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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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MR. SPEAKER (Trimper) Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

I'd like to welcome all the Members back to this House of Assembly, and, as you can see, we have several guests today that I would like to introduce.

First of all, in the Speaker's gallery, I'm very pleased to welcome Ms. Judy White. She is the chair of the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commissioner, and with her is the Executive Director, Carey Majid. They are joining us this afternoon for a Ministerial Statement.

A great welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Fresh off a tour in this House of Assembly, and I understand a great lunch of pizza, we are very pleased to have joining us today in the public gallery, Ms. Nadine Ryan's grade seven social studies class from St. Paul's Junior High.

Welcome to all of you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I'd also like to thank and express my appreciation to all the Members who are wearing blue ribbons today. This is in recognition of the fight against lamellar ichthyosis, the Blue Ribbon Campaign.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we will hear from the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Pearl North, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, Harbour Main, Cape St. Francis and Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a former resident of Mount Pearl North for her impressive accomplishments.

I remember Dr. Cheryl Laite as a young girl who would come to the farm every day to brush my grandfather's horses. To say Dr. Laite is now a practicing veterinarian in Ottawa is an accomplishment in itself, but she manages to juggle this role with her position as an active firefighter in the City of Ottawa as well.

Now, if you're considering the time management involved with these two roles, Dr. Laite also spends six to eight weeks a year working at a not-for-profit wildlife conservancy in Kenya. A recent news article highlighted Dr. Laite's care of Sudan, the last male northern white rhino in the world. Last year, she helped him keep comfortable in his old age. Unfortunately, Sudan died on March 19, 2018, a month after Dr. Laite had returned to Canada. However, later that year, she returned to the conservancy to continue her service and care for the animals there.

Mr. Speaker, shamefully enough, the rhino is still hunted for its horns throughout the world, something that has always troubled Dr. Laite.

I ask all Members present to join me in recognizing and thanking Dr. Cheryl Laite on her outstanding accomplishments and selfless dedication to preserving species at risk.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm delighted to congratulate Joseph Butler on being inducted into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador for his contributions to this province as a radio pioneer and a philanthropist.

Joseph Butler became involved with VOXM after the death of his father, Joseph L. Butler, who worked with the radio station's founder, Walter B. Williams. Joseph followed in his father's footsteps and expanded the radio station

into rural areas of the province, offering crucial information to those who previously did not have access to the news.

In addition to his broadcasting achievements, Joseph contributed greatly to various charities across the province through the VOCM Cares Foundation, which has been giving back to communities for 40 years.

In 1991, Joseph was awarded honorary life membership in the Atlantic Association of Broadcasters. In 1992, he was named a Paul Harris Fellow and inducted into the Canadian Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

I ask the hon. Members of this House to join with me in congratulating Joseph Butler on receiving the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PARSLEY: Mr. Speaker, on March 16, 2019, I had the honour of attending the St. Patrick's Day celebrations at the Star of the Sea in Holyrood. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank the volunteer executive.

On February 2, the Star marked its 117th anniversary, and has for many years been the hub of community-based activities in the Town of Holyrood. The Star of the Sea has always supported the good work and concerns of seniors and local churches. It also serves as a beacon for a town that embraces such a wonderful mixture of development with rural attraction and interests.

A very special mention and salute to President Bryce Noble, 1st Vice-President Robert Kieley, 2nd Vice-President Patsy Myette-Noble, Secretary Terry Smith, Treasurer John Byrne, Public Relations Bert Murphy and Grand Marshall Ann Marie Marrie.

This being volunteer week gives me a great opportunity to thank all the volunteers and members who have devoted their lives to the

improvement of others while keeping our towns vibrant.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Cape St. Francis.

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

I rise in this hon. House today to thank the Torbay Lions Club for another successful year. The Torbay Lions Club is just five years old and has 14 members. They have been very active in the community and the surrounding area.

I had the opportunity to attend their charter meeting on February 25 and was amazed with all the community activities the group is involved in. Some of those activities include: the Holy Trinity Elementary breakfast program; the Holy Trinity High scholarship awards program, which they donated \$1,000 to, as well as a \$1,500 donation to the Juniper Ridge Intermediate library. They took part in the Santa Claus parade, volunteered at The Gathering Place, contributed donations to the food drive, provided financial help to individuals in need of assistance with medical and sporting needs and much more.

The Torbay Lions Club presented a donation of over 200 hats and headbands to the Janeway hospital, made by some wonderful volunteers.

I ask this hon. House and all its Members to join with me in thanking the Torbay Lions Club for another hard year of work and dedication.

This being National Volunteer Week, I would like to thank all the great volunteers in this province.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I would like recognize Peter Hiscock of Spaniard's Bay. To many people, Peter was a hero. He was born in 1986 with an extremely rare genetic skin condition called lamellar ichthyosis that would last his entire life. His skin would grow 14 times faster than average and would shed every three days. As a result of the disease, he did not have sweat glands, which also created discomfort.

In spite of this challenge, Peter was happy, determined and curious, like most children. As he grew older, he made it his mission to promote awareness and education and provide support for other people living with the rare condition.

Peter created a Facebook page, Ichthyosis Awareness NL, where he posted documents and videos. He also had a tremendous love for cars. He frequently attended car shows, where he also promoted awareness. One day, Mr. Speaker, at a show, he met a little boy who is living with the exact same condition. Peter became a strong support for that child and his family.

Through his social media page he also connected with people in Bermuda, the United States and the United Kingdom who are also living with the disease.

Peter Hiscock recently passed away at age of 33, surrounded by his family and loved ones, but his work of creating awareness and support will live on.

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: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand here today to congratulate Ms. Judy White, QC, on her recent appointment as Chair

of the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission.

Established in 1971, the Human Rights Commission is responsible for investigating written complaints of alleged violations of the Human Rights Act, promoting the act, conducting education and research designed to eliminate discriminatory conduct and advising and helping individuals, groups, organizations and governments on matters related to human rights.

Ms. White is the first Indigenous woman appointed to the role of Chair of the Human Rights Commission. Currently residing in Conne River, Ms. White is a Mi'kmaq grandmother and member of the Flat Bay Band. I would note, Mr. Speaker, in order to be here today, she left Conne River just after 4:30 this morning. She has a Bachelor of Laws degree from Dalhousie Law School and specializes in Aboriginal Law.

Ms. White has vast board and governance experience and has served many agencies in various capacities, including the National Centre for First Nations Governance, the First Nations Statistical Institute, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and the Board of Regents of Memorial University.

Mr. Speaker, the Human Rights Commission ensures that each and every resident of Newfoundland and Labrador is afforded fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of their lives. Given Ms. White's knowledge and experience, I am confident she will contribute significantly to the commission and our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the hon. minister for the advance copy. All Members of this side of the House join the hon. minister on congratulating Judy White, QC, on her appointment as chair.

The Human Rights Commission plays a critical role in our society in investigating complaints, providing advocacy to groups and individuals on various matters pertaining to the Human Rights Act. As the minister noted, Ms. White, QC, is the first Indigenous woman appointed to the role of chair of the Human Rights Commission.

Ms. White, QC, is a Mi'kmaq member of the Flat Bay Band, with extensive experience in Aboriginal Law. Her impressive CV includes having served as the chief executive officer of the Assembly of First Nations, and she is currently the assistant deputy minister of Intergovernmental and Indigenous Affairs secretariat with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

All Members on this side of the House join with me in wishing Judy White, QC, every success in this important work.

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. Our Human Rights Commission is one of the most vital tools to ensure a fair, just and equal society for our people. It is there that our people can be heard and seek justice. It is one of the foundations of our society.

Judy White, QC, an incredible Indigenous woman, who brings a wealth of experience and knowledge and expertise, who is willing to lead our province in ensuring that everyone has access to fairness, justice and equality, there is much to celebrate.

Judy White, thank you for stepping up. Brava!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize April 7 to 13 as National Volunteer Week.

This year's theme The Volunteer Factor – Lifting Communities, highlights the exponential impact of volunteers and how they lift their communities. Our province's volunteers also lift our spirits and contribute to our well-being.

Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, 46 per cent of our residents volunteer at an average of 151 hours a year. This incredible statistic clearly shows us the true sense of selflessness and passion shared by our province's volunteers and community sector.

Our communities are vibrant and stronger when volunteers get involved. Their guidance and caring has made a difference in so many lives. To all of our volunteers, you should be very proud of your accomplishments. Your kindness and support continue to have a monumental impact on children, family and seniors in every aspect of their lives.

It is especially appropriate during National Volunteer Week that the contributions of volunteers are both recognized and celebrated. Please accept our heartfelt thanks to all volunteers for your ongoing efforts, work and dedication.

This morning, I enjoyed breakfast with the Vera Perlin Society for their annual volunteer appreciation event and I am looking forward to participating in other events across the province throughout the week.

Mr. Speaker, I have often said, volunteers do not get paid, not because they are worthless, but because they're priceless.

I invite all Members of this hon. House to please join me in congratulating our province's volunteers for the invaluable role they play in our society.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. All my colleagues on this side of the House certainly echo the minister's comments. We certainly want to acknowledge the volunteers and the work that they do throughout our province. Volunteers are an integral part of our communities and this is an excellent week to show our appreciation for that.

I'd like to comment on they're priceless – there's no doubt about it; they're priceless. Actually, the stats that were presented are a little surprising because I know and I guess everyone here in this House knows of some people that put in far more hours than the average. This is what lifts our communities up.

It's great to rise here today and show appreciation for our volunteers, what they do, unselfish, charitable work that they do to keep our communities running and I want to thank them for their generosity and for their enthusiasm in all that they do.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister. Volunteers indeed are priceless. Bravo to the legions of unsung heroes who make our communities better in countless ways. Especially in these uncertain and tough economic times, volunteers are stepping up in their communities, making them more resilient, creating environments for sustainable jobs, tourism and more. Volunteers are making life more bearable for the many people struggling, for seniors, young working families, children, instilling hope.

To all our volunteers, thank you for your vision, your passion and compassion. Bravo!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we'll have to keep the dramatic content of Question Period high today if we're to encourage the young observers in the galleries to come back for more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSBIE: The Code of Conduct requires Members of the House of Assembly to respect the law – and I'm quoting – and the institution of the Legislature and acknowledge our need to maintain the public trust by performing our duties with accountability.

In the face of this ethical duty, the Premier has hinted that there will be no discussion and no questions on the budget.

How can the Premier square this with his ethical obligation to promote accountability?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, first of all, I will guarantee you that my Code of Conduct and the transparency to this House of Assembly will be intact. What I do, however, say is that I will not put this House of Assembly or the people of this province in a situation where they would go into an election without having an accountable record of the financial affairs of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we faced that in 2015. It was the previous Tory administration that on September 26, when I wrote them a letter, failed to answer that letter giving us an update or giving the people an update. Subsequent to that, I look forward to having a discussion when I get more time with the next question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's answer might be reassuring, except that he hasn't said that he intends to give the House the normal 75 hours of debate and questioning.

The Premier last week shut down the House for a week in order to shield his bogus Accord deal from accountability in this House.

How can the Premier deliver an \$8 billion budget while shutting down Question Period, Estimates scrutiny and legislative debate and still comply with his ethical obligation to respect the institution of the Legislature and promote accountability?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, once again, I'm not going to get down into the dirt and the mudslinging that I'm seeing from the Leader of the Opposition today.

Mr. Speaker, just look at the individual opposite right now, as I look at him and we look through you, and just to see the smile on his face. Well, I will tell you, there is a concern for me for the last 3½ years from people in this province who are still reeling from the financial situation that the Tory administration left this province in.

I don't find this at all funny, Mr. Speaker. This is not funny. We have taken this work very seriously. We've put in place a plan to put this province back on track. That plan is working, Mr. Speaker.

We will be bringing forward a budget next Tuesday that we will put to the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, this House has reached a sorry state when the government can reproach a questioner for raising an ethical issue and calling it: down in the mud.

The Premier told *Open Line* Monday that three of the issues arising from the scientific consultative process around methylmercury contamination are resolved. One of these issues is the compensation fund.

What is the amount of the compensation fund and where will the money come from?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to remind the people of this province, when we talk about the Independent Experts Advisory Committee, the reason why, number one, that committee was formed in the first place, this came out of concerns of methylmercury in the Lake Melville reservoir, which is as a result of flooding at the Muskrat Falls project.

Let's not forget, that prior to 2010 or 2011, there was a report from the Joint Review Panel that talked about this very issue. The work wasn't done in pre-planning like we were told it was, Mr. Speaker, by the Tory administration who sanctioned this project.

This, once again, was another issue that we were left to fix. We put in place the IEAC and those recommendations which I'll get a chance to speak to in a few minutes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Just as a factual issue, Mr. Speaker, it was the federal government that was supposed to do the preparatory work on the methylmercury preparation, not the provincial.

I haven't heard an answer about the compensation fund amount or where the money is coming from. Will the amount of the compensation fund cause the estimated cost of the Muskrat Falls project to exceed the budgeted amount of \$12.7 billion? If not, why not?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, right now based on the work that has been done by the CEO Stan Marshall, we've been able to put this budget on track since June of 2017. If you remember, we saw escalating numbers and numbers that weren't shared through the former PC administration. They weren't shared with the public.

Once again, I go back to September 26, two things that I asked for was a financial update on the affairs of this province. This is back in 2015. The other thing that I asked for, prior to the election, was an update on the Muskrat Falls project. None of that information was provided by the PC administration at the time. Not only did they not provide it to me, Mr. Speaker, but they didn't provide it to the people of this province.

We, indeed, put in place an Independent Expert Advisory Committee. They did some work and they came back with four recommendations; three of which we have had consensus and one of which we will be discussing with our Indigenous groups in the next few days.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Again, no answer to the question.

Mr. Speaker, what the people of the province want is ownership of problems, not history lessons. Will the amount of the settlement with Indigenous people –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CROSBIE: – and Lake Melville residents around methylmercury cause the Muskrat Falls project to exceed budget? That's the question.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: No, Mr. Speaker, there's no reason to believe it would exceed budget. But

the Leader of the Opposition and the current Leader of the PC Party just said something which I think is a little profound, which means talking responsibility. Added to that, you should take responsibility for the actions of your party.

I'm asking right now, since he's made the statement to take responsibility, does the PC Party, the Leader of the Opposition, take responsibility for the failed Muskrat Falls project which leads to, by the way, even though your Members may disagree with the fact that it's a fallacy that rates would not double, everyone in this province knows as a result of this project, left unmitigated, those rates would double – so I ask the Leader of the Opposition: Based on your first comment, do you take responsibility for the Muskrat Falls project?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: We all know that I get to ask the questions and the Premier is meant to give the answers, which seldom happens.

However, I'll say this, we have taken responsibility. We have taken ownership with our plan to mitigate Muskrat rates and we haven't seen yours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSBIE: Will the Premier explain to the House why his government will not dedicate the \$160 million yearly from his agreement with the federal government to Muskrat Falls rate mitigation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it seems to me that we have the Leader of the PC Party now that's looking for some of that Accord money which he thought last week was fake. So here we go, Mr. Speaker, here we go, there's a PC Leader, then, who wants to spend all the money they can just like they did prior to 2015, making decisions which may not be sustainable.

This is an accountable crowd over here. We have put this province back on track, but still he didn't answer the question about responsibility for Muskrat Falls, which I thought was a little interesting.

I want to remind the people of this province that the plan to mitigate rates in this province is 17 cents. Why won't you be transparent, fix your plan, you've double-billed \$150 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Order, please!

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, the \$160-million yearly that we're told we're getting is money, but compared to the \$22 billion, which has resulted from the Premier Peckford Atlantic Accord, it is cucumbers.

The Premier is scheduled to present –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CROSBIE: – to the Muskrat Falls inquiry on July 4 and 5, which we now know will be after the election. He said yesterday that he's eager to explain his role. I understand there are a number of dates during the last week of April and May where no public hearing is scheduled.

