the ministers a minute and a half if they want to because, personally, if I stand up like I did the last couple of days with a petition for the workers in Corner Brook, I want to hear the government's position. I want to hear what the government is going to do to help out with the petition. I want to have an exchange back and forth that we can work together to find solutions, not just to offer problems – let's find solutions together.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the Committee, great job on bringing this forward with the Standing Orders. I will be supporting this. I say to all the people, don't be nervous of petitions, if you're going to put a petition to get results and work with people to get results because that's how – a lot of times, Mr. Speaker, I know on both sides, from Opposition to being a part of government back in 1989 and back in 1999 when I was in government, a lot of times there are issues not brought up and a petition is the way to bring it up. You can start a meaningful dialogue with the ministers.

Petitions are a way that we should encourage more debate and if the government and everybody in the House agree a minute is fine, I'm fine. I have no problem allowing a minute and 30 seconds for a minister to respond, to get a response, if we're going to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Just a couple of comments as a Member of the Standing Orders Committee, and I agree with the Government House Leader that we've been doing more work on that Committee in one year than I think – I've been sitting on it since 2006 and we've done more work on it in one year than we did for the whole 15 years before that.

This one, this motion, is a good one. I do agree with the 60 seconds because, as the Government House Leader pointed out, in the presentation of a petition by the time you read the prayer with all the preambles leading up to the prayer, the presenter is not speaking for three minutes. So using the principle of the minister having half of the time to respond as the presenter has, really 60 seconds is what does it. Because you do use almost half a minute, I think, when you're presenting the petition itself before you get a chance to speak to it.

So I do agree with the 60 seconds. One of the reasons why I brought this – I don't know if I was the one who brought it specifically to the Committee when we worked on it; we all named different things that we were concerned about. We've all had the experience of people wanting to know – I've had it many times. I've signed this petition and I know that it was presented in the House of Assembly, what's government doing with that petition? So the reason for having the ministers respond was to meet that need of people to think that it meant something that they signed the petition. But I also think the ministers' responses have to mean something as well, and I'm sure the ministers want that as well as I do.

I think it's very significant. If there's particular information about how the concerns of the petition are being dealt with, I don't think a minister needs a real long time to say that. I think it needs to be put out – even if it is to say we know this is an important issue and we're dealing with it right now at this moment but we will be down the road. Even that is a response that people get some idea that government is thinking about the petitions. So, that's the main reason for having ministers respond. I think 60 seconds is quite sufficient for that to happen.

One of the issues that did come up when we were looking at petitions – and I want to bring this out for people who may be watching – was

the whole issue of electronic petitions, which they have in Ottawa, where you can do petitions online. We actually did study it. We didn't take it lightly. We looked at other jurisdictions. I think Ottawa and Quebec – Quebec is the only province that has electronics I think. It's been a while now since I saw the document, so I think I'm correct on that. And Ottawa has it as well. But, at this point in time in the province, it seemed to be something that was going to be a bit beyond us in terms of, first of all, money and making it work.

So, I don't think the Committee rejected the concept of electronic petitions, per se, but, at this point in time, we didn't think that we could take it on as a province. I remember that discussion. I think that's why we didn't come up with a motion around electronic petitions.

I think it's important for the public to know that, because people do ask: Why don't we do it electronically? But having said, I actually think you get a much more meaningful petition when you see something that people have actually signed. It means that they also may have talked to the person who has the petition and that the issue gets talked about. I'm not saying electronic ones don't count, but I don't think they actually are the be-all and end-all. You may get a lot more signatures – that might happen – but it doesn't mean that a lot more people actually discuss the issues.

So, I don't think it's the end of the world that we didn't make any recommendations with regard to electronic petitions when we dealt with the petitions issue, and I'm sure the Standing Orders Committee will continue to have that on its agenda as other issues that we do have on the agenda.

Having said that, I look forward to voting for this motion that came from the Standing Orders Committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to be too long. Mr. Speaker, I don't have a problem with what's been recommended here. We've been doing it, as the minister has said, as a pilot project, giving ministers the opportunity to respond to petitions. I think that's worked well. It think it's a good thing, actually, from a number of angles. First of all, if a Member is coming forth with a petition and it's really what people have signed and people want brought forward, I think it's important to get a response from a minister in terms of where government stands on that particular issue, what their plans may be in that regard and that's important.

I think it's also important as well, in fairness on all sides, to give ministers an opportunity to respond to any misconceptions, false or misleading information that could be not necessarily contained within the petition, which could be fed by the Member who is commenting on the petition, throwing out information that may not necessarily be accurate, whether intentional or not. So, I think it creates more fairness and an opportunity to get the appropriate information out there for the public, which is really what we're supposed to be doing.

From that perspective, I do agree with maintaining this concept of a minister responding. You know, when we talk about 60 seconds compared to 90 seconds, if the Committee has recommended 60 seconds, that's fine by me. As the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said, if it was 90, he wouldn't have an issue with it. Personally, I wouldn't have an issue with it either way; whatever the Committee has recommended, fine. But if the minister needed a little extra time, assuming – taking the minister at good faith that they were actually responding to the petition and not getting on with any rhetoric which we see on all sides of the House, then if time is needed to do it properly, I certainly wouldn't have a problem with that.

On the issue of electronic petitions, personally I'd like to see electronic petitions. I think if we're trying to engage more people in democracy, particularly younger people, having electronic petitions could go much further in engaging people and getting more people involved in that process if they have concerns and so on. I know there are challenges around

the regular petitions in terms of getting them out there and getting signatures and getting them mailed in and all that kind of stuff. I mean it's done. Obviously, we present petitions all the time. But if we can make access to government easier for people, and encourage more people to get involved in that democratic process, then personally I think that's a good thing.

There's nothing to say that it has to be one or the other. There's nothing to say that you can't have regular petitions the way we do it now, and also have electronic petitions. There's nothing to say you can't have both. Whatever works, basically, so people can have their say and have their input. Now, the Member for St. John's East Quidi - Vidi talked about they had looked at it and it was cost prohibitive or at least there was a cost associated to it. I would be interested, as a Member of the House, to know exactly what that cost was and why it was prohibitive, what kind of money are we talking for this because I don't know. I'm not on the Committee.