Has the Premier asked to move his date up so he can testify to the people of the province?

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

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

I'm happy to stand up and answer this question, as the inquiry, and most inquiries, do fall under the mandate of the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

What I would say is that we were extremely lucky to have someone of the calibre and capability of Justice Richard LeBlanc handle the inquiry, and he has also quite capable staff there,

as we can see by the recent elevation of one of those individuals.

What I will say is that it's my understanding that all planning for the inquiry, including witness testimony, is done by the commissioner and his staff, and would be at their request.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the Minister of Justice for that lesson in how inquiries conduct their business, but I'm sure a request from the Premier would be treated with due deference.

The Minister of Natural Resources is scheduled to present to Muskrat Falls inquiry on June 13, which will likely be after the election.

Has the minister asked to move up that date so that people can hear from her?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I will stand and answer this question as the minister responsible for inquiries, as I just said approximately one minute and 30 seconds ago, inquiries are led by the commissioner, and the commissioner would set the timelines for witness testimony. Again, all people that would be requested to stand in front of that inquiry will do so at the timeline that is requested by the commissioner and staff.

What I would say is this, and this is just my personal opinion, I can guarantee you that everybody on this side would love to get up and stand and talk about that inquiry, but I'm not sure about the Members on the other side.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Autism Society has had its funding frozen for many years by this government. Now, facing significant financial crisis, the society is considering laying off staff and cutting services.

Given Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the highest rates of autism spectrum disorder in this country, why is the minister sitting by and allowing this uncertainty for staff and clients?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, what I can say to this hon. House is we certainly value the work of the Autism Society in this province, in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a government, Mr. Speaker, we provide about \$500,000 in funding. We have no intention of cutting that funding. We continue to maintain our commitment.

Just recently, Mr. Speaker, my department provided an extra, around \$30,000 for various smaller programs to the Autism Society.

Mr. Speaker, we are one of several government departments that comprise an Autism Action Council across departments and we will continue to work with them to move forward, 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.

Mr. Speaker, the Autism Society provides services to some 300 clients every week. These services range from developing better social skills, finishing school, to finding a job.

Why is the minister not supporting them in the endeavours that they put forward?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer this question.

Part of my mandate letter and part of our undertaking when I took on this portfolio was in conjunction with my colleagues across a variety of departments to develop an Autism Action Plan. We have been actively engaged with the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities and a wide range of stakeholders.

That plan has significant fiscal challenges and, as a result of that, requests have been submitted through the budgetary process. The budget will be delivered by my colleague next Tuesday and I think the populous will be pleased with the results of our hard work over the last four years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I on this side of the House continue to hear example after example about individuals living with autism and an IQ of more than 70 being denied services.

When will the minister do the right thing and ensure that these individuals are not falling through the cracks?

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

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

The issue of constraints around the access to services for people on the autism spectrum was part of the work of the Autism Action Council. That will be referenced in any plans that we bring forward, and, as I say, that will be part and parcel of the budget process and that's being delivered next Tuesday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is not only families with autistic children that are impacted by the lack of services arising from the IQ 70 policy, but also families with adult children. These moms and dads are getting older and very concerned about what will happen to their sons and daughters when they are no longer able to care for them.

What is the minister going to do to help these families?

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

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

As part of broader approach to the delivery of home supports and home care, we are moving very much towards a functional approach and an individualized approach. So it will not matter what your diagnosis is, it will not matter what your specific IQ may or may not be, you will get the services you need provided, if possible at all, in your home, certainly in your own community, to match your needs with the resources that you need. That is part and parcel of not just the Autism Action Plan, but also the entire thrust of home support, 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.

Mr. Speaker, both the minister's mandate letter and *The Way Forward* referenced developing a provincial autism strategy and supporting persons with autism.

Mr. Speaker, on the eve of an election, will the minister commit to ensuring that the services are provided for people who need to avail of these services?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, it is our aim to always provide at every opportunity the best quality and the right care from the right person in the right place at the right time.

The Member opposite is just as keen as a lot of other people to hear about our Autism Action Plan. It's coming. The budget is Tuesday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, there's been a lot of families and a lot of individuals fall through the cracks for the last four years with no strategy put in play.

While no changes to the eligibility criteria for admission to personal care homes have been made, the guidelines for regional health authority staff have changed. These guidelines were distributed to assessors for personal care homes in August and September of 2018. Since then, assessors are telling us that many seniors who would've previously qualified for admission to personal care homes are no longer eligible.

Once and for all, can the minister explain this assessment process?

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

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

The issue of eligibility for a personal care home is based on criteria that were established by the former PC administration and dates back at least to 2011. Those have not been changed. The RHAs have been asked to ensure that these standards, these criteria are used uniformly in the same way. So it doesn't matter whether you're in St. Anthony or Burgeo or Ferryland, you get the same assessment.

If the Member opposite is aware of some individuals who he feels have fallen through the cracks or not been assessed appropriately, it is his job to let me know, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Well, I can reassure the minister that in the previous administration there were a number of other seniors who did qualify for personal care home sponsorship.

Mr. Speaker, we are hearing that more seniors were denied in 2018 than in 2017; fewer than nine seniors in 2017 and more than 40 seniors in 2018.

Would a senior presented with loneliness, anxiety, fear of living alone be eligible today for admission to a personal care home?

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

MR. HAGGIE: I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to correct some of the flow of misinformation that comes from the benches opposite. There have been no changes to the criteria. People are still going into personal care homes with government-provided subsidy at a similar rate – in actual fact, a slightly higher rate than they have in previous years.

There has been no change in the criteria. Subsidies are available and, really, it's serving no one's interest for the Members opposite to generate fear and panic when they come up with these nebular stories about people who have fallen through the cracks.

If they've got people who they know or they feel have not been served well by the system, it is their job as elected representatives to bring those to me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're not putting fear out there; these are real people who are facing real experiences, with family who are facing trauma around this.

Mr. Speaker, this is not what we're hearing from families and personal care home operators. How can the minister and this government justify the Newfoundland and Labrador seniors who are experiencing anxiety, stress, depression and loneliness that their needs are not great enough to warrant admission to a personal care home?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, my department is aware of three people who we have had names and IDs and consent supplied who their Members felt that they were assessed inappropriately. Every one of those three has been dealt with and has been reassessed and is where they wish to be with government support, if that's what they wanted in the first place.

So the Member opposite if he has knowledge of individuals and he is keeping it from me for his own ends, he's not serving the interests of his constituents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guarantee you if we had knowledge of a senior who needs to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: – avail of a service, we will guarantee it that we'll reach out to every department necessary for them to get that service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: But I'm glad the minister brought it up, because, Mr. Speaker, in that vein, recently a 103-year-old senior in this province was denied access, not once, but twice to a personal care home. The reason, no physical care need, until the MHA applied some political pressure with the senior now looking to be put into a home, who was previously being taken care of by an 86-year-old family member. This is disgraceful.

Why does it take political pressure to ensure a 103-year-old senior is getting the care they need and deserve?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, obviously it's not possible to speak to individual circumstances in this House. The tradition has been on both sides of the House that we do not make reference to individual circumstances.

What I can say, however, is that those individuals who have a case that they have been inaccurately assessed, those who have come to our department, we have looked into those circumstances and they have been managed to their satisfaction, Mr. Speaker.

Mental health and physical health in our department are equally important, and they're actually recognized in the old criteria as well as work we are doing in consultation with the personal care homes about what we might do better in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our point here is that we shouldn't have to have politicians get politically involved in these cases. Policy should reflect the proper access to proper health care, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: In that vein, a 90-year-old couple who have both survived cancer, with one

of them also surviving a stroke, were also denied admission. Reason again, no physical care need. And again, with political pressure these seniors were approved.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: We have many more similar examples.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government demonstrate a caring, responsible attitude to our seniors and reverse the guidelines that are denying many of our vulnerable seniors access to personal care homes?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, these guidelines, these criteria were put in place in 2011. I would draw that to the Member opposite's attention. That was four years prior to this government taking over the role of governing and looking after health and community services.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we have had three cases with ID and consent that have been brought before the department. They have been resolved to the satisfaction of the individuals concerned and their family members.

It is all well and good to bring up these mythical cases if there is no ID. I would suggest the Member opposite –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HAGGIE: – is simply fear mongering and bringing this out at a time when he thinks he can gain some electoral advantage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of the Immigration Action Plan under *The Way Forward* government contracted Goss Gilroy Inc. to contact and survey expatriates. This was completed over a year ago in the spring of 2018, yet the results have not been released.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain to the House why he has not released the report?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to take the opportunity to say congratulations to the students from St. Paul's who are here today visiting with us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: The hon. Member is correct; we have received a report from Goss Gilroy on the expat survey that we announced last year. We're still working on that in the department. It will be coming very soon.

The province, as we know, has met much anecdotal information that was kicking around this sphere. We wanted to make sure we had evidence-based reporting. The opportunity has come that we contracted a supplier to do that and we came forward with that information. It will be released in due course.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, Goss Gilroy has been paid tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars to complete this survey, yet government refuses to release the findings. There have been studies done in the past on this. The common reason expats leave and don't come back is that cost of living, high taxes and the lack of long-term, permanent employment. Perhaps government is being told loud and clear that these remain the reasons.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What is he trying to hide by continuing to hold this report?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you very much for the question.

I'd love to stand and talk about immigration in this House, considering the fact that the previous administration cut the guts out of the department when they were in government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: We've stacked that department up now. We've got first-class individuals providing services to the people of this province and newcomers. The numbers don't lie here, Mr. Speaker. The facts lay within the numbers. We have 1,525 individuals that are calling this province home today; 25 per cent more than the previous year; 25 per cent more than the year before that as well; 25 per cent year over year.

Growth is important. We are doing things right. We are continuing to move forward on this. We've released three additional years to the action plan (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, in 2014, government environment officials recommended to reject Eagleridge's bid to explore for gold in the Avalon Wilderness area. Yet, the then PC government overrode that decision. Then the Liberal government made such a hash of it, a Supreme Court judge ruled that the mining company could go ahead, despite the fact that there was no rigorous environmental assessment.

Eagleridge will destroy one of the last pristine wilderness areas on the Avalon Peninsula and there will be no getting it back.

I ask the Premier: Is his government going to stand idly by and pretend they can do nothing while this mining company has its way?

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell the hon. Member that the environmental process was followed in this project, and it was found to be released.

We do have people out there, and I understand some of them were in the House there just last week, who don't agree with our decision. Our decision is based on what we've heard from the courts. We have followed due process and the right process and this project is proceeding in an environmentally friendly manner.

If we get to the point where further development is required, in the mine or otherwise, a full environmental assessment will be done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, it is not being done in an environmentally friendly way, and their own government environmental officials said there was a problem.

While the 11-kilometre exploration road for the Eagleridge gold mining project is bad enough, it pales in comparison to government permitting Eagleridge to do four years of devastating exploration drilling in and around two pristine watersheds near the Salmonier Nature Park and the Hawke Hill Ecological Reserve.

I ask the Premier: How can he allow this irreversible, destructive process with no environmental review?

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

MR. LETTO: Mr. Speaker, we have officials within the Environment Department who are monitoring this project on a continuous basis.

We have found no deficiencies in what was approved for this project. The project did include a road and some exploration work.

Again, I will say, Mr. Speaker, they are following the guidelines that were released. This project was released under several conditions, of which we are monitoring, and we can confirm that they're being followed.

Again, if further development is required in Eagleridge, then a full environmental assessment will be done.

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, it's too late for the devastation that's happening right now as we speak. To date, no analysis has been done of the economic and social benefits of the Avalon wilderness area and watershed over the long term.

I ask the Minister of Environment: Why does government assume the short-term environmentally devastating and limited returns of a gold mine makes better sense than long-term benefits of this rare, pristine wilderness area and the Salmonier Nature Park, which is loved by all?

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

MR. LETTO: Mr. Speaker, again, I will say that nothing is happening in this project that is outside of what was approved during the process – nothing. They are following – and it's being monitored on a continuous basis. We see no deficiencies in the project. The road has been completed. The drilling, as approved through permits, will continue.

Again, I will say, if any further development is required on this project – and that is clearly stated in the conditions, and they have several conditions to follow regarding the nature park – they have to stay within certain distance and that's being adhered to.

Mr. Speaker, again, if we need to get into further development and if a gold mine happened to

result from this exploration work, a full environmental assessment (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Time for Oral Questions is over.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, I was asked a question about the contingency fund. Mr. Speaker, there's been less than \$20 million of the fund utilized. It was utilized for three purposes: emergency housing through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, children in care and judges' salary and benefits.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS legislation was amended in 2012 allowing the regional service boards to charge cabin owners for a garbage collection service; and

WHEREAS it has been the view of a number of cabin owners that the service wasn't required; and

WHEREAS the Eastern Regional Service Board has implemented a cabin garbage collection service on the Avalon that is viewed as an intimidating tax/fee collection policy while other boards were very much more accommodating.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to re-examine the Newfoundland and Labrador Waste Management Strategy with particular emphasis on the legislation and an implementation plan that considers all stakeholders and takes into consideration regional disparities.

Mr. Speaker, this petition itself, I think we all agree in this House of Assembly that the health and well-being of the ecosystems and the environment is important. That's a given. We also understand that the Newfoundland and Labrador Waste Management Strategy is necessary.

I've had a number of discussions with cabin owners in my district, along with my colleague from CBS, and it is evident that there is a void and some confusion being created. Much of the confusion has been created by correspondence and directives from the minister responsible, which basically brought a halt to some of the collection and created uncertainty.

Cabin owners have many questions: When will they get their refunds? What's the definition of unserviced roads? What about those who have incurred legal fees? What about cabin owners who want the service? How will other places be affected?

I had the opportunity to attend the Eastern Regional Service Board's meeting this past weekend, they have questions. How do they continue to provide the same level of service?

How do they deal with subcontracts that are in place? How do they carry out the strategy's mandate? The decrease revenue creates concerns, and I don't want to offend the minister opposite, this is their words not mine, they use the term a knee-jerk reaction by the minister.

The bottom line, everyone values our environment and we see the need for a strategy, but we need clarity and a definitive direction on that information, and, most of all, they want to be included in the process. All parties have a stake in this and would like to have their opinions considered.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, for a response please.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What an opportunity. I met with the chair, the vice-chair and an employee of Eastern Regional Service Board yesterday, following their meeting on Saturday of which the Member says he attended. We have a plan in place that we are working together.

We met yesterday, as I said, and we decided on a plan going forward. These issues were raised, they were raised with me yesterday. Whether it was a knee-jerk reaction or not, I'm not going to get into that foolishness, but, anyway, going forward, I'm not looking back I'm looking forward.

The chair is in place, Mr. Mallowney, and the vice-chair who is Mayor Breen, Mayor Mallowney and Mayor Breen, as I said, we have agreed that the best way forward on this is to work together to put a plan in place. They have until June 30 to come back to us with a plan of action, how to implement (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

If I could have the Members attention. It has come to my attention that there is an issue in the West Block. There is a leak and they will be closing the West Block shortly. I would ask all

Members just to confer with your staff, if there's anything that you need from that building, you may want to obtain it now.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: No, we're going to be fine. We'll continue.

Further petitions?

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I stand on the petition for the hospital in Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: WHEREAS the successful proponents for the new hospital in Corner Brook are scheduled to be announced this spring with construction anticipated to begin in the fall, and as this is estimated to be a four-year construction period, and as 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.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I have names here from all over: Holyrood, there's a Glovertown here, St. John's, Colliers, Spaniard's Bay. So this is all across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I heard the minister stand up yesterday and talk about the infrastructure program for seniors, for the long-term care facility in Corner Brook and others that are going to be – and that's great news. I'd just like for the minister, if possible, to take it to the next step, to encourage and make

sure local people are hired on this major project in Corner Brook.

We look forward to the project in Corner Brook. It was 2007 when it was first announced, 12 years ago. To have the construction to start and to have it announced is going to be a great endeavour by this government that started this back in 2015 and made a commitment to have it done. And I'm proud of that, Mr. Speaker, and I'm proud to be part of that back in Opposition and in government.

What I'd like is to do what we can to get local people hired. This is for all western Newfoundland, not just the Humber - Bay of Islands area. As I said before when I spoke to several of the union halls, there are people even out as far as Baie Verte, the Northern Peninsula, out Port au Port area, Port aux Basques area, a lot of local people, tradespeople and labourers, would love to be able to work in the area so they can go home to their families, so that they can spend time at their home, and they are well-qualified, well-trained tradespeople and labourers that can do the job.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, I ask all ministers who have any role in this here with the companies that are in the running for the – there are two left. I encourage them all to ask them to hire local people, because I know last year it was supposed to be done and it wasn't done. I just want to make sure that government is well aware of it this year. I'd love to see it done before the election, so that they can have great news – and I don't care if it's election bait, I don't care, as long as we can keep those people home for four years, I'd be a happy man, and I would applaud the government if that's done before the election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. Mr. Speaker, we always do what we can to ensure

that Newfoundland workers and Newfoundland companies are winning the contracts and getting the jobs on our construction sites. We've had a very successful infrastructure plan as a government. We continue it.

Just this morning the Premier was at the Heavy Civil Association and announced some, I think it was \$120 million in municipal capital works this year, Mr. Speaker.

I was very happy today actually, Mr. Speaker, because we have big-scale projects, but I was extremely happy today to see the Winterton fire department receiving a new fire hall. This being Volunteer Week, it's very important that we give our volunteers and our volunteer firefighters in this case good equipment and good buildings to work with, Mr. Speaker. So, I was very proud this morning that under this year's municipal capital works program, the community of Winterton is going to receive a new fire hall.

That benefits the economy as a whole, because you have local workers, you have local businesses supplying the materials.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

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

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

These are the reasons for this petition: Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province to still require an assessment and referral from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and gender identity clinic in Toronto; the wait time for an assessment at CAMH is approximately two or more years; in recent years, other provinces have improved their in-province assessment and referral processes, in addition to increasing coverage and funding for gender-affirming surgeries; without adequate MCP coverage these surgeries can cost thousands of dollars; the Department of Health and Community Services is already engaged in investigating an in-

province assessment and referral process; long wait times for gender-affirmation surgeries often contribute to prolonged gender dysphoria and worsened mental health; among transgender youth age 14 to 25 in Canada, 65.2 per cent considered suicide and 36.1 per cent made at least one suicide attempt in the last year according to a 2014 trans youth health survey.

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to develop an in-province assessment process for gender-affirming surgeries that would eliminate the need for an assessment by CAMH as the sole referral option, increase funding and coverage for gender-affirming surgeries throughout MCP and expand the types of surgeries covered to better reflect national standards.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I spoke to this petition yesterday and I asked the Minister of Health to respond to it. I do know that the wait times for an assessment at CAMH, in fact, have reduced somewhat. However, again we are the only province in the country that still requires CAMH as the sole source for assessment. Ontario doesn't even do that.

Mr. Speaker, it's been too long and I ask the minister to stand and respond, to let us know precisely what it's happening. How long will the trans communities and their families and their partners have to wait before the assessments can be done in province? We know that there are experienced health care providers with the expertise who are qualified to do these assessments and the legislation that allows them to do so has not come to the House, although we have been asking for it for years.

Once again, I ask the minister to stand and to respond to this, to tell the people of the province exactly what he's doing and what is the time frame. Will we see this happen before the next election? Simple question, Mr. Speaker, and it is my hope that the Minister of Health will respond.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

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 their own waste for extended periods of time. We believe this is directly related to government's failure to ensure adequate staffing at all 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.

Now, Mr. Speaker, today's petitions – every one of them actually are residents of Centerville. We're getting these petitions from all throughout the Island. When I presented this petition yesterday and the minister responded, as he has on other occasions, yesterday, basically, his response was that people in long-term care homes, staff and so on, are offended by the fact that these petitions are being presented. That somehow it's saying they they're not doing their job.

I want to clarify, once again, this is not about that. This is about saying that there is not necessarily adequate staffing on these Alzheimer and dementia units at all times. That's what the petition is saying. It's not saying the people there are not doing job, it's saying there are not enough of them; there are not always enough of them there for various reasons.

It's also important to note, this is not my petition. This petition was developed and circulated by advocates for senior citizens' rights. The first time it was presented, there was over 6,500 signatures, the first batch. Since then, we've continually been presenting them. The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has numerous petitions as well from them that they want presented.

So, when we present petitions here in the House of Assembly, it's not about us presenting petitions. If you're saying that this is fear mongering, if you're saying it's untrue, if you're saying it's insulting, then you're saying it to the people who created the petitions and the people who signed these petitions.

You're not hurting me by saying it. I don't care what you say about me, couldn't care less, but, at the end of the day, it's the people that are bringing these forward, who are asking Members of the Opposition to bring these forward, who you, Sir, are insulting by saying that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Reason for the petition: The government now requires Regional Health Authorities to strictly enforce a policy that requires all applicants being assessed to have a physical care need to qualify for admission to a personal care home. Seniors with issues such as anxiety, depression, fear of falling and loneliness are no longer eligible. Many seniors who would have qualified just months ago are now being denied access.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to revise the policy on personal care home access.

Mr. Speaker, we've had the discussion a number of times in the House of Assembly around policies that are relevant to taking care of our seniors and putting them in an environment

that's conducive to their needs, that addresses their particular physical needs, but also their mental health needs around anxiety, depression and fear, to ensure that families have less turmoil and can feel less stress when it comes to their loved ones being taken care of.

There's been a lot of debate around the particular policy, and we're not arguing that a policy, if fully enforced and if taken by the pure letter of its interpretation, may indeed force people out of that. What we're saying is the practice – and practice has been there – and policy for a period of time around ensuring that it wasn't only your physical restrictions that would dictate your access to a personal care home, and the provided services that these professionals provide in a loving, caring, inclusive, engaging, social environment, while at the same time, protecting our seniors because of the programs and services and the structure of these facilities.

What we're saying here is, that for a number of years, the process worked. There was no reason to change it. There was no reason to fix something that wasn't broken. There was very minimal complaints when it came to access. The process was being accessed and determined by financial assistance officers, by the assessors, by social workers in a number of cases, to ensure that these people would have access to a service that would be conducive to a better quality of life and a dignity within their life.

Mr. Speaker, we have to take into account, nobody goes and says: I want to leave my home. We all agree with home first but anybody who makes the decision that they want to leave and go into a personal care home does it based on a reasonable understanding that they can get a better quality of care based on their ailment. Their ailment, in some cases, are physical, but in a number of cases where they're being denied, it's now based on mental health, it's based on anxiety, depression. It's based on fear.

So, to do justice here, and to really take care of the vulnerable sector, we need to be able to go back to a policy that was working, Mr. Speaker. It was working and we fixed something that didn't need to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker, we will be speaking to this again and I appreciate your attention on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

I think it's important just to lay out here again in the relative calm of petitions, there has been no change to the criteria that are currently employed. These are the ones that have been in force since 2011. They do include provision for consideration of mental as well as physical care needs.

We are, as is asked for in the petition, reviewing the guidelines and the policies. Indeed, I had a meeting this morning with the Quality Living Alliance personal care home group that represent personal care home operators. These are at draft stages, a lot of to and fro and very active discussions.

Just for reference, subsidies are still being provided for those who have care needs and are eligible. There is currently no wait time for any subsidy outside Central Health where the wait time is currently 2.5 months, same as last year.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day, Sir.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend the Automobile Insurance Act, Bill 3, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act, Bill 3, and that the 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?

The motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill entitled, "An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act," carried. (Bill 3)

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act. (Bill 3)

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 3 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 Natural Resources, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Insurance Companies Act, Bill 6, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Service NL shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Insurance Companies Act, Bill 6, 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?

The motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Service NL to introduce a bill entitled, "An Act To Amend The Insurance Companies Act," carried. (Bill 6)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Insurance Companies Act. (Bill 6)

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 6 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 call from the Order Paper, Order 2, second reading of Bill 1.

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, that Bill 1 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Environmental Protection Act." (Bill 1)

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my absolute pleasure to stand in this hon. House today to speak to Bill 1. I've been waiting a long time for this day, since I assumed the Municipal Affairs and Environment portfolio. With this bill, we are proposing to amend the *Environmental Protection Act* so that we can begin drafting regulations to ban the distribution of retail plastic bags.

Today, we are taking the first step in banning the bag. We believe that a ban on these bags will protect the environment and improve the waste management system. Every day we see another media article about the problem of plastic waste in our oceans, in our ponds, turning up in seabirds, in sea life and littering the landscape. Plastic bags are very lightweight, very thin, and we've all seen them blowing like a flag, and wrapped around a tree in the middle of what is otherwise a green, natural setting.

Mr. Speaker, I have to pause here and give you a personal story. I have a tree in my front yard with two bags sitting in it; one that's been there for six or seven years, and you still see the threads. It's still not fully gone, parts of it are still there. I have one there that blew in there last year and it's like brand new. If I got up and took it down, I could take it back to Sobeys and put the groceries in it. So, Mr. Speaker, what we're saying and what we're seeing is actually real.

A roadside litter audit by the MMSB in 2016 showed that plastic bags constituted less than 6 per cent of the waste stream. So we have to keep that in mind. It's less than 6 per cent of the actual waste stream. But for us, the bags are a very visible reminder that we have a problem, and we are not alone. Plastic waste is an issue that is affecting every corner of the world.

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment has continued to work on the issue of plastic waste, including bags, with the other provinces and territories and the federal government. I sit as the representative for this province on the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment and, together, the council has approved, in principle, a nation-wide zero plastic strategy, as committed in the Ocean Plastics Charter. I can assure you that Newfoundland and Labrador will be thoroughly involved in the development of the supporting action plan and will continue to work with the

council to decrease the amount of plastic waste in our environment.

To address the broader category of packaging, we are working with the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board toward establishing an extended producer responsibility, otherwise known as EPR program, for the management of printed paper and packaging as a long-term strategy. We are working toward recycling efforts and making waste disposal easier and more efficient for people.

Just a few months ago, we called a full review of the provincial Waste Management Strategy to look at how we are disposing of waste across the province. Ms. Ann Marie Hann, former clerk of the Executive Council, is currently engaged in that review, and we anticipate it will clue up in December 2019.

Mr. Speaker, we have all heard the calls to ban the bag from municipalities, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and, in fact, seven municipalities within Newfoundland and Labrador have gone ahead and put in their own municipal ban. We've also heard from the average resident. I have personally been in favour of a ban for some time. Though we saw the social media campaigns and met with stakeholder organizations, a public engagement process had never been undertaken on the issue of the bag until we launched consultations from March 5-27.

Mr. Speaker, we received the most feedback on the engageNL site that's ever been received on the platform. Over 3,000 public submissions, including 160 written submissions, show that 87 per cent of the respondents supported a ban of retail plastic bags.

It is important to recognize that the amendment of this act does not constitute an immediate ban of the retail bag. Amending the legislation is the first step and it allows us to facilitate a ban through the regulations. People need not worry about being immediately impacted; it can take a few months to get used to bringing their reusable bags when they go to the store. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that through those consultations we have seen that many people are way ahead of us and many people are using reusable bags as their means of grocery shopping.

So while it may take six to 12 months to fully implement the ban, that should not stop anyone from beginning to reducing their use of these bags right away. Businesses can begin looking at offering alternatives and many of them have, and residents can start getting used to bringing useable bags along to the stores.

We have always felt that a provincial ban of the bag was not something to be taken lightly. Multiple departments and entities have been working on this issue for many months. Coming to the decision to ban the bag has not been a quick process, but we wanted to ensure due diligence was done before we move to ban any bag.

As we have said, we are sensitive to the effects that this ban might have on businesses and industry. We have met MNL, waste management organizations, business stakeholders and producer representatives and we will continue to do that as the regulations take effect. This amendment will allow us to draft regulations that take into account what we heard in consultations about how to do it so people and businesses will be least impacted.

In drafting the regulations, officials will take into account how long businesses and industry will need to adjust to the change, what types of alternatives people will have available instead of the plastic retail bags, whether to require a fee on alternatives to limit their overconsumption and required exemptions.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is relatively straightforward. The consultations we just conducted demonstrate the strength of conviction from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They do not want plastic bags to be distributed at retail locations. The amendment seeks to make that legislatively possible. It will ultimately decrease plastic waste in the environment and ensure this province remains the beautiful and unique place that it is.

I'd like to have a few minutes to highlight some of the issues that came forward in the consultation process. I know when we implemented this consultation, there was a lot of kickback from many people that consultations weren't required, go ahead and ban the bag, we're wasting time, we're wasting money, we're

wasting resources to do a consultation; but, Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee you we heard a lot of information through the consultation process. I can guarantee you that the information that we've gathered through the consultation will inform us in developing the regulations going forward that will allow this ban to be implemented.

As everybody knows, we did the consultation from March 5 to 27 and we held public consultations on whether a distribution ban is the best approach to reduce waste plastic bags and the factors to consider if a ban were to be implemented.

A total of 2,845 questionnaires were completed through the engageNL forum. Additionally, the department received over 120 written submissions directly through mail or email. We want to thank those people who took the time to fill out the questionnaire, to do the survey or to send in a written submission. I can guarantee you that the information that was provided will be used, it was very useful and it will go a long way to help us develop those regulations in the very near future.

Some of the things that we received, of the 2,845 individuals who responded, for instance, 95 per cent of them identified themselves as being a member of the public, some were representatives of businesses or a member of an environmental organization, community organization, industry association or business interest group, municipal government, less than 1 per cent provincial government or regional service board.

The majority of the written submissions were from individuals, but submissions were also received from Municipalities NL; the Professional Municipal Administrators; Restaurants Canada; Restaurant Association of NL; the Council of Canadians, St. John's chapter; the Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Industry Association; the Retail Council of Canada; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; World Wildlife Fund; Stewardship Association of Municipalities; Clean St. John's, individual municipalities and individual businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be fair to say that we received a lot of feedback from a lot of

organizations and individuals, and many organizations that are certainly directly impacted by such a ban. I can honestly say that these organizations are much in favour of a ban, but they want time to make sure that it's implemented properly. We'll certainly take that into consideration when we're developing our regulations.

The majority of the respondents, 71 per cent, identify themselves as residing within the Avalon region of the province and 63 per cent were between the ages of 19 and 50 years old, so we have all kinds of information. If you go on the engageNL website, where the document exists, you will see where the different representation came from.

I think the survey showed as well that a lot of people are already engaged in this initiative. As we know, a lot of people are concerned about the environment and what plastic does to the environment. There were some who felt that probably we didn't go far enough with the plastic bags, we should go to other forms of plastic, or other plastic material, or other plastic

AN HON. MEMBER: Straws.

MR. LETTO: Yes, that's it.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, we're restricting this legislation to plastic bags. We think that's a good first start and the reason being, I guess, because we toyed with the idea of including other plastic issues as well, but we decided that we would stick with this because the questionnaire and the survey was geared around the banning of plastic bags. So, we felt that if we need to move ahead and move further with this, that further consultations should be and would be necessary.

As I said, we asked: What was the preferred approach to plastic retail bag use reduction. As I said, 87 per cent agreed that we should have a provincial ban on the distribution of plastic retail bags. So, just not to confuse people, the ban that we're proposing is a ban on the retail use of plastic bags. That's the one that you get if you go to pick up your groceries or other material, other outlets that may use these.