I guess that's the other point I wanted to just put out there for the record that when we talk about the Standing Orders Committee – and they've done good work. I'm not denying it. I've agreed with, I think, everything that's been put forward, whether it's this Committee, whether it be the new committee now that the minister announced on democratic reform and so on. We have three independent Members of the House of Assembly now – we have three. We don't sit on any of those committees – neither one of us do.

When we look at the democratic reform committee and so on, there are going to be four government Members, I think, and two from the Official Opposition, one NDP. We have three independent Members who also have no seat, no say, no input. I hope that, in that process, there's going to be some avenue – even if you don't get a vote, at least some avenue to participate in some way.

I think it is important when we talk about how times are changing, we're talking about democracy and so on that there could be more independents next time. Maybe there won't be any, I don't know. That's up to the people to decide, but there could be. Our Standing Orders don't recognize those people, and they don't have a say in any of this stuff. I think that's

something that also needs to be addressed by this House of Assembly, how you deal with independent Members. Because, like it or not, they are elected; they represent the same number of people or proportionately, generally speaking, as every other Member in this House. Those people should have a say on some of these things as well. Right now, we don't and I think that's an important point to make, not just on this particular motion but on all Standing Orders and other things that we do in the House of Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to stand in the House again today and speak to this motion that's put forward concerning the Standing Orders Committee itself. It's an honour to be on that Committee and to work with my colleagues from the other two parties, particularly around improving the operations in the House of Assembly.

I got to agree with the Government House Leader that we've come a long way in the last three years. No doubt, there was a major gap for a period of time that things should have been looked at, that we could have improved it, but this is about going forward. We're looking at valid changes to the Standing Orders and how the operations work here.

I must note that we do have great co-operation within the Committee. It's not based on political agendas; it's based on what works best in the House of Assembly, what makes it more engaging, what makes it more effective and, particularly, what makes it more understandable for the general public who are watching this and the procedures and the structure that we use to ensure that it's engaging and it's fluent when we debate in the House of Assembly around our structure and even around the time frames that we use to make it more attractive for everybody involved.

Part of it – obviously, there is a lot of work to be done and we've started to carve off particular things in the last three years about night sittings, time frames, some great successful things. I think we done the calendar. It gives people an opportunity – because we have a responsibility to the people who elected us, and those are the people in our district who need us to be there to assist them in particular challenges they may have or situations they want some advice on. We have municipalities and individual groups that we work with. So, knowing our calendar system is very positive in being able to plan around functions and events and times to meet to get the best productive use of our time. That was one of the key structures there.

Again, looking at some of the thing we've done in the past, the operations here. We've added Wednesday mornings. That's solely for debate of legislation, and that's a key component. People forget that. Because in the course of an afternoon, when we go through our process in the House of Assembly, there are a multitude of other things as part of our structure that have to be looked at.

There is Question Period, very important. There are Petitions and that that I'll get to talk about there. There are other notices that are put in fact. There are responses to questions asked. There's tabling of reports. There is a multitude of other things that take time and would take away from direct debate. In some cases, may convolute it a little bit because of what may have happened in Question Period.

The Wednesday morning addition adds additional time within the calendar for direct debate, and what that does then is give us a clean understanding when we come in. We start on a particular bill, and we go through that morning session talking about and debating legislation that's going to improve the lives of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. So that's another thing that we added.

We had agreed: How do we make this work for everybody in the House of Assembly? So discussion among everybody was let's improve things.

One of the philosophies that was brought in about making it family friendly for candidates,

for recruiting people, for making it more attractive for people to come to the House of Assembly, particularly those who may have young families. We tried to engage the process, what would be things – what would be stumbling blocks around those type of challenges?

Even some of the things about committee structure, and the Government House Leader talked about that, that we're going to get into looking at how we better use committees. We've had some of that debate.

I'll note, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, that there has been and there will continue to be discussions on how do we include every Member, every elected Member in this House of Assembly as part of the committee process here. I think we have a responsibility to do that. They were elected, as everybody else in this House was, and independence and anybody who represents a party should have an opportunity to have their voice heard. And particularly when we are touting, and we've been successful at it to this point, that we're not partisan when it comes to the politics of this committee. So I see the positives of where we've gotten.

The changes we're making here is another change that was made as a provisional pilot, for want of a better phrase, last sitting, around how do we better engage the use of petitions. Again, petitions have been around for years and they serve a very valuable tool in the House of Assembly of getting the views of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to the public agenda.

In the House here we have an opportunity, when there's an issue that may not be directly part of the legislative calendar for that year, but still can be brought up in the House to be looked at and discussed. But, unfortunately – and it's a two-way street here. We, in the Opposition, for example, or it could be a private Member on the government side who are presenting a petition, can very rarely get a response as to is this on the agenda item of government? Is there something in the works that can address this? Is there information relevant to this petition that we're not aware of that may change our philosophy on whether or not this is a priority?

What we're doing is representing the people in our district, or the people of this province who've said, here's an issue, here's a concern of ours. Normally, it's a multitude of people who do it. You can have as few as three, but very seldom – every petition that comes in here, we may present the same petition 10 times during a sitting, but we know there are hundreds of people who've signed most of these petitions. In some cases, thousands. So that's a reflection that there's a real issue out there that people want to deal with.

So what we've done, we adopted in the last sitting that a minister could respond. We've seen that – that first process seemed to be fairly successful that we're getting, sometimes it's debate, sometimes it's explaining, sometimes it's challenging the merits of the petition. In return, it's the petitioners and us representing the petitioners, get to challenge the minister on the responses they've given, whether or not they're acceptable or whether or not they fall in line with how we can solve the particular issue that's being brought to the forefront by the petitioners.

What we've done, and we've talked about it, and we talked about expedience and asking ministers to get to the point of addressing whatever the actual petition intent is about. So we looked at when you present a petition and you go through the main clauses of the introduction, the petitioner who's presenting on behalf of the people is limited in time.