There was a lot of concern as well from some of the respondents that, well, the reusable bags, they had concern there was no plastic for wrapping meats or fish, but there will be other plastic material available at the checkouts to ensure that there is no contamination from one product to another. So that's not part of the ban.

Again, one of the other issues that came up and was a big concern for us was the fees, what we would do, if we would do fees at all. While respondents were highly supportive of a provincial ban on plastic retail bags, fewer, 66 per cent agreed that there should be mandated fees to purchase the alternatives and limit their overconsumption. That's the point, if we were to implement fees, that would be the point of implementing fees would be to – it's not much point of banning one product if we're not going to try to restrict the use of another one. We want to make sure that one doesn't cause another problem. I think most people understood that.

If fees were to be implemented – and we gave the respondents, we gave the people we surveyed some options on what they thought was a reasonable fee. The average suggested an effective fee to pay for a paper bag to reduce the overconsumption was 38 cents a bag and the average suggested an effective fee to pay for reusable bag to reduce their overconsumption was \$1.68.

Now, we know that in PEI, for instance, they're bringing in the ban on July 1, and for the first year their charge will be 25 cents per bag and I think it's a \$1 for a reusable bag. After the first year, into the second year, that goes up to 50 cents and \$2, respectively. So, whether we'll follow that, these are things that we will decide in consultation with the retail outlets and the other organizations that I just previously mentioned.

One thing was interesting, respondents were not in agreement on who should keep the revenue if we were to implement a ban; 42 per cent of respondents thought that it should be the retailers because they are the ones that have to provide the alternatives. Actually, 32 per cent thought that it should go to government and the remaining 26 per cent of the responses were varied. There were different ideas, including the use of fees for developing recycling programs,

initiatives to reduce waste, initiatives to mitigate climate change and environmental damages, to give to environmental or community charities or organizations, to give to waste management regulators or service providers, or that the revenue should be split between the provincial government and the retailers.

These are all things that we have to decide as we develop these regulations. We have started work already on developing regulations, knowing that the support is out there to bring in a ban. One of the things we asked as well in the survey was what would be their suggested implementation date. We have second reading here today. Hopefully, we'll get to Committee, then to third reading and then the bill has to be finalized, and then we'll have to develop the regulations. That's going to take some time but not a lot of time.

Anyway, we think that – and the respondents agreed – a period of six to 12 months would be reasonable to have the ban in effect, that would be the drop-dead date, sort of, of being able to purchase plastic bags at retail outlets. That will give time for people to adjust, it would give time for the retail outlets to get rid of their present stock and it would be time to allow them to have alternatives in place. We looked at other jurisdictions that have implemented a ban already, most of them go with the year. We think that may be reasonable, but it's something that we'll certainly discuss with all the stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, that's where we are today. As I said, this is the first step toward the implementation of a ban on plastic bags. I look forward to the debate that's going to follow this. I look forward to hearing from the Opposition as well. I'm sure they'll have questions that we can, hopefully, answer in Committee. I look forward to being able to implement this ban as quickly as we can because the people of the province have clearly spoken that it's something that they need. As I said, many municipalities, and especially those on the North Coast of Labrador, my colleague for Torngat Mountains, many of them have been doing it for years, so this is not new.

There's only one other province that has implemented a provincial ban. We would be the second province to do that. I think it's very

proactive and something that we should be doing, not only because it's the right thing to do, but it's the right thing to do for the environment.

Thank you, 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.

It's a pleasure to get up and speak on Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Environmental Protection Act and the banning of the plastic bag, which is something that our leader called for and I know my colleague from Mount Pearl North proposed doing some petitions to caucus on this issue as well last year, I guess, so he took a great interest in this bag issue.

It's one of those issues that, for the most part, we had 80 per cent of the population in favour of banning plastic bags, reusable bags, yet everyone was talking about it, everyone was making the conversation, they were showing pictures; you'd see these pictures down by Robin Hood Bay and out around in the woods; you'd hear stories of birds choking on plastic bags; hooked in trees. It was unsightly. It needed to be banned. Why don't we ban them? Why don't we use more creative – why don't we stop? There were a lot of conversations and I think, for the most part, everyone agreed with it. Like I said, when the word was out there, this was an issue that we had 80 per cent of the population in favour.

So, we did some news releases. Like I said, my colleague from Mount Pearl North was a strong advocate for it and we spoke out on it. So then about a month back, I guess, we asked questions here in this House. I asked them as critic and the media also asked questions of the minister at the time and we were told we needed more consultations, which is fine. I just struggle with why we needed more consultations when the verdict was in – from what we could gather – that people wanted action on this initiative and get the wheels in motion to bring in this ban.

We had the consultations for a really short period of time; it was probably a three-week period. As the minister stated, we had 2,845 individuals respond to engageNL. There was overwhelming response. We knew that before this consultation would have been asked for that people wanted the bags banned.

I guess the question then arose: Why are we having more consultations when we know what the people want? So now we're here today and we're bringing in a piece of legislation, we encouraged this, we're on record, we wanted this plastic bag ban and we felt it was time for it. Our wild ocean, our fishery, a lot of things are being affected by these unsightly – and they're unsightly, there's no doubt, but there are a lot of other things in our environment. That's one of many things, the reusable plastic bag, a lot of plastics are bad for our environment. This is a step in the right direction.

We're bringing in a piece of legislation that all we know is we're going to ban the bag. We're going to open up the *Environmental Protection Act* and we're going to insert these two clauses with a piece of legislation that's pretty, as you can tell – it's not a lot of detail. There's not a lot to it. But there's no regulation, there's no information, there's no – other than the fact we're going to ban the bag; that's all we have.

We don't have any implementation date. It's going to take six to 12 months. Exemptions and prohibitions of the sale and distribution of plastic retail bags, we don't know what's exempt. I mean, I read the PEI legislation, which was copied basically from Victoria, so I guess basically everyone is keeping consistent with the other. Listed off some exemptions are for loose items, food safety, medications, dry cleaning, some bulk items, to protect prepared foods, these sorts of things. They are brought in by Cabinet after the fact.

Again, it's fine to say you have a ban, but there are no details with this. We support a ban. I want to make that crystal clear, because anyone who gets up on the opposite side and will question what the Opposition supports, we support a ban and we've called for a ban. But we also like to get details. The general public wants details on these sorts of things. What's involved, what's exempt, what's not exempt, who can use it, what

are the rules? Some of these will be explained, and some of them already have been explained. And we went, actually, yesterday morning and the minister's officials provided a good briefing, and I thank them for that. They did a very good job and we asked lots of questions and we got some good information. Yet, we're left with a lot of unanswered questions, but they'll all show up in the regulations.

What will be the fines? Now, it is clearly written fines in our environmental – if you violate the act. They're clearly written for your first offence, if you're a corporation, second offence. First offence if you're a non-corporation, individual. But I have some concerns with that, of course, is that when we're talking about these reusable plastic bags, the concept is fine to ban the bag, but what about the small retailer, the mom-and-pop shop? So are these fines going to be applied to this mom-and-pop shop if they're caught using a plastic bag?

Now, I know the rules when it comes in place, they're supposed to abide by them. I hope everyone does, and I think most people will. But you're bringing in a piece of legislation and you're going to have right now until so – are there going to be different fines? Now, we will get to Committee and there'll be a lot of questions we can ask, and I will ask those questions. But there are lot of things, how deeply it was thought out, who consulted with them. I represent CBS, obviously, which is a farming community. I have a lot of farming kiosks on the side of the road, farmers markets, and that's part of CBS. Anyone that's from around this area drove through CBS when the vegetable season is alive and well, there are a lot of people backed in, that's the vegetable markets.

They use plastic bags. So, again, I'm not talking about phasing them out. I am in favour of a ban, but were they consulted? So they're going to reuse these bags. So we got a ban at the purchase, we got a ban in the stores, suppliers and retailers are not going to be able to use these bags, but what about in our Robin Hood Bay, in our landfill? There's no ban there, because these bags could still be in circulation for many, many years to come.

What about food banks? Food banks struggle to survive, because we know the recent fire, the public outcry and public support, obviously, from our community to bring them back. But there are a lot of smaller groups; they're not Loblaws or they're not Sobeys, they're not these chains. They're the small operations, they're community groups, they're flea markets and the list goes on. These bags are very commonly used. Were they consulted with in their consultations; did they have an input? And part two of this is going to be the fact we're going to be charging a fee at the checkout.

So, right now, you go into Walmart – I'll use Walmart as an example – you can go into Dollarama, I know there's a few places around, they're charging you for the plastic bag. It's a deterrent and I get it, and I got my own personal opinion on that because I believe that it's either one way or the other; you don't have the bag or you have the bag, free of charge, or you don't have the bag. This charging a fee for a bag – anyway, that's my personal opinion; I don't get it.

But right now, for eons and generations in Newfoundland, we went to every retailer and we never had a fee. You went and you purchased something with no fees. They give you a bag, paper, plastic, whatever you chose, they give you a bag with no fee associated. Now you're going to implement a fee of – it's 30-something cents for a paper bag, I think a dollar or something minimum charge for a reusable – and I use reusable bags. We use plastic bags at home for various reasons, you recycle them that way, but we use recyclable bags most times. But you're going to bring that concept in that people are going to be charged a fee.

So the revenue's going to go to the retailer. But right now, today, most retailers don't get to charge for that bag. That's a part of doing business. It's absorbed, they are charging for it, it's in what we buy off the counter, off the shelves, it's all marked up and it's blended in to your cost of your purchase. But now we're going to have it showing up on the cash register receipt as a fee.

Like, I have concerns with that and I think a lot of people would have some concerns with that concept because we are banning the bags, which

again is good, but we're going to replace it with a fee, a fee for paper bags. I don't really know how that's going to fly in the general public, but I guess that will remain to be seen.

I want to go back, I think there are a couple of points in this legislation because there's not a whole lot in the bill, other than we're opening up the *Environmental Protection Act*, but the issues that are concerning to me are: What exemptions are we going to have? What will be the exemptions?

When I looked at PEI, they have some clearly wrote out. What is the implementation date? When are we starting this? What are you going to constitute as a bag? What is going to be exempt? What is going to be not exempt? What sizes? All sorts of questions.

What's going to be the cost to store owners? What are you going to do in place of it? What about these farmers markets? Everyone has to be creative, I get it, but there are a lot of unanswered questions.

One of the things that I suppose occurs to me is, I can't help but feel, even though we supported this ban, I can't help but feel this is a rush to get something done, check the box.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: I guess that answers my question, Mr. Speaker, I guess I just hit the nail on the head. That's exactly why it's being done.

Three weeks ago in this House I stood in my place and I asked the Minister of Environment about the plastic bag ban and he weaved and he dodged and he weaved and he dodged. He never gave a clear answer, other than consultations. He went out and he faced the media and he told them: I love consultations, I believe in consultations. Much to the chagrin of a lot of the media people because they're like: Why? What are you consulting for again? Now, I just asked the question about checking the box and through their laughter and the heckling I guess I got my answer. That's exactly what it is, Mr. Speaker.

You can say when you go to the polls next week or the week after, whenever we're going to do this, we know it's close: We brought in the plastic bag ban. Okay, so what are your details? Show us some details. We don't have any of that done. We got the ban in, we'll figure that out later. We got the ban done. When is it going to be implemented? We don't know, we got the ban done.

That's what you're faced with. What's exempt? No idea. What's the date? No idea. What about the fees? No idea. Who did you consult with? We don't care, we already done that. We got the ban in. There's no meat on the bones, Mr. Speaker. Regulations are fine. This is regulated. Even the implementation date is regulated.

Now, I've seen legislation come through this House in the last four years, and we get the guts of the legislation and some regulation will come at a later date. We'll ask questions in Committee and, for the most part, we'll have our questions and concerns, but we'll get to the point of, okay, we'll find a happy medium. There are some details that will be worked out later. We'll ask enough questions. We're satisfied most times, probably not all, but most times.

This is one of those ones, as much as we support this ban, we have a lot of questions. I think it's our role as an Opposition in this House, and we all stand in our place, even though we support a ban, we're not doing our job to get up and applaud the government. This is wonderful. We think this ban is great. Sit down again and vote in favour of it.

It's our job in this House, especially on this side of the House, to bring out the concerns because the concerns I'm raising are probably no different than what the general public would be asking if they sat down, went through the same briefings and read the same material as I read, that we've read. These are just common sense questions, Mr. Speaker. These are concerns everyone has.

There are a lot of what-abouts, what-ifs, when, how, why, where and how much? We don't know anything. All we know is it's going to be implemented, it's going to be put into subsection 111(1) of the *Environmental Protection Act*, it's going to be amended and it's going to be adding:

“prohibiting the sale and distribution of plastic retail bags” – this is the bill now – “and respecting exceptions to the prohibition of the sale and distribution of plastic retail bags.”

Those are the exemptions, that’s one part of it that we don’t have a clue what’s being exempt other than you can read, I guess, there maybe some tips here. I know in our briefing yesterday officials referenced some of these exemptions that’s already in the PEI legislation. Will there be more? Will there be less? Will there be any? Cabinet will decide. The public will be told after the fact.

Are we doing any more consultations? Highly unlikely because they’ve done all that, but did they consult, did they reach out to some of these other groups, some of those communities groups to offer some alternatives?

My point of the fees is people are going to tie it back to the community groups. Right now, when you go to the supermarket and you get your plastic bag, you bring home your groceries, you throw them in the cupboard, whatever you’re doing with these bags. You can bring them down to the farmer. I’ve given them to farmers because I have farmers all around me. I live on a road where it’s all agriculture where I live. I give them to farmers. You can give them to the local flea markets or community groups, you can give them to the food bank.

Now, when they’re going to be recycled and taken out of supply, eventually, we’re going to be replaced with these paper bags that we’re going to have to pay for. So, is that going to be an added cost to those people, especially if you look at a food bank and small community groups because no longer are you going to be recycling and giving them away, because most of these paper bags it would probably be hard to reuse them anyway.

So, I’m a bit at a loss, and most of them are biodegradable, they’ll be probably burnt in fires for the most part, unlike plastic, and they’re less hazardous to our landfills.

When I say about the fee, what about those groups? That may seem small to some and it may seem a minor issue to a lot, but if you live in my district, I’m sure many other districts, and

probably your own, Mr. Speaker, that means something to a lot of those groups. That’s when I come back sometimes, that’s the little issues, that’s what matters.

When I go out, when you walk around probably in the near future, we’ll all be out beating on doors and talking to individuals, those are the types of questions you get. It’s very seldom you ever get the high-level conversations. They’re few and far between.

I always say it, and my colleagues can agree with this one, my favourite words amongst my crowd are: the bread and butter issues. It’s what matters to people. These are the sorts of things that matter. You don’t have to be an environmentalist. You could probably be the worst environmentalist ever, but you can’t deny that plastic bags are bad for the environment. I totally get that, and I’ve always been against – I’ve always supported a ban, but the public deserves better, the general public deserves to know a lot more answers than what they’re getting in this piece of legislation. It’s a pretty vague piece of legislation and to say that it’s a check-in-the-box exercise, that’s an understatement. That’s exactly what it was.

Now, things changed in a three-week period, from I need consultations, to I love consultations, to there’s your legislation. I think everyone was like, really, where’s this coming from? But when I got the legislation, I realized what was going on. I realized we have an election in the near future and it must be already in the red book that we ban the bags because that’s the only reason I could see.

Forget me, forget the Opposition –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: You can forget me and forget the Opposition piece of this, Mr. Speaker, the general public deserves – the general public are the ones here, they’re the ones who put all of these people in this House. They deserve answers.

I rose to ask the questions, to debate legislation, debate these bills, to highlight the flaws or the

weakness or the shortcomings. That's all we're doing. We support a ban. I hear some heckling and all that. We were calling out for this ban before the government opposite were willing to do anything about it. They consulted and they consulted and they consulted. We were the ones asking for that.

The minister loves consulting. They like developing plans and they like getting studies done. That's what a lot of these Members opposite do.

A few weeks down the road there's going to be another consultation, it's going to be called a general election and everyone is going to get to consult then, Mr. Speaker. That will be the true consultation. That's the true consultation. That's when people get out and show their real feelings.

We'll wait and the jury will decide. The jury's out on this one, Mr. Speaker. I just want to caution the government that it's fine to bring in legislation – it's fine to bring in any piece of legislation you please. This is not a bad piece of legislation, technically, when you look at banning of plastic bags. But when you have nothing more than two lines and one little explanatory note, and all the while all these groups have been out there and you had over 3,000 submissions, people wanted this bag ban – and we know there is more to it. This is PEI's legislation. We know there is a lot more to this bill than what we're seeing here. None of this is here. All this here is regulations. We're going to get them by and by, down the road.

Again, we don't know the date. No one knows the date. Think about that. You're bringing in a ban, but you don't know when you're going to do it.

MR. HUTCHINGS: And no details.

MR. PETTEN: And no details, exactly. They come in the regulations, but we don't know when that's coming because we don't know when it's going to be implemented. We don't know what it's going to cost to consumers. We don't know what it's going to cost store owners. We don't know what impact it's going to have. We don't know how it's going to affect the landfills. We don't know. But do you know what? We're banning the bag because it's in the

red book; it's called check the box – exactly what's going on.

They can laugh, they can do whatever on the other side, Mr. Speaker, but that's the statement that I'll stand by because that's exactly what this is. We're up here debating a piece of legislation that, technically, other than I saw the opportunity to get up and do some exploratory conversation on the flaws, one minute you can get up and talk about this piece of legislation because there's nothing to it.

Yeah, we're banning the bag. That's it.

MR. HUTCHINGS: When?

MR. PETTEN: We don't know. The retailers are saying: How much is this going to cost us? We don't know. What's going to be acceptable and what's not in the size of the bag? We don't know. What exemption? No idea. Will this be exempt? We don't know, but we're banning the bag. Well, that's good to know.

You can go on with this forever, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going wrap up and I'm just going remind the government that before they get – I can go a long while yet, Minister. Lots of time on the clock, Minister. I can go for a long time. Trust me, I can go for another 40 minutes, no problem, but I have other colleagues of mine who have been supporting this legislation who want to speak on it.

I have lots of questions for Committee too, but be fair to the people of this province and tell them, you're bringing in this legislation, be more respectful. Because do you know what? People are not blind, people understand. We have a very smart population in Newfoundland and Labrador and they see through this foolishness. Yes, they'd like a ban, but they'd also, like me and everyone over here, we'd like details.

Thanks you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand today and speak on Bill 1. Although I just

listened to the Member for CBS and I'm not so sure if he's in favour of banning the bag or beat the bag to death. I'm not so sure –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: – where he's going to go with the bag.

I could picture him as the Littlest Hobo with the stick on his back and the little bag, going picking up bags.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, that was all over the globe. Pardon the pun, but that was certainly all over the globe. He must have been up all night practising that speech. And he's right, it is not a lot in the bill because we have to start somewhere. We need legislation and the legislation says “prohibiting the sale and distribution of plastic retail bags.”

Now, from that the Member opposite went to nan-and-pop stores, to the farmers' markets, went all up and down the coast. Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you ever drove through Central Newfoundland, you'll go up on a place Joey's Lookout, and in Joey's Lookout there's a farmer there every year in season. I'm yet to see a reusable bag. I'm yet to see one with a major distributor wrote on the side of it, whether it be a grocery retailer or anybody else. He uses bags that are of the quality to put the vegetables in, every time I've been there.

And yes, Mr. Speaker, everybody who knows me, when this was introduced over in our department I was probably the one who went wait, I am the bayman of baymen. I got a use for each one of those bags. I've never thrown a bag in the garbage until there's nothing left to the bag. And that's no kidding, Mr. Speaker. But also, I live on an island and I walk around the shoreline every single year. Around the shoreline it is littered with plastic bags. Now, not only plastic bags but there are plastic bags everywhere. And I'll put it to anybody who's ever been out in the ocean as a fisherman or a recreational boat user and got one of those plastic bags wrapped around the tail of their motor, you just lost yourself \$10,000 for what

was – as one of the stores sells it – a 5-cent plastic bag.

So, the marine species we worry about. I joked and said on our coast we don't see a lot of whales come ashore filled with plastic bags. We have 500,000 people, Mr. Speaker. There're all not going out to the shoreline and tossing a bag overboard. But in parts of the world the bags are everywhere. If we do our part, if we are the first ones – and if you can convince someone like me that banning the bags is great thing – you won't convince everybody, Mr. Speaker; it's not possible.

AN HON. MEMBER: You are a believer.

MR. BRAGG: I've gone to the other side on the plastic bags. I actually now, if I go into the nan-and-pop store, if I have an item that doesn't need a bag, I don't ask for a bag. I don't need another bag generated to go into the landfill, because ultimately that's where most go. And to be fair, if we look at our roadsides now, it's not all plastic bags, but the plastic bags are the most obvious one. The minister had one in his tree for five or six years. My wife would've killed me if it was in the tree for five or six years. But the minister got a good wife.

So the bags, the Member opposite can complicate it to death, he can throw all the scenarios at it. Everybody that I talk to, everybody – because I ask, as the minister would know, I'll go to the grocery store and I'll do my own mental survey of how many people use the reusable bag. I'll do it in the corner store at home; I'll do it at the gas station and just see how many people. More often than not now you'll see people with reusable bags. I'm a bit of a germophobe. My concern with the reusable bags is getting people to wash out their reusable bag, because after a while it's going to get grubby like anything else. So yes, it's something we have to educate ourselves to.

Only a couple of nights ago my aunt was up to my place – she's in her early 70s – and she said, I'm not going to buy bags yet, I'm going to make my own out of jeans and I'm going to make them nice and strong. People will make the initiative to do a lot of things. Initially when we take care of the plastic bag – and no, you can't do it today and take them out tomorrow.

We all know that that can't be done. It's going to take a transition time, because people have to adapt.

Everybody that you talk to – and as the Member opposite called it, his bread-and-butter issue. That's not a big bread-and-butter issue, because most households that you'll go to will find a way. They'll do something else. You'll get away from using that bag. You'll use other things; you'll reuse it. I joked and said I would use a milk carton, just because I could store it in the trunk of the car a lot easier. But there will be people come up with some pretty ingenious other ideas, whether it be a basket or whatever the case might be, Mr. Speaker.

But the will is there. And the consultations were done. The Member opposite said what did we ask people for, why are we rushing it, and then why do it so fast. So he was on opposite ends of the spectrum of where he wanted us to be. But when 2,845 people actually do a questionnaire – there were, I think, a couple of hundred more, Minister, that did emails and phone-ins? You have 70 per cent of the people, almost 80 per cent of the people, support it. That's a great majority. You're never going to do anything to get 100 per cent of the people to support it, but 100 per cent of the people realize by throwing plastic bags out through, I don't know, if you're out in his boat or in the wilderness or wherever, anywhere besides in a wastebasket is wrong, everybody knows that.

Mr. Speaker, you can't convince everybody. I drive four hours every week home and four hours back to here. Each one of those trips, I don't see as many plastic bags on the road, but I see coffee cups on the road, I see wrappers from other things on the road. We just need to educate the people; you're stopping for gas, take your things out of your cupholder, put them in a trash bin. You don't need to throw things out the window.

So, the plastic bag, to me, is a great way to start. It's the most visible thing. It's everywhere. There are other things, I'm sure, as time goes, and you may say the devil's in the detail, but if you just look at it this way: If you can take those plastic bags out of the waste stream, out of the ocean, off the sides of the road, anywhere in our environment, you're not doing a bad thing.

You're certainly doing something for this province.

Here we are, we're at the eastern most tip, PEI has already implemented it and bringing it in. If we could be, us and PEI, the ones to sweep right across the country with a plastic bag ban, for the retail plastic bag ban, what a great thing, what a great way to go down in history, to say we were a part of taking care of the plastic bags.

Again, when it came back, some of the many uses was for your boots, to put in your boot. Now, that sounds to most people: What? Who would put a plastic bag in their boot?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. BRAGG: Exactly. Anybody who has ever put their foot in a puddle of water, needed a plastic bag thereafter.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a little story. When we used to go out at the seal fishery, my brother and I would always put plastic bags in our boots. We didn't do it because we thought our feet were going to get wet because we were in the boat, but if we ever fell overboard the plastic bag helped them big green boots slip off nice and easy. So it was a safety feature for us many years ago, Mr. Speaker.

So, don't tell me about the many uses of plastic bags because I could tell you some now that you would really go: Wow. Whether that means now I'm going to have to use bread bags or not, I'm not sure, but the plastic bag use will certainly – in a years time, there will be people who'll have plastic bags in their garage and in their shed. There won't be many under the kitchen sink like most people now. Under the kitchen sink, you open up the door, you don't know where the soap suds is, Mr. Speaker, because the bags are coming out at you. Right?

There are people with four-inch sewer pipes with little holes poked in them, Mr. Speaker, made all the little craft and artsy little things out of them. Granted, that won't be there anymore, but just think about it, Mr. Speaker, that bag will be out of us.

Everything takes generations to grow out of. If you go back two years ago – and I'll go back to

throwing things out the window. Years ago you were afraid to drive down the highway, you were dodging back and forth because you didn't know what was coming out the window at you.

Although you see it now, if you look at the volume of traffic, Mr. Speaker, you probably got less than 1 per cent of the population now that actually would roll down their window and throw out something.

AN HON. MEMBER: You only have to look in the back seat of my car.

MR. BRAGG: The minister opposite is telling me about the back seat of his car, and I can vouch for that, Mr. Speaker, because I was in it today. I had to go to the dry cleaners afterwards. That man throws away nothing; absolutely.

I've often heard it said a clean car is a sign of a sick mind. He's got a great mind, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, back to the bags. The banning of the bags is a great thing. I'll say as I did in the beginning, if you can convince me, the banning of the bags with the multiple uses that I've had for these bags over the years is a great thing, you won't get 100 per cent, but if you don't do 90 per cent I'll be so surprised.

Yes, you're going to have a few people that are going to be naysayers but you're going to get that regardless. I think our move to bring in this legislation to ban the bags, the retail plastic bags, the shopping ones, the little ones that sometimes you get your groceries in, sometimes you don't, when they're gone, when you get them out of your house or out of your sheds and wherever else you might have them and you move on to your reusable bags, I think, Mr. Speaker, we'll have a much safer, cleaner environment for the birds and for the fish.

Again, like I said, anybody who's had an outboard motor and wrapped a bag around it, they know the cost of that bag for that time and a danger to somebody's life. So, if we can clean up our oceans, our environment, our ponds, lakes and streams by banning this bag, Mr. Speaker, I don't mind going on the record by saying I support banning this bag 100 per cent and bar none. I know I'll take some heat for that because I know there are lots of people like me,

but I think it's the best for this environment and the best for this province. Mr. Speaker, I would hope that we would get unanimous support for this Bill 1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm very happy, as well, to stand and to speak to Bill 1, the first bill in this new session, this sitting, An Act to Amend the Environmental Protection Act. As my colleagues on this side of the House have said, there are some details that we do not know, when this will be in effect. We don't know about fees and how much. However, Mr. Speaker, in principle, I fully support this bill.

I think it's really interesting to note that we've already seen in our province the banning of plastic bags, of retail bags in Nain, Rigolet, Hopedale, Makkovik, Twillingate and Fogo Island. How fabulous is that, they have been leaders. They have led us in this initiative.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. ROGERS: What's that?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. ROGERS: Small Point-Adam's Cove and Broad Cove all just banned plastic bags as well, and this is at the point of sales, so retail bags.

Mr. Speaker, my partner and I – I just want to disclose this – own two stores downtown on Water Street, called The Travel Bug and the other one called The Bee's Knees. The Bee's Knees is a store that we did out of social activism because it's a store that retails ethical products, recyclables, recycled, upcycled. We do not use plastic bags, we use paper bags when necessary, but also use the Boomerang Bags. I don't know if people have heard about Boomerang Bags but Boomerang Bags is a project that was started by a few people here in

St. John's. It comes from Australia. People get together, they get recycled fabric and they make bags, they sew bags together.

They distribute them to stores all over downtown. So when you buy something at a store and they have a Boomerang Bag, they give you the bag, you put your stuff in that bag and then the hope is that you will either return that bag to the store where you bought things or you'll return to another store who also is part of the Boomerang Bag movement.

It's recycling material, it's a community initiative. Kids are involved in helping to make the bags. There's also a little label on it that says: Boomerang Bags. It's a great thing. It becomes an educational piece and it's also a feel good thing to do around the environment.

Some people have said, well, plastic bags, retail bags are not really a large part of our plastic problem, but there is evidence to the contrary to that. In June 2018, a dead whale was found in Thailand with more than 80 plastic bags in its stomach and those bags prevented that whale from digesting food.

We've all heard stories about this, within the ocean, the fish, the mammals in the ocean who are consuming plastic bags. The reason they are is because when those plastic bags float around in the water, they look like prey. They look like edible things that live in the ocean that they would eat, and it actually kills them.

AN HON. MEMBER: Seafood.

MS. ROGERS: That's right, seafood.

Now, our own biologist here in the province, Holly Hogan, who's an incredible biologist, she wrote in May 2018: Soft plastic mimics the shape and movement of prey as they undulate in the water column, and this is likely the reason that so many whales are dying from plastic bag consumption.

Mr. Speaker, I live right downtown. My living room, kitchen and dining room is on the fourth floor of the house and the back windows overlook the harbour, but it also overlooks a back alley where there are a number of trees. For instance, my partner tapped the maple trees that

were in part of this little back alley behind our house and made maple syrup, but there is a plastic bag that is stuck in the tree.

I've lived in this same place for eight years, that plastic bag as been there for seven. Every morning I look out, it's a really high tree, and I see that plastic bag caught in the branches of that tree. It's a reminder. Then for those folks who've had the pleasure of going to the Robin Hood dump before it was renovated, before it was modernized, there was a plastic bag forest. We could see all the trees in that whole area were filled with plastic bags.

Now, it's interesting how in North America we see ourselves as really modern. We see ourselves as incredibly modern and progressive and way ahead, particularly, of countries in parts of Africa or Central or South America or Asia.

Mr. Speaker, I have right here a global account of what countries have already banned plastic bags. They are: Afghanistan banned their bags in 2018; Albania in 2018; Andorra in 2017; Antigua and Barbuda, all over – Benin in Africa banned their plastic bags in 2017; Botswana have banned plastic bags; Burkina Faso; Bangladesh in Asia, their ban came into effect in 2002 – 2002, that's 17 years ago, Mr. Speaker. So it's about time that we did this. It truly is about time. There are countries all over the world that have done this because they know the effects.

So for us, banning plastic bags that are bags at the point of retail, it's a beginning. In my store, for instance, in The Bee's Knees – and again this is not to promote my store, but it's to talk about what's possible. Plastic toothbrushes, same thing, they're washing up on shores. We have bamboo toothbrushes. We have dental floss that's in a glass vial, and you can just buy replacements and use the same little glass vial. There are razors that don't have plastic handles but are locally made by woodturners here in the province. There are paper straws, metal straws, all sizes of straws.

So some of it, when you think, what about replacing a plastic straw? It's such a small thing. What does it mean? Well, it is a small thing, but the plastic straws are a huge problem. But what happens when we do this step-by-step process,

we know that it's educational as well, and that people start to have their eyes opened about the responsibility that we must all take.