We had given the minister in a response time of 90 seconds – which may not seem like a lot, but when you're asking for a particular issue and you're asking what the government are going to do in response, a lot of time the bill will come back and say here's our plan, here's what we want to do, or no we don't agree with this process, or yes we've already done this. This is as far as we're going.

So, for reasons for expedience in the House and utilizing the time in this House for adding to some of the other things about debate in legislation, it was felt that 60 seconds would get a minister and ask a minister to be direct and to the point and answer the reflective petition itself to some degree of explaining what is being done or what is not going to be done. So we talked

about that, and that's one of many things we're going to tackle over the next period of time.

What I will say is, and it's been echoed by my colleagues here, the committee structure that we have in our system, it is good based on what we have allotted. It may not be as effective in how we institute the use of that allotment. So I think we've had that discussion here.

I know the Committee that's set up on parliamentary reform will no doubt discuss the structure of committees here; how do we make them more effective, how do we make them more engaging? One of the questions, or one of the comments we had in our last meeting was about the philosophy that we have certain Standing Committees and we think they only stand for Estimates, and that's unfortunate, a misnomer, because at the end of the day, Estimates are just one of their responsibilities under that Committee.

Those committees have a multitude of other responsibilities. We just have to find ways to engage them, and it could be around legislation, it could be around a particular issue, it could be around tackling a common challenge that we have in this province. We have an opportunity to move things forward. What we're doing here is getting to the next level.

So, we've pretty well ticked off, you know, five or six things that were important. As a start, phase 1 of the Standing Orders Committee. Now, I would think from the discussions we've had recently, we're going to go into a couple of harder, more integral working things, things that may be a little bit more debatable until we get something that we feel is exactly where we want to go. So that process is moving. We've opened that engaged discussion, and I'm looking forward to the next number of meetings we're going to have with the Standing Orders Committee.

Before I sit, Mr. Speaker, I do have to note, too. Every time we take on additional work as MHAs or we suggest additional things, there is an additional responsibility that goes to a staff person somewhere in this great Chamber of ours. We can talk what needs to be done, we can make suggestions, we can ask about

jurisdictional scans and that, but somebody does the legwork for us.

So there's a note that has to be noted here, that we have some very valuable staff who go out of their way to ensure when we're making decisions, and if we're making proposals here around Standing Orders and the operation of this House, it's fluent because it has been researched, it has been looked at, it has been talked, precedent has been outlined and we have an open debate with information that's very relevant. That's a testament to the staff we have.

We've got to try to find a way that we cannot overburden them but, at the same time, move things forward. So, we're going to have all this dialogue to ensure that what we do best fits the needs of this House and it best fits the needs of those who represent the people in this House, but particularly the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the changes here and I look forward to the great work that the Committee will do and what we'll bring back to the House in making this more inclusive over the next number of months.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just wanted to make a few comments on this motion as well. I probably won't take my full time, just wanted to make a few comments as a Member of this Committee as well. As the Government House Leader said when he opened this debate, the Standing Orders are the sort of rules that we use to conduct our affairs here in this House. They're the rules that guide us in the way we operate and the way we proceed with debates in this House and how we hear from each Member and how we object if there are problems and things like that in the House.

The Standing Orders are very important. This Committee that we're talking about today is a Standing Orders Committee; it sort of reviews these rules every now and then to see how we

can make them better, how we can adapt them to the times, how we can change some of the things that are happening.

This motion relates to petitions and how we deal with petitions. Of course, petitions have been around in our parliamentary system for years and years; they've even been around before parliaments existed. People always sort of had the right to petition, petition the King, petition the parliament, and it's a useful way for people to have direct input into the legislature that represents them.

By allowing for responses by ministers, I think this adds to the validity of these petitions. By allowing a minister to respond to what people have said, to correct or agree with anything that has been said in the petition that the people have signed, I think that's an important aspect of this.

Others have mentioned that the Committee has been very active in the last three years. I would agree with that. We've seen a number of changes: the calendar that we have in the House, the set calendar; the constituency weeks that we have that allow us to take some time while the House is open. We take a week every third week and review – it allows us an opportunity to set up meetings in our district and things like that. So that's very important as well.

There are number of changes that have come from the Committee that have been very positive changes for this House. I think the changes that we're looking at in allowing a minister to respond to petitions that's another positive change.

I look forward to continuing the work with the Committee to look at how we can improve other aspects of the rules of the Standing Orders of the House in relation to committees, especially. I think there's a lot of potential there for us to look at using the time of this House more effectively, by taking some of the things we do to committees, allowing Members to debate, work out any problems with a piece of legislation before it comes to this House. I think that's a very constructive thing that we can do as a committee as well.

My experience with this Committee shows what we can achieve to make our Legislature function

better, when we work together, when we work together in a non-partisan way. When we respect each other's voices and hear what each other has to say, we can come forward with some constructive changes to the rules of this House. I think that's what's happened here in this motion that's coming forward, and I would encourage all Members to vote for this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers to the bill, 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.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance, Bill 52, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance, Bill 52, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour to introduce a bill, "An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance," carried. (Bill 52)

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance. (Bill 52)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping to have leave to do the second reading now but, as I stated yesterday, I must ask leave of my colleagues so that we can proceed to second reading.

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Leave.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you to my colleagues.

On motion, Bill 52 read a first time, ordered read a second time, presently by leave.

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6, second reading of Bill 52.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to our hon. colleagues for granting us leave here today. I'm pleased to stand and to speak to a new bill, the *Student Financial Assistance Act, 2019*. I have a seconder for –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Can I just have someone second the –?

MR. DAVIS: I was just getting to that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for the reminder, but I was just getting to it. Secunder for the bill is the hon. Member for Bonavista.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance." (Bill 52)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: This new bill, Mr. Speaker, the *Student Financial Assistance Act, 2019*, replaces the former act as the volume of amendments exceeded 50 per cent and, therefore, an updated version of the act was required.

Mr. Speaker, this government is working to create more efficient public service and to provide better services and outcomes for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We are exploring opportunities to shared services and find efficiencies within core government departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

This new act will bring into effect the elimination of the Student Loan Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, the Student Loan Corporation was created in 2004 as a financial mechanism to allow the province to take over the student loan system from private lenders. Since that time, it has been determined that the collections activities of the Student Loan Corporation could be moved within the current government infrastructure and are now being performed through the Department of Finance.

The elimination of the Student Loan Corporation assists the government in achieving two policy objectives within *The Way Forward: Realizing Our Potential*: reducing agencies, boards and commissions, and consolidation of collection services.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that the elimination of the Student Loan Corporation will not impact students and will not result in any job losses. The elimination of a Student Loan Corporation will have no impact on the delivery of student financial services – absolutely none. Students will receive the same

level of service for issuing of loans and grants as they always have.

In keeping with the current practice, individuals will be provided with assistance to manage their loan repayments and to establish affordable payment and schedules to accommodate their financial ability to pay. As I just noted, the elimination of a Student Loan Corporation has resulted in no loss of employment. The structure to provide the functions currently carried out by the Student Loan Corporation already exist within government. The consolidation and the disbursement of the collections of student loans within government will allow for greater coordination, and, as a result, more efficient means of providing this service.

Mr. Speaker, 14 collection staff were successfully moved to the Department of Finance, and all collection activities are being carried out in full without any disruption. Two staff positions have been reassigned to the Student Financial Services division within the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour. The division will be handling the disbursement of student loans and grants and performing general financial administration responsibilities.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, two vacant positions have been eliminated, a director and an administrative clerk position, as a result of this change. With this change, we are simply integrating the operations and employees of the corporation into the Department of Finance, and Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

Mr. Speaker, by moving the operations and employees of the Student Loan Corporation into core government, there will be an estimated savings of \$400,000 annually. This savings stems from the elimination of two vacant staff positions that are no longer deemed necessary in the future state of arrangements, in the amount of \$178,000; and reducing administration fees paid by the corporation are no longer required, and that was totalling \$220,000.

Those who avail of student loans are expected to repay them in due course. If they default on payments, this expectation does not go away. The consolidation of collections with the Department of Finance is expected to improve

the rate of return on defaulted student loan accounts and other collection activities within government.

The necessary funding for administration and appropriations for the student loans and grants will be included within the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour and the Department of Finance budgets. All necessary changes to enable the government's financial management systems to disburse loans and grants are still in place and will become effective April 1, 2019. Necessary changes to the government financial management system for administration of the collections of defaulted student loan accounts is progressing and is expected to be fully transferred in June of this year.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, I want to reiterate that these changes will not impact students in any way and has not resulted in any employment loss. We have no issues with this change in any capacity. The transition process has been quite straightforward and very smooth. It is a credit to the staff and the department. It is business as usual within the province's collection processes and how services and supports are provided to students in need of financial assistance.

As a government, we are working to create a more efficient public sector and provide better services and outcomes to our residents. We continue to explore opportunities to share services and define efficiencies within core government departments, agencies, boards and commissions in areas of human resources, information technology and financial functions. The elimination of the Student Loan Corporation works towards addressing these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the implementation of this new act and the decisions to eliminate the Student Loan Corporation. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues across the way, and hopefully they'll be supporting this change.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister opposite for the briefing he gave us and the advance copy of the bill. The Student Loan Corporation, as you may know, was established in 2004, and it was to administer the financial Student Loans Program. In a sense, serving as the banker for the student assistance program. So the Student Loan Corporation worked on disbursements as well as collections, and the Student Aid division worked on eligibility.

So, in speaking with the staff – and I worked over there with the corporation at one time, to be honest, and the staff over there were outstanding in terms of their ability to collect outstanding loans. It was a result of that, that another MOU was signed. So we took that collections from CRA. The federal government was doing a good job but we were doing a better job. It's a good move, there's no doubt, to bring it back to the collections here in the province.

The bill, of course, will repeal the *Student Financial Assistance Act*. The present act would require more than 50 per cent changes, a lot of housekeeping changes and that. So it has to replace the full act.

The bill would repeal provisions respecting the Student Loan Corporation and implement the transfer of the Student Loans Program to the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, and the Department of Finance.

As the minister opposite mentioned, the collections will go over to the Department of Finance and the disbursement of the loans will go with the Student Aid division who determine eligibility. It's a consolidation in terms of collections. Why have two different groups addressing the same people for the same money, either student loans or other outstanding fines. So it consolidates the activity into one venue.

As the Member opposite had also mentioned, no layoffs. There are two vacant positions that would be eliminated. There are savings in terms of approximately \$400,000. That includes the admin fees that we previously paid to the government to do collections for us.

Staff noted, as well as the minister opposite, that it would be eliminating some unnecessary bureaucratic processes and create a more efficient collection system.

The Briefing Note also stated there would be no negative impacts on delivery of the Student Financial Assistance Program. So, what you have now is you have a consolidated collections and you have a Student Financial Assistance division that is able to address eligibility, and, at the same time, also work on disbursements of the fees. So, as it stands, and as the briefing we had, I don't see any outstanding issues evident in it.

So, thank you, Minister, for the briefing, and thank you for bringing it forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was a pleasure to work with the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour in bringing this measure about. It's really about finding efficiencies, and bringing the collections in-house in the Department of Finance will find those efficiencies.

We've done similar measures with the consolidation of the vehicle fleet under one roof, which will result in the elimination of 10 per cent of government's vehicle fleet, saving government a considerable amount of money. The Minister of Transportation and Works, for example, has reduced the government's footprint in terms of leased space throughout the province by more than 10 per cent. We know there are additional reductions in 2019 going to happen as leases expire and we're able to take advantage of other opportunities.

When you look at it, Mr. Speaker, we've done digital government and rolled that out through OCIO. Digital government is now a case study across the country in terms of becoming more efficient within government and one government ID. There are provinces and municipalities

across the country asking for the road map, so to speak, on how to achieve digital government within their jurisdictions.