For instance, one of the things that my partner does, she sells biodegradable laundry detergent, but it came in plastic cartons, in plastic bagging. She said to them: I'm sorry I can't sell your product because the people in St. John's are now saying they don't want their products coming in plastic. So you know what that company did? They put it in a paper envelope, and it works. She's encouraged a number of manufacturers to just simplify their packaging to get rid of the plastic packaging.

For instance, an environmental towel that came in a box with plastic on it now comes with just a little paper wrapper around it with all the information that's needed. So there's so much that can be done, but what is really interesting, Mr. Speaker, is to look at what countries all over the world have done because they know that it's a life-and-death issue. It's not just about nice, it's not just about litter; it really is about life-and-death issues and not just for fish or for birds, but for all of us.

Many of us have seen documentaries about the oceans of plastic, huge collections of plastics, like plastic islands that are floating around out there on the sea. We know how important it is to stop that, to prevent that from growing. We have a lot of work to do to do remediation and cleanup. It's going to cost a lot of money to do that, but the other thing that we see is that the plastics have entered in to our food chain, thereby affecting all of us.

The other thing that I would like to bring to the attention to the House here as well is what the European Union has done through their parliament. They are banning all single-use plastic. They are not banning all plastic; they're banning single-use plastic. Single-use plastic, for instance, are like disposable razors that have plastic handles. We don't need that.

But, for instance, food containers when you go to a restaurant or to a grocery store and you buy lettuce and it's wrapped in a plastic container, or you buy green beans and they're in a plastic container and it's single-use, the plastic is labelled as single use because if you wash it and

reuse it, it starts to leach toxins. So they're saying no more of that. We do not need that anymore. So, all of the European countries are involved in curbing single-use plastics.

There'll be heavy fines. They're giving them time. They're giving manufacturers time to replace that kind of plastic. There are all kinds of very interesting ways to replace that plastic. For instance, someone has developed a water single-use water bottle that's made out of corn products and it's biodegradable.

We heard on the news either yesterday or today that there is a graduate student here at Memorial University who is developing plastic wraps that can be used in industrial settings out of fish. I don't know if it's out of fish guts, but it's out of something of a fish. How exciting is that? That is being developed right here at Memorial University. So the wonderful thing is that there are solutions. Sometimes it costs a little bit more, but the savings in the long run in terms of the environmental degradation are really, really important.

So, Mr. Speaker, of course we are going to support this. PEI is the only province right now that has changed legislation to ban plastic bags. The US, Hawaii and California are the only states that have banned plastic bags, and it looks like New York is on the way to banning plastic bags. So we may be a little bit ahead in Canada, but really when you look at North America we are so far behind, and there's a lot that we can learn from Europe. There's a lot that we can learn from some of the more progressive countries in the continent of Africa, in Asia who've done really good work. And a lot of these countries really struggle with the issues of poverty. There's not a lot of money to spare, yet they've managed to do this.

But how wonderful again when you see school children and adults getting together sewing those Boomerang Bags out of recycled material or children carrying their own straws. Whenever I go somewhere, I say, no plastic straw, please. Again, it's about getting that message out, and it's also about realizing that we can all be part of the solution. That's what this is about, being part of the solution.

I'm not going to say much more than that, except that this is really important. I look forward to Committee where we can ask the minister some very specific questions about fees. I'm sure that we will need fees and we will need fines. I know myself, there was a time when, for instance, Dominion were not offering bags at the retail counter, you had to pay for them, and that reminds you to bring your own bags if you don't want to spend more for your plastic bags.

It is my hope that what's going to happen, there are all kinds of projects that can be done to reuse these plastic bags. They can be molded into mats. There's a crab harvester here in Newfoundland and Labrador that makes doormats and makes swings out of recycled fishing rope. So, he goes around and finds recycled fishing rope that may have washed up on shore or that other harvesters have put in a pile somewhere, it's no longer safe to use for fishing, he collects that and he weaves doormats out of it. He also makes swings out of it.

Also, we have at The Bee's Knees, again, because that means all of that nylon fishing rope and plastic fishing rope will not end up in the landfill and it will not end up in the ocean. It's a wonderful thing, again, when we all start to see ourselves as part of the solution. There are all kinds of creative solutions.

This is a great initiative. I would like to see the province start to go another step further and look at banning all single-use plastic because we can do it. Europe is doing it. It's being done in other parts of the world. We can do it and we will only benefit by that.

Again, when you look at what's being done at Memorial University, the inventions that are being done there, there's a fabulous scientist called Dr. Max Liboiron. She is doing incredible work looking at the amount of plastic that is in the ocean near Newfoundland and Labrador. She has taught a lot of students how to do very low-tech scanning of the oceans, very low-tech – what they do is they scan the ocean and they also survey the ocean to see what kinds of plastic are coming near the shores here. It's very low-tech, what she's doing, showing that all of us can be part of doing that kind of work. And I think it would be really interesting to do that up in Labrador because we know the effects of

plastic, particularly around some of the northern shores as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat but, again, we will support this. I'm looking forward to talking about regulations and the details of this.

Let's get it done. Let's just do it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

I recognize the hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to rise to participate in this debate. I probably won't take all my time; I just want to make a few comments in support of this amendment to the legislation.

This piece of legislation is a necessary first step that we need to take to implement a single-use plastic bag ban in this province. So, I'm very supportive of that move. We're in the second reading of this piece of legislation where we debate the principle, the whole idea of doing it. So, certainly I support the principle of implementing this change, which will allow the ban on single-use plastic bags to be brought about.

I just want to talk about the process. Some people in this debate have said, well, we didn't need consultations. We didn't need to do the consultations. Initially, I was of the same mind. I sort of said, well, we already know; we can go on with it. But I think now, in retrospect, looking at some of the results of the consultation, I can see why the minister, in his wisdom, wanted to go ahead with that consultation, why he wanted to do it.

I think the information that he got from doing those consultations, I don't think changed the results or changed the direction that we were going, but it gave us valuable information that we needed to implement this in a proper way, to implement this in a way that didn't hurt some of the retailers, the way we could mitigate the hurt for the people who continue to use single-use plastic bags, how we could implement this and

make a smooth transition into a world, an environment where we don't have single-use plastic bags.

So I think, in retrospect, that was a very wise move to have that consultation, and I think the number of people who participated in that consultation is evident as well in that this was a very valuable thing to do.

I think it's interesting that we're amongst the first in North America to do this. California, Hawaii, PEI and the state of New York is sort of embarking on that process now as well. So we're amongst the first to do this in North America, other people around the world are already doing it, but I think Newfoundlanders have always been very close to the land, close to the environment – Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I'm sorry, have always been close to the land. Maybe more so the people from Labrador have been close to the land and understand the need to protect the environment.

As I was listening to the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, he talked about how innovative Newfoundlanders are, and how we can find different uses for things and how we can find ways around things. So I think it's interesting that we, in this province, are amongst the first in North America to move forward with this. It shows that we really are innovative, that we are forward thinking, that we care about our environment and want to do something to protect the environment.

This past summer, I had an opportunity to participate in an activity by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. They buy or acquire pieces of land around Canada. They have some land in Newfoundland; they have some on the West Coast. One of the properties they own is on Sandy Point. One of the activities they do there is they do a beach cleanup every summer. I participated in that beach cleanup, as did about 30 other people from the area.

I had an opportunity there, first-hand, to see the amount of plastic that was on the beach around Sandy Point. I don't know if people know; Sandy Point is a resettled community on the West Coast in Bay St. George. It used to be French capital of Newfoundland really, western Newfoundland. So, it's interesting to see that

amount of plastic that was on the beach, the amount of plastic that was picked up there.

It really is a problem that exists and something has to be done to change that. I think this step that we're taking today is the first step that is needed to make a ban of plastic bags so we can eliminate the damage that is being done to our environment. I think Newfoundlanders are innovative enough to make that happen. I encourage everyone to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take a long time, but I wanted to say a few words about Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Environmental Protection Act. Traditionally, Mr. Speaker, when you have a new session of the House of Assembly, Bill 1 is normally the government's signature piece of legislation; that's traditionally how it's gone. I think the government has chosen wisely with this particular bill because I think it's something that's important to us all.

For some of us growing up over the years, it's like anything, you get used to a certain thing, you get used to living a certain way, you get used to what is acceptable and what's not acceptable and things change over time. So, I know for me and I'm sure a lot of people in the House would acknowledge the same thing, my colleague certainly from Bonavista North – I know that's not the name of the district; I forget what it's called but anyway –

MR. BRAGG: Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

MR. LANE: There you go, Fogo Island - Cape Freels. As he said, it was something that he had to be convinced to some degree that it was a good thing because he had used plastic bags a lifetime, even to put inside of his logans or his rubbers or whatever. I did the exact same thing actually. I can remember growing up I used to put plastic bags inside my logans if I was fishing

or berry picking or whatever I was doing, just so that your feet wouldn't get wet if you stepped in the bog or whatever the case might be. It didn't always work; it worked to some degree. He is right; it is good because if you had to get your boots off in a hurry, they slide right out, especially if you're stuck in the bog.

I know where he's coming from. When it comes to a number of these things around recycling and all these things to protect our environment, it wasn't something for me growing up that would have been top of mind, let's say. But over the years, we've certainly seen a movement, recognition of the damage that we are doing to our planet, quite frankly, because it's happening all over the world. Whether it be on land or whether it be in our oceans in so many ways, finally we have that recognition.

I think we're starting to see this movement globally in recognition of all those things. Whether it be issues with climate change or whether it be issues around pollution of various kinds, we're finally starting to see that movement to make change for the benefit, probably not for ourselves. It will be for ourselves too to some degree, but more likely for our grandchildren and their children. That's really what this is all about because all this stuff is going to evolve over time and it will be our children and grandchildren and so on that will benefit, I think, the most from what we do today.

Now we all realize that Newfoundland and Labrador has 520,000 people or thereabouts, small province in Canada. When you compare our population and the contribution we're making to climate change and so on compared to, say, China or India or these places where you have literally billions of people, it's small. But, as others have said in the past, just because we have those issues globally, and we have huge polluters globally, and so many more people contributing to pollution and environmental damage globally, doesn't mean that we shouldn't do our part because, really, it's still our backyard. We have to live here, our children have to live here and so on, and our grandchildren have to live here, so we all need to do our part for our own environment.

Before we're going to be able to be truly critical of those countries and nations around the world

that are, perhaps, causing the bigger damage by sheer volume, I don't think we have much right, really, to complain or criticize them if we're not prepared to do something ourselves to clean up our own backyard, and to do our part for the environment here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So, I see this as a very, very positive step forward; I really do. Now, could we go further? Absolutely, absolutely we can go further. As my colleague here for St. John's Centre talked about some of the things that are being done in Europe and being done in PEI, I think someone mentioned now New York is on board and other places. There are places that are doing more than what we're proposing to do here, in terms of eliminating single-use plastics in totality, not just single-use plastic bags, but single-use plastics.

I would be on board right now if we were to say let's add straws. One thing that comes to mind I see – I love the outdoors; I love going moose hunting and trout and stuff like that. One of the things I see up in the country a lot, up by the side of the pond, is someone got a six pack of beer cans, and you see the plastic that they come in, and you see that thrown down on the side of the pond or in the pond or whatever the case might be. I'd love to see that gone. I'd be on board right now to get rid of that. I'd be on board right now to get rid of straws and so on.

But, Rome wasn't built in a day, I guess, as the old expression goes, you got to start somewhere, and at least we're making a start. So, from that perspective, I want to acknowledge what the government is doing here today and congratulate them on doing it. It's been talked about for quite some time and we finally got it done, finally some action. Less talk, more action, and we're seeing some action. So, in that regard, I think it's a great thing.

Now, as my colleague from Conception Bay South talked about – when he's raising these points, Mr. Speaker, I have to be honest, I don't view it as negativity at all, I don't. There's nothing he said that was – I wouldn't call it negative. I would call it he was asking reasonable questions, because there are things that the public, there are aspects around this that the public are going to have questions about.

People are going to wonder, when we talk about exemptions, people are going to say: Well, what are the exemptions going to be?

Now, in the briefing that we did in the department – and I thank the staff at Municipal Affairs, they did a great job with the briefing – they talked about, for example, some of the things they would envision would be a bag that your prescriptions could come in, could be one. Although, I don't know why that wouldn't be a paper bag, but anyway. That was one.

They talked about if you got your tires changed at the garage, you're taking off your winter tires and putting on your all-seasons, that they put the winter tires in those bags, so that when you stick it in the back of your car that you don't get your seats or whatever filthy rotten from the old tires. So that was one they talked about as an example as well.

They talked about dry cleaning. If you go and you bring your suit into the dry cleaner or whatever and it comes out, it's wrapped in plastic. Obviously, it's got to be wrapped in something, if not, it kind of defeats the purpose. You want to get it aboard your car or whatever and have it clean or whatever, so it's wrapped for a reason.

Those were some of the – some – of the exemptions that they kind of alluded to, perhaps. I think, as the Member said, in PEI they've actually listed some things in their regulations that would probably give us a decent idea as to what the changes would be, are going to be, or what the regulations would say here, in theory, but we don't know. We don't know for sure.

If we voted for this bill now and we passed it and someone were to ask me over at Pearlgate Dominion: Well, what are the exemptions? I couldn't tell them. I could say: Well, I'm guessing it might be this, it might be that. It would seem reasonable that it would be this or that or whatever, but I can't say for sure.

Likewise, if people said: Well, we hear there could be some kind of fee associated with this. How is that going to work? What is the fee going to be? How much are you going to have to pay now for a bag and for alternatives and whatever? I wouldn't be able to tell them.

Now, for me, I know, for example, that if I go to Walmart – I haven't paid for a bag in Walmart since they started charging for them. One of the things I learned is in a lot of cases you don't even need the bag, because I just refuse, simply on principle. It has nothing to do with the 5 cents, but on principle. When I looked at Walmart, a huge multi-national company making billions of dollars in profit and so on, and just on sheer principle, I was not prepared to give them 5 cents for a plastic bag. They're getting enough money off me at the register and just on principle they ain't getting it.

I simply would not get a bag. I refuse to get a bag. If I have a bag with me, a reusable one, I'll bring it. If I forget about it, I'll put the stuff in the cart and when I get out I'll just stash it in the trunk or the backseat or whatever. If that means I have to make a couple of extra trips to carry the stuff, so be it, but I am not getting the bags just on principle.

I found that in a lot of cases you don't need the bags. I know now when I go to a retail store, if I go to get gas up at the Ultramar, for example, and while you're there you pick up a confectionary item or something like that, and they go to put it in a bag, I never take the bag. Not because you have to pay for it because they don't charge for it. You could get the bag for nothing, but I just don't want the bag because now I'm kind of getting used to the idea of what do I want this bag for, what a waste to have a bag to put this in.

If I got a 2 litre of milk, I just take the 2 litre in my hand and go out through the door. I don't need it put in plastic bags; a total waste for nothing.

I think as time evolves and we start becoming more aware and there's more education and so on, I think you're going to see more of that. I think our kids and our grandkids, they are going to be looking back in time and saying: My God, I can't believe that poppy was putting plastic bags in his rubbers, like my colleague said. I can't believe that they were using bags for this and that and whatever and destroying the environment with all these bags. I can't believe they had it, but I'm sure that's what it will be in years out.

I also hope they look back and they say: Do you know what? We actually did something here, we recognized it and we did something to benefit them into the future.

I digress and go back to the point I was making about my colleague from CBS, when he's asking these questions, whether it be about fees, whether it be about exemptions and so on, the problem, if I can call it a problem, which is not unique to this bill, Mr. Speaker. I can remember when we brought in the new procurement legislation. You think about that, the procurement legislation, that is dealing with, literally, the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars annually by government and we passed that bill and most of the critical details are in the regulations. So we didn't know what that was either.

You couldn't really vote against because you're saying, well, yes, do you want a new modern procurement act? Of course, we do, we're not going to vote against it, but there were a lot of details that would be in the regulations. It's the same thing with this, really, is that in principle the concept of banning these bags is a good thing. I cannot say it enough, it's a good thing. I support it 10,000 per cent, but it does not diminish the point that my colleague from Conception Bay South was saying in that we support it, but after this is passed, we have no control over what the implementation will be like in terms of what it will look like, what the dates will be, what the fees will be, what the exemptions will be.

So, if at some point after it's passed, the minister, through his office, implements the regulations, and there are things in those regulations that the public find offensive – and I'm not saying there will be. I'm sure there won't be actually because he has to live here too and he has constituents too. I'm sure he's not going to intentionally put things in regulations that are going to just like totally go against what the public is saying. I don't believe it for a second that he would do that. I really don't.

But I do make the point that we don't know what it's going to be, and that's the concern that the Member for Conception Bay South is raising and I raised the same issue because it is a valid point. We won't know what the regulations are.

Again, I will conclude by saying good job, Minister, good bill, great signature piece of legislation. I think we should all be proud of what we're doing here today to do this. It's a great thing that we're doing, but, as I said, the devil will be in the details and, as one Member, I will vote for this but I cannot be responsible for what those regulations look like because I have no control and I don't know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly it's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Environmental Protection Act. Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to some of the Members as they talked about the ban of single-use bags. I rise in my place today to talk about something a little different in terms of approach because 2019 marks 10 years for the community of Nain having banned the single-use plastic bags.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. John's Centre talked about some of the other countries that we could learn from. Well, we need not look any further than Nain, in our own province, and learn about the impacts of single-use plastic bags.

The Member for Conception Bay South, I'm not sure if he supports the bill or not because he was all over the place. I'd like to talk a little bit about the uses of single-use plastic bags. My colleague, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, talked about a few.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a district where there is a very sparse population, very big geographical area. Most people up my way are land based. I'm a hunter and a fisherman. I'm out on the land and on the water whenever I can. I see the impacts and they say the impacts are first felt up north. I'd vouch for that, Mr. Speaker. I've seen the mountain of plastic bags in the water that blow off the dumpsites.

In 2009, the community of Nain started to do away with the use of plastic bags and the other communities in Nunatsiavut followed shortly after, Mr. Speaker. If you want to see on a small scale the impacts of removing plastic bags from the environment, in 10 years, we've seen the benefits of not having single-use plastic bags in the stores.

There were challenges with the bulk that some of these stores had already had in their possession. People have become so dependent and, in this case, they became so dependent on these single-use plastic bags that more often than not they forgot multi-use or multi-purpose bags when they went shopping.

I can say that, from my own practice, I forgot to bring my multi-use bag many times, and I paid the price. I tell you what; it doesn't take too many times when you're going shopping that you'll remember to take that bag.

Just one thing I'd like to share before I sit down, Mr. Speaker. After going through a ban for 10 years or seven years or six years, when I go to a store now that still uses single-use plastic bags I am shocked about the merchandise that goes in one bag and how you end up with so many bags on one trip. We packed bags so tight it was a job to haul the handles together. But I go to a store if it's Sobeys in St. John's or in Goose Bay, I walk out with six items sometimes with four bags. That's where the damage comes from, when we're so dependent on something that we don't really need that impacts the environment.

To do away with plastic bags – and I commend the minister for bringing this legislation forward, because I have seen the benefits of removing single-use shopping bags from the environment. Mr. Speaker, I think we'll all learn from this. Is there a transition? Yes, of course there is. I know some Members in this hon. House talked about the time it takes to adjust, sometimes a generation. I think this is a starting point, and I'm sure we'd all love to see reusable items introduced instead of single-use plastic which takes hundreds and, in some cases, millions of years to deteriorate to the point where it doesn't affect us.

If you look at the global picture, the sea of plastic that's out on our oceans, the impact it's

having on wildlife. Mr. Speaker, I've caught fish with plastic bags around them. I've shot ducks with the six-pack wrappers wound around their legs. I've seen the impacts first-hand. So, again, this is 10 years of no single-use plastic bags on the North Coast of Labrador. We took the initiative. We're one of the oldest, if not the oldest community in the country that implemented the ban on single-use plastic bags.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 1. This is an issue that I feel very passionate about. It was almost a year ago today that I did rise and present a petition urging the government to move forward with this type of action.

I only need to, I guess, refer to what we know as the plastic island. The Member for Torngat Mountains referred to it, and that's what we call a plastic island in the middle of the ocean, in the Pacific Ocean. It now is estimated to be 1.6 million square miles; 1.6 million square miles, that's three times the size of France. How can we say that plastic is not an issue; 80 per cent of the plastic that has been created still exists within our environment today.

Making a legislative change that is going to adversely affect a small percentage of people who are adverse to this ban, it has to be done with affirmity and clarity.

I was really disappointed when we went into another phase of consultation. We went into another phase of consultation and, thankfully, they did propose this legislative change, but, again, we're talking about fees for plastic bags, we're talking about exemptions. So, really this could be nothing more than a tick box, yes, we've done it. It is going to depend on the details of this bill.

I personally believe that – and in reference to comments from the Member for Torngat Mountains – if you have no other option, you'll

remember to bring those reusable bags next time.

So, I'm a big proponent of, look, we're going to commit to this. We're going to commit to the environment. We're going to commit to our children. We're going to commit to their children. We're going to commit to all creatures on land and sea that we're going to stop the use of single-use retail bags. No exemption, no backing down, no option to pay, because that will always give humanity an avenue to not be proactive.

In speaking with several of my colleagues from Prince Edward Island, implementing the ban was a little bit challenging. It was a little bit of an adjustment period, but you get used to it. You change your behaviour because really it's not the bag that causes the problem, it's what we do with it.

Just like when the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels had said: Driving in I see this on the side of the road, I see coffee cups on the side of the road. Do you know what? Those coffee cups didn't get there by themselves. They got there because someone irresponsibly threw it out the window. It's not the corporate entities that produce this type of material, it still comes down to the individual.

As a government, not necessarily all decisions are going to be popular, even though they're the right ones, but this is one decision that's very popular. Yes, there is a little bit of adversity, but when you look at the good that can be obtained, and I was really pleased to see that this current Environment Minister had changed his position of the former, temporary Environment minister. I was party to a letter that was copied to me, he had addressed a couple of the municipalities in the region, saying: No, not interested in a bag ban, it only amounts to less than 6 per cent and the current focus is on climate change.

As I said yesterday in Address in Reply, we only need to make one small step. It may only make 2 per cent of a difference, but do you know what? It's easy to make the second step. So it'll be easy, just as the Member for St. John's Centre and Members from across the way have said, and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said, he would be on board right away if we

started adding more into it. I'm pretty sure we all would. It's just a matter of accepting that what we've done to our planet, and what we're continuing to do to our planet, is not acceptable. We're on a crash course to exhaust the resources and compromise every species.

It's a widely known fact that there's not a fish that can be pulled from the sea that does not have plastic molecules embedded in its flesh. As a matter of fact, and embarrassingly enough, in Europe, they've actually detected plastic molecules in people's feces from the food that they eat. So that's not an acceptable fact that we're facing, but it's not too late to reverse this.

It's not too late to take proactive decisions, such as we're doing here, but, again, the devil is going to be in the details. I'm supportive of what's happening, but before this becomes enacted and before it becomes complete legislation, and we know as consumers and as citizens of this province where we stand, I'm reluctant to say this is going to be the truth and virtue of what we intended to do by the plastic-bag ban.

As we move forward into Committee, there will be questions, and I'll commend my colleague from CBS who did take some questioning and jeering from the opposite side as to whether he supports the ban or not, but at this stage, we're in the preliminary examination of what we're proposing. We're in the preliminary examination of the details that are going to be here because, we, as an Opposition right now, we're not going to see the details. We're only going to see basically the change of the bill that will permit the changing of the details. So, it is his job, it is all of our jobs as Opposition, to question, to throw out scenarios, to throw out probabilities and that will give due diligence to what we need to do as a Legislature.

There is no doubt that this has to go ahead. There is no doubt that this is a positive step, and while I do question the timing, I am still very proud that I can stand here in this Legislature today and say that we, as a collective House, are proposing this bill change that will enable us to ban plastic bags.

I've often said: Why do we need to follow suit of another Canadian province? Why do we need

to be the last one to jump on board? Why can't we, as a responsibility to our citizens and our future generations, lead the way?

We need to listen to what is emerging worldwide. Australia, for example, they've also had a plastic ban in place, and to the Member for Torngat Mountains, I am so proud to hear that a Northern community has had the bag ban in place for 10 years.

Last Friday, I took a run down to dumpsite A, that's the, I guess, the commercial side of Robin Hood Bay landfill. I commend the waste management authority for prettying up the residential side and, basically, it looks like we're doing an absolutely fantastic job on managing our waste, separating our waste and keeping it out of the environment, but I think that as part of our responsibility as users of this facility, we should actually have to go over to dumpsite A; go over and see what we're doing to our environment on a daily basis.

Last Friday, winds were up around 75 or 80 kilometres an hour and I happened to go to the dump with some material, non-recyclable material. Unfortunately, it has no other destination but the dump, and, at that time, they were allowing one truck at a time to pull in and dump the garbage. While they were doing that, as soon as the material was coming off the truck – if I quoted a number it may be inaccurate – but a substantial amount of plastic became airborne and headed out over the Atlantic Ocean. But do you know what? That Atlantic Ocean is not going to absorb that and it's going to disappear from our environment. That is going to continue to infiltrate our food systems, our environment and ecosystems for years and years and years.

We've heard some, I guess, personal situations where the Member for St. John's Centre and the Member for Lab West, they spoke of bags that have been caught in their trees. Do you know what? In theory, that bag will outlast those trees. That bags will be hanging in those trees long after the trees have reached maturity and the tree falls down, that bag will keep going on because bags, just like a lot of waste that's in our environment, they don't entirely disappear, they just get smaller and smaller and smaller and go throughout all organisms within an ecosystem.

In my career as a farmer, I've often purchased cattle from one area of the province. It's on the Avalon, but this one particular pasture is right adjacent to a former dump, and every farmer who buys those cattle knows that those cattle don't have the life expectancy or the productivity of other animals in other pastures. Why that is, is because they plug themselves up with the plastic. They'll just munch away on the plastic. It'll get caught in one of their four large stomachs, it'll settle in the bottom and it reduces the amount of capacity of the absorption.

So, not only does it affect domestic animals, the Member for Torngat Mountains referred to several species in which he's seen a direct effect on either the digestive systems or their ability to forage for food, be it a physical hampering or a chemical infiltration of the digestive system, plastic is not something that species have evolved fast enough to deal with in their digestive systems or in their environments.

That creates a huge challenge when it comes to specie diversification and specie existence. There will be animals that succumb to extinction as a result of plastic in their environments. One of the biggest ones we often hear about is the sea turtle. Plastic bags replicate a jellyfish, of course, they swallow the plastic bag, they plug up the system and they are unable to eat. That's a continued thing that's happened.

Even when we implement this ban, and I pray that it will be a firm and solid ban and very little tolerance for exemption, if at all. We need to lead the way. We need, as a responsibility to our children, as a responsibility to their children, we must be proactive and continue on with these initiatives.

I personally support this. I will have lots of questions, there's no doubt. I'll probably get a bit of heckling from the other side when I ask questions, but my heart and my soul is supporting this action. The issue is how are we going to implement it? How are we going to enforce it? I don't want to see this being another cash grab on behalf of the government. Fees for bag use – nope. I want it to be firm and I want it to be certain, there's no option but to bring your own bags.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I hadn't intended on speaking, but I do feel I need to put a few comments on the record to ensure clarity and accuracy as it relates to this very important debate. One thing I will say is that I support the bill being brought forward by our minister and the department, they've done a very good job.

Specifically, I want to refer to the comments from the Member for Mount Pearl North who took advantage to mention my time in the office. I will say, he was accurate on one point that he said, in that he said that I was a temporary minister, and the fact is that is true. I served in the role for seven months, knowing that I would hold the role for as long as the Premier chose. That being said, there was a significant amount of work that got done, but all the credit for that goes to the people within the department. That's a very competent and capable department, and I truly think that those people there, the work that they do, often goes unrecognized.

What I will say is this, I think what the Member said – and he'll have a chance to clarify me if I'm wrong and he can do this during the Committee stage – is that he said I'm glad to see that the new minister has a different attitude than the previous minister, which is implying that I would not support this. But what I would point out to the Member opposite is that on any issue – same as the Members have said now a couple times, they've said that we support this, but we want to take our time to figure it out.

Well, somebody doesn't jump into that role and take on an issue and come out one way or the other without also doing their research. I received a significant amount of correspondence in that role, and I think everything that I laid out in correspondence that I sent to anybody during that time would have been 100 per cent accurate. In many cases, again, all that would have come from listening to the staff within the department when we talk about various forms of plastic, when we talk about the pollution that we have ongoing, and this is something that we all feel strong about.

So, I want to clarify the Member's comments, because, again, we'll be long gone, but *Hansard* survives, and if I were not to question what he said, it would go on with his implication that I do not support this, which cannot be allowed to stand.

What I would suggest is that we take our time when it comes to important issues like that. We actually did a significant amount of consultation during the time I was there; consultation that the current minister has carried on even further, and he's done a great job with this issue. It's one that is very important to him and I want to commend him for it.

Certainly, during the time I was there, we had a number of issues to deal with and we run the risk, when you come in and take a significant issue and implement a change without consultation or without doing work, we end up with the possibility of doing things like expropriating mills, and that's not something that I want to do during my time.

So, what I would say to the Member opposite is that when you make your comments to this, just try your best to be accurate when it comes to what a person would imply or be stating in their letter. I will be standing up and supporting this.

I did not question the comments by one of your colleagues, the Member for CBS, who stood up in the House one day and said: Get on with it, get on with it, get on with it. Then during the debate today stands up and say: Well, hang a second now, I'm not sure where we are on this.

What I would say is I'm not going to talk about that, but I just want to clarify the comments made by the Member for Mount Pearl North as we move forward in this debate and in support of the bill that the current minister, who's doing an excellent job, is bringing forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I start, I just wanted to make it upfront clear, I'm supportive of the bill in what it is intended to do, so in my speech afterwards you don't get to think something else.

The ban of the plastic bag is long overdue. It's been something we've seen and heard other countries, other communities, deal with and have dealt with. It has huge implications for our environment. My Member here to the right of me mentioned the great Pacific garbage patch. A picture tells a thousand words, and if you go online and google that, it's, as he said, I think he called it miles, but it's 1.6 square kilometres of garbage floating in the Pacific Ocean. That's 607,000 square miles of garbage. That's actually 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic; 80,000 tons. That's just one island. There are several out there in the Pacific floating around. So, whatever steps we can do to get plastics and that out of the environment is certainly a step in the right direction.

I heard the Members here today talk about whales and ducks and fish that are caught and have plastic either wrapped around them or in them. Midway Island is littered with carcasses of birds. You can just picture their ribcages and all that's inside of them is plastic straws, caps, whatever you can find. This is what they die from because it's in the oceans.

Many people, Mr. Speaker, comment on my complexion. They say how nice it is. That's from facial scrubs. Facial scrubs, believe it or not, have the little plastic beads in them. They get washed down through, so I'm gone all natural. I go with the seeds now. That's how it looks so nice. But the plastic beads – think about it, those facial scrubs that used to be out there, and we don't think about this, little tiny plastic beads, fish are filled with them. We talked about the sea turtle and plastic bags imitating jellyfish. They eat them and they die with this because they can't digest them.