There are number of other examples, Mr. Speaker, of how we are looking for efficiencies and finding efficiencies within government and creating savings as a result. This is one of them. As the Member opposite also recognized, this is a positive move for government.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I won't have a lot to say about Bill 52 because as has been explained by the minister and the Member for Topsail - Paradise – welcome – it is a housekeeping bill. The decision that caused it to happen is not housekeeping, it's quite important. I think the elimination of the Student Loan Corporation, as has been explained, is a very wise thing to do.

At this point in time, the issues that were there that caused it being set up are no longer there, so why keep something that isn't needed when we can, in-house, deal with the issue, and I agree with that wholeheartedly.

The bill that we have here today, Bill 52, is a rewriting of An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance but only a rewriting from the perspective that any references to the corporation that's being eliminated are being taken out of the current act by this bill, so nothing else changes. Nothing else around the financial assistance for students is an issue. All of that remains the same in the current act. It's only the reference to the defunct corporation that has been removed.

From that perspective, it is a housekeeping bill and, certainly, we're going to be supporting it. But I think it's good to point out a couple of points with regard to our student assistance, the financial assistance for post-secondary students, because we have done some good things here in

the province. For example, in 2016, our provincial student loans became interest-free; however, what was problematic in 2016, students were forced to max out their federal loans before applying for the interest-free Newfoundland and Labrador loans.

Our loans are interest-free. The federal government loans are not interest-free. That means that if a student – and they have to – as they max out completely what they can borrow from the federal government, they're increasing the amount of money that they have to pay interest on. Whereas if they could move into the provincial system prior to the maxing out of the federal, they would have less interest to pay.

This is not something that this bill is dealing with, per se, but I think it is something that I'm saying to the minister that needs to be looked at again. We were critical in 2016 when this happened. I think it's still an issue that needs to be dealt with. Because, in spite of everything we're doing here to help our students, debt load is still an issue. A 2017 national survey by Ipsos found that graduates in Atlantic Canada had the highest average debt load of any region in the country at \$20,493 compared to the national average of \$14,763.

Now, that's quite amazing actually. An average amount still owing by graduates were also in the highest in the country at \$17,087 compared to the national average of \$10,506. This is a real barrier for students who finish a college certificate program or finish their B.A., something at the bachelor level. Are they really going to want to go on in their education if they finish their first level with a high debt? It's a big issue.

That's why you sometimes find – and I've met them – people who may be in their 30s or older are back in university doing a master's program, for example. It's because they couldn't afford to finish their bachelor's level and go straight on into masters. I'm not saying that's everybody, but it certainly is a common thing. So we should be wanting, in this province, to help our students even more than we are doing to really deal with the debt load.

The estimated total amount of provincial and federal student loans outstanding in this

province is more than \$400 million. That's a lot, and I think it's something that we really need to look at. The Canada student loans carry the highest interest rates for student debt in the country – prime plus 5 per cent for a fixed rate. So that means a student from our province who has to max out the federal loans before they can access the interest-free provincial loans, they are paying a very high interest rate on the Canada student loans. And as I said earlier, this means more debt for them than they would need to have if they'd only used provincial loans or used more provincial loans than federal loans. So it's something that we still need to look at.

The government is saving money through our new systems. The government is saving money while we have students who, in actual fact, are paying more interest than they need to be paying because of having to max out their federal loans. So I bring this point up at this point in time as something that we do need to look at. Now that the corporation is defunct, I think government needs to look at its own policies with regard to further helping our students benefit from our provincial loan system.

Having made those points, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll take my seat and look forward to more thinking from the government as time goes on with regard to what we can be doing with regard to student financial assistance.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly not going to take long but I do want to offer my support to this bill, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance. I'm not going to belabour any of the points that have been made. For me, there are a couple of things I got from the briefing and so on that made a whole lot of sense to me and I definitely would agree with.

We're looking at the consolidation of services and programs, which is a good thing. We are not seeing anybody lose their job, which is a great

thing. But, at the same time, we are eliminating a couple of positions, which again I would say is a good thing, given the fact of where we are financially as a province and the debt we have and the year over year deficits we have.

I think there are a lot of people in this province who would applaud this particular move. I think there are an awful lot of people, who I talk to, would say that it would be their desire that you see a lot more of this kind of thing happening and use that as a mechanism to grapple with our fiscal situation as opposed to people paying more taxes.

Again, I can't speak for everybody but I can certainly speak to a lot of people in my district who have that belief, that as opposed to taxing people more, government should be working on the other side of it, the expenditure side to reduce costs, and that's what's happening here. At the same time that this is happening, it is certainly my understanding through the briefing – and the minister has confirmed – that things will still run smoothly.

It's pretty much a seamless transition, if you will. Services are still being provided. We're seeing more consolidation. We're going to save \$400,000 a year, and there will be no impact on students, which is important – no impact on students.

So, any student who would be looking to apply for a student loan, any student who would be waiting for that student loan – if approved – to be disbursed, any student who would have to pay back their student loan, make payments, of course, collections – nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. But what has changed is that the taxpayers are going to save \$400,000 a year. That has changed.

Again, while there are a couple of positions eliminated, they weren't filled anyway. So nobody is actually losing their job. Nobody is getting a layoff slip and so on. So I say to the government: Keep up the good work in this regard. The more of this we can do the better. That's what we need to do.

I have said many a time that if government does something that I don't agree with, I'm going to say it and if they do things that I think is a good

move, I'm going to acknowledge that as well. This, to my mind, is a good move. There has been plenty of questionable moves, but this is a good move and I support it 100 per cent.

I thank the minister for bringing it forward, and certainly the work of the staff in the department in making this happen and certainly the staff who provided us with the briefing in a very professional way. I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour speaks now he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't speak for too long, I just want to take the opportunity to thank the speakers who spoke to this bill: the hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise, thank you for your support and your kind words about the department and your experience in the department from your days back in another life.

Thank you to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, it's a pleasure working with you on this file as well.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, thanks for supporting the bill, it's important, and your kind words for that. Also, you made some very good points about other things that we're working on as a government and, obviously, we're looking at some of those as well as we go – on a go-forward basis. Thank you for your words.

The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, thanks for the support and, as always, you speak to the bills that are important to you and you give credit where credit is due. So that's important, and thank you for that.

I won't go on, Mr. Speaker, because a lot of this stuff is housekeeping to bring things in line with what we're trying to do with *The Way Forward*. I think it's important that we brought staff in at a savings, staff in through an agency, board and

commission and brought them into core government as an opportunity to provide better services but also provide more efficiency and cost savings as well. So it's important to see that.

Mr. Speaker, with that said, thank you very much to the Members for their support on this very important bill.

Thank you.

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

The motion is that Bill 52 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: Those against?

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance. (Bill 52)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill "An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 52)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to

consider a resolution relating to the advancing or guaranteeing of certain loans made under the Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 53)

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now debating the related resolution and Bill 53, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957.

Resolution

"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

*"That it is expedient to bring in a measure further to amend *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957*, to provide for the advance of loans to and the guarantee of the repayment of bonds or debentures issued by or loans advanced to certain corporations."*

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to stand today to talk to *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957* under which the Stephenville Airport Corporation loan guarantee

falls. That, in particular, is what I'll be speaking about today. We're making the amendment to extend the loan guarantee to Stephenville Airport to March 31, 2020.

In the past few years, Mr. Chair, I met with the Member for the area, with the board of the Stephenville Airport Authority, and they've given me some indication as to where they're going in terms of a business model and what they're doing. I met with them last year prior to approving the same loan guarantee last year, just to ensure that they were focused on what they needed to be focused on. They've given me the assurance, Mr. Chair, that they are.

They're working diligently towards identifying and pursuing new business opportunities, including support from the Town of Stephenville. It's important for the airport in Stephenville that they do this, for a variety of reasons. They continue to make headlines, Mr. Chair, as a strategic location that offers a premiere service for military and emergency response work.

If you look at the airport, they are a choice destination among many of the squadrons that require refuelling during transatlantic flights. They've had a number of Hercules aircraft that have been scheduled for refuelling stops in Stephenville for that purpose.

Just last December we saw a United Nations flight which originated in South Africa choosing Stephenville to touch down and refuel. Last January, we were pleased to learn that the airport would receive \$1 million in upgrades to its instrumentation and landing systems from Nav Canada. We spoke about that last year in the House when we approved the same loan guarantee extension. The upgrade will ensure that the airport will remain as an emergency or an alternate landing site for transatlantic flights.

Just a few months later, we were reminded of how important a location Stephenville Airport is in this regard. We remember the PAL flight that had difficulties with its landing gear and had to land at Stephenville and the very professional job that the Stephenville Airport did in responding to that particular incident.

So, Mr. Chair, by extending the loan guarantee until 2020, the provincial government is reaffirming its commitment to support the Stephenville Airport, as it continues to work to diversify the business that they're attracting to the area.

I look forward to comments from colleagues on both sides of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Stephenville Airport is a wonderful asset for the whole province. It's a former US air force base and it's one of the largest runway facilities in the world, really. At one point, it was an alternative landing site for the space shuttle, just to give you a sense of the quality of the infrastructure that's there and the possibilities that exist.

I think this loan guarantee allows the airport to continue its operation. It gives the airport the flexibility to pursue some of the opportunities that they have in terms of continuing operations, as they make the transition to other operations – training is one possibility in terms of search and rescue training, especially. It's already the site of the SERT Centre, which is a site operated by the Marine Institute to train people in terms of search and rescue, firefighting and those types of activities. So the possibilities are there, and the airport board has been pursuing some other training opportunities as well that might be there.

The refuelling possibilities: The airport is focusing on other opportunities that may exist to make the airport a viable operation. One of the things they're looking at and they've been promoting in the last few years is the possibility of refuelling transatlantic flights, and they've had a lot of success in attracting especially military aircrafts and executive jets going into Stephenville Airport to refuel, so that's another sort of possibility there.

Also, the Stephenville Airport has been recognized as a site for search and rescue. It's

ideally located to cover the most possible area in the Atlantic provinces. It has a possibility to be more of a site for the stationing of search and rescue aircrafts and helicopters, so that's another possibility for the Stephenville Airport as well.

Those are some possibilities and I think this funding of the loan guarantee allows the airport the opportunities to make the transition that they're making. Myself and the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, where the airport is located, have met with the airport board on a number of occasions, we have a good working relationship with them, and we've been working to make sure we can take advantage of opportunities that exist.

This is a piece of legislation that comes before the House every year, so I encourage all Members to support this piece of legislation, to support the airport which is a great asset, not just for the southwest coast but for the whole province. It also operates as an air ambulance site. There are a great number of air ambulance flights from Stephenville Airport; also, in terms of an alternative landing site for other aircraft. So when an aircraft leaves, they have to have a destination and they also have to have an alternative landing site if that destination is, for some reason, unavailable.

So Stephenville, because of its location, offers a lot of possibility in terms of alternative landing sites. If Stephenville were not available, there would be a number of problems in terms of additional costs and additional problems in finding alternative airports within the region.

The services provided by Stephenville are very important. The assets that are there have many possibilities in the future for continued growth. I ask all Members to support the airport by continuing this loan guarantee which will help it continue operating.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure to stand and speak to this.

Mr. Chair, I'll just say for the record, first off, I support the bill and the loan guarantee for the Stephenville Airport. I'm sure all Members will support this unanimously. I'll just put that on the record.

That being said, Mr. Chair, this is a money bill, as I understand, so therefore all Members are free to speak to basically whatever they want to speak to, any topic.

I want to take an opportunity for a few minutes to speak to an issue – I presented, now, a couple of petitions since the House opened and I also presented petitions in our last sitting of the House on behalf of a group known as the Advocates for Senior Citizens Rights calling on our provincial government to establish a bill – or, sorry, a law, which they've entitled: Lillian's Law.

Basically, the founder of the group, Sharon Goulding-Collins – her mom's name was Lillian, who was in long-term care – experienced a number of issues and concerns as it related to her mother's stay in long-term care and that she felt were unacceptable conditions and practices and so on. She formed this group, and she now has thousands of people throughout the province and I guess a coalition with numerous seniors groups throughout the province who are all supporters of Advocates for Senior Citizens Rights.

Particularly, Mr. Chair, this group's biggest concern, as I said, is long-term care and, in particular, patients of long-term care who would be suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's disease and other similar afflictions. Their concern relates to staffing ratios at our long-term care facilities.

Now, Mr. Chair, they have looked into it and they have come up with a ratio which they feel is appropriate, which we have been presenting to government. They would like to see a ratio in legislation, not in policy – not in policy, not in regulations because, of course, as we know, if it's in regulations that means it's the minister of the day that decides as to what the regulations are going to be. It doesn't come before the

House of Assembly for any debate and so on. The minister decides and the minister can change it at a whim.

Now, I'm not saying that any minister, including this minister, would do that on a whim, but they could. Any minister could decide, for whatever reason, to change regulations. Of course, then policies are sort of even more watered down in the sense that a policy – staff, not even a minister, but staff at a long-term care facility or with one of the health care boards and so on would write policy, and they can change policy, in theory, without even going to the minister.

Now, I would think that if it were significant changes it would certainly flow through the minister, but it's the staff that has the ability to write policies. So, what this group is looking for is to have it enshrined in the legislation to sort of eliminate that discretion. That no minister, no staff person can deviate from certain staff-to-patient ratios in long-term care facilities, particularly when it comes to patients, as I said, with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

The other part they would like to see in said legislation, would be the requirement to have an individual, I would call it a monitor, I suppose, on these Alzheimer's and dementia wards who would be there to monitor the seniors at all times to ensure that they do not do any harm to themselves and that they do not do any harm to other patients. Because we know when certain people have Alzheimer's disease or dementia and so on, sometimes they can become violent and they could do harm to themselves or they could do harm to other patients. It's important that there is somebody there when they're all out together in an area, to ensure there is someone there to watch them, to make sure they don't hurt themselves and they don't hurt any other patients.

To simply say there are nurses, or another mix of staff that are working there: well, they're going to be there to watch it and see it. We know that's not necessarily the case. Because the workloads the staff have at these facilities, one would argue, is very high workloads and they can't be there at all times to watch. They could be in a room or something dealing with a patient or whatever, and who's there then to watch the other patient? So, basically, what it comes down

to is ensuring appropriate staffing in these facilities on these wards to ensure that patients are taken care of.

If you go to the Advocates for Senior Citizens Rights, you go to their Facebook page and so on, you'll see stories there from family members telling stories of their loved ones and the experiences they have had in long-term care. Experiences, for example, where a family member might be left in their own waste for an extended period of time. And that's not to say, Mr. Chair, that's not saying that the people working there are intentionally doing it, or they're not doing a good job or not doing the best they can, but in a lot of cases it could be simply a staffing issue. There are simply not enough staff there to ensure that that doesn't happen.

We talk about good nutrition; when I spoke to the petition earlier and good nutrition, the minister stood up and said we're cooking nutritious meals and so on. That's not the issue. The issue is not about whether or not they have on the menu nutritious foods and that the cooks are not cooking the food right or whatever, that's not the issue.

The issue is if you have a person – you could have the best food in the world, but if you just take the food and bring it in and you lay it at the bedside or on the table, and the person who's lying in that bed is not able to feed themselves, then what good is it? What difference does it make if it's good food, bad food, if it tastes good, it tastes bad, if it's nutritious, if it's not nutritious? If the person lying in the bed is not physically or mentally capable of feeding themselves and then there's not enough staff in place to feed them, then it could be as nutritious as you like. That's the issue.

So when I spoke on the petition and the minister spoke about the nutritious food and you're alluding to the fact that it's not nutritious food. No, that's not what they're saying. That's not the issue that I've heard. The issue I've heard is you cook nutritious food, but the person who's not able to feed themselves, it does no good – it doesn't matter what the food is like; they can't feed themselves.

So, you hear stories of family members coming in and finding food – they show up at suppertime and dinner is laid there at the bedside and nobody fed that person. Someone came in from the kitchen or whatever and laid the food next to the bed and walked away.

Now, three hours later, the food is still sitting there because nobody bothered to go in and make sure they were fed. Again, that's not saying that this is intentionally done. It's not saying that it's done and they don't care about these people; it's a case of staffing and so on.

There can be challenges with staffing and challenges when people are calling in sick and availability of staff – all those things happen; we understand that. But sometimes, there could be administrative decisions to say, well, technically we like to have three people here on this wing, but such-and-such called in and I think we can get away with two.

We have seen that in Eastern Health where you hear about the first sick call – they have the policy with the first sick call. The first person who calls in sick, they don't replace them, in a lot of cases. Is that happening in these long-term care facilities too? I'm not sure, but the potential is there. That's why they want to see staffing ratios enshrined in legislation. That the discretion to do that is gone; you have to make every effort to have this in place.

That's what this group is asking for. We got to remember, we're talking about our parents, we're talking about our grandparents and maybe, one of these days, ourselves. This is not tied to any region of the province; it's the entire province. It's important. It's something that we should be all be concerned about –

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his speaking time has expired.

MR. LANE: – as Members of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Stephenville- Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, today we're discussing Bill 53, An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee Act, as noted by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. I certainly respect the opportunity and the option we have with respect to any bill pertaining to the province's finances in that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands discussing something that he's passionate about; however, I wish to just add my voice this afternoon for a few moments to the specific nature and the importance of Stephenville Airport and specifically to the importance of this loan guarantee.

Mr. Chair, by way of history, this loan guarantee did not come about overnight. Record will note it has been in existence now for just about 14 years. This is a direct result of some significant challenges that the Stephenville Airport Corporation had faced back in as early as 2005. Some of this history pertains directly back to Transport Canada devolving themselves of some of their airports throughout the province and throughout the country. With great passion, the people of the Stephenville area, previous town councils, community leaders, they took on the Stephenville Airport and said we will not see this close in our community. They've endeavoured to continue to keep its operation going.

As they ran into some financial hardship in 2005, this loan guarantee came about. It has been extended, I would suggest, under both stripes of government, be it the PC administration or our current Liberal administration.

Mr. Chair, what I will share with you, just a few of the highlights over the last two years alone of the Stephenville Airport. They've recently just had a new collective agreement with their staff. The Stephenville Airport Corporation has 19 individuals on payroll; however, what's important to note is that there are an additional 58 jobs with respect to tenants that operate in the airport and the airport facility itself.

Most notably, one of those tenants we were very pleased to renegotiate a contract with, and that

would be the Marine Institute. I'd have to give a shout-out and a sincere thank you to the efforts to the Member for Corner Brook in his role as the former minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour. He had taken some great strides to meet with myself and the Member for St. George's - Humber to ensure that the Marine Institute – to see if there's a way we could look at, not only renegotiating that contract, but renegotiating that contract with some increases for a five-year term with the option for another five-year renewal.

What this has seen is some significant training in Stephenville at the airport facility for the Marine Institute, and it's certainly something that continues and will continue right now under the current contract until 2022.

Mr. Chair, we've also seen some significant assistance from our federal government, our Member of Parliament for Long Range Mountains, MP Gudie Hutchings, through some of her advocacy efforts and meeting with, again, myself and my colleague for St. George's - Humber, as well as the Airport Corporation staff. We have now seen the new instrument landing system, valued at just over \$1.5 million, that was recently installed in Stephenville to ensure that the airport would continue its operation.

A lot of that, Mr. Chair, just for technical sense – an instrument landing system is 100 per cent necessary to land the type of aircraft that the Stephenville Airport has landed and continues to land. I just want to give you an idea. As of the end of December alone, we had some 13 different military aircraft between C-17s, primarily, as well as a number of C-130s. These military aircraft, Mr. Chair, they take on a significant amount of fuel.

They have preferred landing directly in Stephenville as opposed to some other locations in the province, primarily due to the efficiency at the airport with respect to the ease of the approach and the exit, be it given the runway, and, in addition, the traffic volume.

So you can imagine a C-130 that is looking to get up and down the Eastern Seaboard in a military American plane, and they have an option of St. John's or Gander or Goose Bay,

and they realize that not only is there an efficient operation in Stephenville, they can get in and out quickly, they'll get the amount of fuel they are required, and it also is because of the weather.

Believe it or not, Mr. Chair, you wouldn't say it this winter, we've had quite the winter in Stephenville and on the West Coast, I can personally attest to that, but what I can tell you is that the airport and the town does boast a 97.5 per cent of the time fog free. You've probably heard me on the record here, and my colleagues would as well, as we've debated this loan guarantee in the past, and I've touted that, but it is something that is very significant and it certainly adds to the ease of aircraft coming and going.

Mr. Chair, some of the other highlights include some of the upgrades to the fencing, to the beacon lights. We've had upgrades to our communication systems and networks. We've been able to do some upgrades to our capital equipment with some new heavy equipment with respect to clearing our runway; clearing a 10,000-foot runway is no easy task in the winter months.

Mr. Chair, perhaps one of the most important necessities for the Stephenville Airport relies around our health care services. I can tell you in speaking with the Minister of Health and Community Services, and having the opportunity to work with him in that department, our air ambulance service is something that we are extremely fortunate to have in this province, and the Stephenville Airport supports the entire southwest coast. So whether that be the Burgeo - La Poile area, whether it be down around Codroy, it could be out in Bay St. George south, it could be Cape St. George, the entire southwest coast region is serviced by that airport by our air ambulance services. What I can tell you is given our aging population and the changing demographics, we have seen a significant increase in our air ambulance movements.

I can specifically tell you that in 2016 we seen 87 movements. In 2017 it was 100, in 2018 it was 106. So you can see the increases there. Now, I say movement, but you actually have to account for that flight that has to leave Stephenville, arrive in St. John's, and then

return. So you can essentially double those numbers.

In addition to that, what I can tell you is that the airport's board, the staff and the manager there have made some tremendous inroads with respect to increasing our passenger traffic. In 2017, we seen 6,766 passenger movements. In 2018 that number increased approximately 13 per cent to 7,657 passengers that came through that facility. This is a direct result of a continued partnership and collaboration with Porter Airlines with direct service from Stephenville to Halifax.

What I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that flight runs pretty close to capacity. We've increased the number of runs there from 23 annually to 53 annual flights. So you can see almost twofold there with respect to the increase. The passenger movement is something we want to continue to grow. It's a market we need to continue to grow, and it's certainly something we're going to continue to do.

Perhaps the most important reason, Mr. Chair – and I'll leave you on this, as I understand my colleagues across the way, the PC Members and the NDP will perhaps speak to this bill at a later date. The most significant reason the airport maintains its importance in Stephenville, in the West Coast region and the entire province, is with respect to alternate landing designation. It's something the airport does not receive any financial incentive or reimbursement for, but it is something that is absolutely necessary.

For every aircraft that plans a flight in this province, they have to have what they call an achievable alternate. This is an airport that has to be within a 30-minute destination of their original intention for landing. So if you can imagine any flight leaving Halifax, leaving Moncton, leaving Toronto and be it the destination St. John's, most often the alternate landing location is Stephenville Airport.

We've endeavoured to find some statistics from NAV CANADA to really point and really kind of give an understanding as to the exact significance in this regard. What I can tell you is we just looked a couple of years ago over a 20-month period the Stephenville Airport was used in flight planning for alternate landing

designation 15,675 times. Over 15,000 flights were intending to land somewhere in the province or Atlantic Canada and chose Stephenville as an alternate. That's over 780 flights a month that when they take off, they plan Stephenville as an alternate. Now, if they do not land in Stephenville, Stephenville Airport does not receive the reimbursement or any finances for that.

So to keep that strategic infrastructure there and to keep this there as an asset for the region and the whole province, it is absolutely imperative that we receive unanimous support for this bill. I certainly look forward to hearing what the Members opposite will share on this, but I can tell you as growing up my whole life living in Stephenville and now having the great opportunity to represent this area here in this Legislature, I am extremely pleased to support Bill 53.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

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 and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have made progress and ask leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred, have made progress and have directed him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Bonavista, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: It is 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.'

The motion is carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 o'clock, and I'll see you all at breakfast at 8 o'clock.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.