Just last night I turned on the nature channel – and I love wildlife; otherwise, I wouldn't be in this House. This is wonderful wildlife in here. I think the Member here opposite mentioned Australia. There was a show on last night about Australia. Now, in the very depths of Australia, in these very remote parts of the country, they did a piece last night on the bower bird. It's

interesting; the bower bird builds a nest and decorates it with scrapes of flowers and leaves. Do you know what they're decorating it with now? Bottle caps, plastics, straws. I encourage you to google; it's really amazing. The far reaches of the world plastic is having an impact on our wildlife.

The Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels talked about plastic in the boots. I certainly remember growing up with the Sunny Bee bags; you put them in your boots in the wintertime when you go off. When you come home, you cut the little bees out and stick them on the windows. There were uses for them then but now we're seeing them, bags are flying around.

I had the opportunity to listen to the Eastern Regional Service Board this past weekend and the councillor for Cabinet spoke. He spoke about their landfill site. He was talking about having a fence around it to maintain what blows around. When they dump garbage there, the first thing that flies up and flies miles down the road are the plastic bags. Again, it was noted today how a bag gets stuck in a tree and it's there forever. So, banning the plastic bag is certainly something that I support.

I will echo some of the comments of my colleagues in terms of the detail, and I'm very hopeful that the detail will come. There's a cost to doing this and there's a cost to not doing it, so I think there's a cost that we can't ignore. It has to be done, but I think the devil is in the details and I think the more details we can get out to the public on how we're going to move this forward would certainly benefit everyone. At the end of the day, we only have one environment and how we take care of that is going to determine what our future generations have.

I support the banning of the bag. I hope it's a step towards more decisions on our environment. I look forward to the Committee stage when we can ask some questions and get some greater detail.

Thank you for the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise again to talk about Bill 1. I thank everybody, all the speakers for their comments. I'm not going to get into debate on them. All I will say, Mr. Speaker, I would love, myself, to be able to move this forward a little faster and know where we are with the regulations, but the fact of the matter is that this legislation that we're entering today, I have to have that legislation in order to move ahead with the regulations. It's not a matter of rushing it through because it's an election or anything like that. The fact of the matter is that this amendment to the legislation is required before we can legally do anything with the regulations.

Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of procedure. I don't think anybody needs to be overly concerned where the regulations are going. We've heard the feedback. The consultation was geared around a lot of the information that would be required to go into regulations with regard to if there is going to be a fee – and I know the Member for Mount Pearl North suggested that there shouldn't be a fee. Well, there may not be a fee. That's something that we have to discuss with our retail people. The regulations will be drafted in consultation with all the groups I mentioned in my previous comments and that would include the retail sector.

Implementation date again was something that we are going to allow the retail sector and business and especially – and they mentioned the mom and pop. Again, that's a concern for us. We have to sit down with those people to ensure that we're not putting their business at risk. Although we've heard from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in the beginning, and that was one of the things, go back to September when the last consultation was done with those stakeholders, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business were not totally on board, but since that time they have come – but one of the reasons, and the main reason, actually, that we went with more consultations, was because that was the

recommendation that came out of the last stakeholder meeting. The stakeholders recommended that more consultation was required with the public before we would move ahead with such a ban, so that's why the consultations were done.

I know the will is there to support this piece of legislation. I'm glad that the Opposition are on board with that. Again, I won't get into any of the comments; I know they have some questions. So with that said, I will take my seat and await the Committee stage. From what I can gather, and I think it's fair to say that the Opposition, certainly most of them, are in favour of this bill, and I thank them for the support. As I said, this bill is necessary for me and our department, for us as a government, to move forward with the ban.

If we could just bring in the regulations and have that debate, we would do that, but in order to even develop the regulations, we have to move ahead with the legislation.

So on that note, Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I look forward to the Committee stage.

Thank you.

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

The motion is that Bill 1 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Environmental Protection Act. (Bill 1)

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: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill “An Act To Amend The Environmental Protection Act,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 1)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 1.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 1.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (P. Parsons): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 1, An Act To Amend The Environmental Protection Act.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Environmental Protection Act.” (Bill 1)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess I’ll highlight just a couple of things before I ask some questions. I want to highlight or mention to some Members opposite after we had second reading and made references to they didn’t know where I stood, we made it clear, and *Hansard* will show that I said on at least, I’d say, six to seven times, probably more, we do support this ban. But we want regulations; we want more details.

So, Members opposite, the Member for Torngat Mountains, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, they need to go back and check their facts because I know they stated I was all over the place. I was very focused on what I said. I’ll stand here right now and I’ll stay focused because what I’m asking for is not unrealistic, it’s a genuine question I asked the minister and government opposite, and I think we, as the Opposition, and the public deserve better answers than what we’re getting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Minister, one of my questions in Committee is: Why are the regulations not part of this bill?

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think I made that quite clear in my comments. We needed this legislation to be amended in order to move ahead with the regulations.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: But why are the details of the regulations not in the legislation?

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

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, again, I'll say this is step one of the process. Step one is to amend the legislation so we can start developing the regulations. I cannot do regulations unless I have the legislation amended. It's a matter of process.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I disagree, Minister; I can't see why. You could bring in a new act. PEI brought in a whole new act to put all the stuff, all their legislation, all their regulations in the act and brought it to the House. You're bringing in two little lines. You're implementing we are going to ban bags, but there are no details on the regulations. We're looking for why are the details of these regulations not being made clear. We just know there's going to be a ban. We don't even know the date of implementation, Minister.

We're passing this through the House. Everyone agrees with a ban, but this lacks details. That's what I'm asking. I'm asking it again. I've asked it over and over again and I'm asking you again – making it legal does not – I don't know where that's coming from, so better clarity, please.

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

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, there's nothing else I can say about that. I needed legislation in order to do regulations.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Minister, for the purpose of the bill, how are you going to define a plastic retail bag?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Again, Madam Chair, we see a single-use retail bag as those bags that are used at the counter in retail outlets as in grocery stores, small businesses and any other stores that

use single-use plastic bags at the point of retail. That's the ban that we're using.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Minister, when will the regulations be drafted?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, if this bill is passed today, tomorrow the regulations start immediately.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: But my question was when are they going to be drafted. That's the question.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, I don't know if I'm making myself clear – and I'll use a hypothetical situation. If the legislation is passed at 5:30 today, the regulations start to be drafted at 5:31.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Madam Chair, who's going to have input in these regulations, Minister? Who's going to have the input in these regulations? Is that going to be done by the department or is it going to be consulted with the retailers and the users?

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

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, the regulations will be developed in consultation with all the stakeholders and anybody else who wants to have input into those.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Minister, during our briefings we were told discussions with stakeholders are going to continue. So which stakeholders are you going to be including – on a go-forward basis from now when this is passed, which stakeholders will be used, just a select group – can you elaborate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the stakeholders were listed in the *What We Heard* document. They would include the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador; PMA, the Professional Municipal Administrators; Restaurants Canada; Restaurant Association of Newfoundland and Labrador; the Council of Canadians; the Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Industry Association; MMSB; the Retail Council of Canada; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; the World Wildlife Fund; Stewardship Association of Municipalities; and so forth.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Madam Chair, you know they are bickering across the way; this issue is important to people in the province. I don't know what the humour – there are lots of humorous shots across the way, but this is an issue that the public cares about, so I don't get this. Anyway, I'll continue on.

Minister, outside of these, is there opportunity for others to join in these consultations when this is being developed in consultation with – will you be open to adding new people, should they want to partake?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Will there be a plan to inform businesses and the public about the regulations before they come into effect?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: I would think, Madam Chair, that they are going to be part of the consultations and the development of the regulations, so they would be well aware of any regulations before they come into effect.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, when can we expect this ban to take effect in the province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

What we heard in the consultations is that we should take anywhere between six to 12 months to make the ban official, to give retail stores, for instance, the time to use up their stock, to allow people to adjust. A lot of people are adjusting as we speak. I would say we'll follow those suggestions, those recommendations that we heard in the consultations. That's why we did them, to get that information. I would say we certainly won't go beyond the one-year period.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, this bill is not to address other plastic products. Is consideration being given to banning other plastic products outside the plastic bags?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, actually, we looked at that and we decided against it at the end. This legislation deals only with plastic bags because that's all we had consulted on. Nevertheless, as part of the federal plan to reduce plastic in our environment, I understand the federal minister is making those announcements sometime in June. We will be part of that. Definitely, there will be considerations given to other plastic products that exist, but we are starting with the single-use plastic bag, but it certainly doesn't stop there.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

PEI has a number of exemptions in its act. What exemptions are being considered here? What alternatives are being explored?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Exemptions, I'm not sure what the Member is referring to, in particular, but what this ban does include is only the single-use plastic bags at retailers. There will be a need for some retailers to use plastic to separate meats, chicken and fish, so we have to look at all that. There's an issue with pharmaceuticals as well.

There will be material and provisions made at those counters to allow for that to happen so that we can do this in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, will retailers be charging for the paper bags and for the reusable bags when this is implemented?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That was one of the questions we asked, actually, in the consultations, and several answers came back on where that money should go, if we were to charge a fee. A decision has not been made on that yet, but if you read the *What We Heard* document, the average was 38 cents for a paper bag and \$1.68, I think, for reusable. But those discussions will take place with retailers because we feel they're the ones going to be most impacted, and, in most cases, any money collected as a replacement, that money would go back to the retailer.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, who will keep this fee? We're going to pay 38 cents a bag, who's going to keep the fee? I know you said in your consultations, government or some retailers. Has there been any discussion who's going to keep this fee?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There has been some discussion, but we feel, at this point, that's something that the retailers should be getting. There were other suggestions in the consultation, actually, 46 per cent, I think, thought that it should go to the retailers, 30 per cent thought it should go to government and the rest thought it should go to other organizations. At this point, that's a discussion that we're having with the retailers.

If a fee is implemented – and that decision has not been made yet – it is more than likely that

revenue will go to the retailer, because they're the ones that are experiencing the cost now to get to banning the bag and get to the reusable and the alternatives that exist out there, whether it's a paper bag, whether it's a cloth reusable bag or some other means, that's something that the retailers are looking at.

By the way, the Retail Council of Canada fully supports a ban on single-use plastic bags. They're willing to work with us and I think that's important. So, that's a discussion that we'll have during the development of the regulations.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, will this bag fee be subject to the HST?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: That's a question that I will have to get clarification on. I'm not sure, but I think that any purchase that would happen at a retail outlet would be subjected to HST. I don't see this as being any different.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, our understanding is that this will be a ban at the distribution point, not a ban at the landfill. Can you confirm this?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, I thought I made that quite clear, this is a ban at the retail, and it's at the counter, it's over the counter. So, yes, the ban would be at the point of sale, at the point of retail, not at the landfill.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, what's your plan regarding enforcement? How will these new regulations be enforced? What is the plan for that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, there are stipulations and provisions in the act now, that exist in the *Environmental Protection Act*, that would apply to any violation of the act. This will be part of the act, so any violation would be subjected to the fines already outlined in the *Environmental Protection Act*.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, just to be clear, in the *Environmental Protection Act* there are set out fees, whether you're a corporation or an individual, first offence, second offence. Are those same fees going to be applied to a store owner, for instance, if they violate this after an inspector comes in to inspect them? Will that be the same fees or is there any consideration given to adjusting those fees?

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The only change recommended in the act at this point is to allow for the ban of the single-use plastic bag, so anything that's in the act today regarding fines or enforcement will continue to exist.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, we know there has been struggles sometimes with inspectors, so will there be new inspectors hired to do the enforcement of this ban when it takes effect?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: At this point that's not a discussion that we've had, Madam Chair, but, the fact of the matter is, we believe that once this ban is in place that people will co-operate. It's a ban that 87 per cent of the people that responded want and everybody in the Opposition wants. So I don't foresee a big need for enforcement because I think people will do the right thing.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, are you considering any particular time frame to permit businesses to get rid of their current supply of plastic retail bags?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That will depend on the implementation date and that is why we are having discussions around the implementation date is to allow businesses, that is one of the reasons, to allow businesses to use up their stock that they have and to make sure that they have the alternative use bag in place. I don't foresee that taking anymore than one year from the time that the regulations are implemented.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, what's the plan to inform and educate businesses and the public about any proposed changes?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Madam Chair, we have involved several organizations in this process. One of the organizations is the Multi-Material Stewardship Board, the MMSB. They will play a large role. They're a big partner in this and they're a big part of the stakeholder group. I foresee the MMSB as playing a big role in the education, whether it's through the schools, whether it's through the businesses, whether it's through the general public, that's their job. That's why they are there and I see them playing a major role in that.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you keep talking about the retail, which is fine, I understand that. I'm wondering about wholesale because there can be a little bit of a mixture. I'll just throw out an example, Kent over on Kelsey, they have like a contractor store or whatever which is more of a wholesale, it's not for the general public.

So, if there's a wholesale business that's doing business with other businesses and they're getting supplies there, would they also have to have a ban on those kind of bags?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The short answer is yes. If you used Kent as an example – I will use it too – even though they have a contractor counter that they do sell probably at wholesale prices, Kent is considered a retail store and they would be subjected to the ban.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you.

I thank you, Minister, for that.

Maybe Kent wasn't a good example, but I guess my point is –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: Maybe it wasn't the best example, but I guess my point is just simply there are a lot of businesses that are wholesale businesses. Whether it be in Donovans, Pippy Place, wherever the case might be, that retail businesses would be getting supplies and getting stuff from them and so on. I know a lot of it probably comes in cardboard boxes and bulk anyway, but I'm just wondering: When the wholesale businesses are doing business with retail businesses, will they be required to ban single-use plastic bags as well?

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The answer is yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Minister, for that.

Minister, I just want some clarity. When we're talking about fees, or the potential for fees because you haven't decided yet if there will be fees or not, when we're talking about the potential for fees for bags, I just want to clarify, it would be my understanding what you're referring to would be alternative bags.

So, right now, I can get a plastic bag at Walmart but I have to pay for it. So I'm paying a fee, but this is going to ban out – so when we're talking

about paying a fee for bags, it's not going to be a case of, if you want to have a plastic bag, you're going to pay for it as a deterrent, but there will be no plastic bags at all, right?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

You're absolutely correct. The only fee that will be implemented will be a fee for an alternate-use bag. There will be no plastic bags at the counter. That will be illegal.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Minister, again.

Another question – and I think my colleague from Conception Bay South kind of raised it in second reading. I never heard it in Committee because I had to step out for a second so I might have missed it. I apologize if I'm repeating the question.

He talked about farmers and stuff, but whether it be farmers, whether it be, I don't know, crafters –

AN HON. MEMBER: Food banks.

MR. LANE: Well, food bank was mentioned but food bank is not a retail business. I would see that maybe as different, but maybe you can clarify that as well.

When you're talking about someone who is operating a business, albeit a home-based business, a small business, a crafting business or whatever, are they allowed to use bags that are – they are recycling them because they got the bags themselves at Dominion and then they use them in their home-based business for putting stuff in. Would they be fined if you went over and there was a guy up in Foxtrap putting vegetables into a Dominion bag?

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That may happen for the first little while, but the intent of this ban is to ban the single-use plastic bag. We're hoping to get to a point where there will be no single-use plastic bags to use. But anybody who is at a point of retail will be banned.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

Another point that just sort of comes to mind because you can think of so many different scenarios, of course, but what about the case of let's say sometimes you go to a trade show, like the home show or something, they give you a plastic bag, you go around and put trinkets and stuff into it going around to tables and stuff. It's not retail, you're not paying for it, yet they are giving you plastic bags. Will that be banned as well?

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

MR. LETTO: I guess the short answer again is yes. But we know that there are going to be situations whether – some people have brought up the example of a yard sale, and if you go to a craft show. We're going to get to the point where there is not going to be any single-use plastic bags out there.

The point is as well that all those groups agree with the ban, these organizations, they agree with the ban on single-use plastic bags so I think once the ban is implemented – and the Member for Mount Pearl North alluded to it in his comments – that people will take responsibility. It's proven in other cases where a ban has been implemented. People have taken that responsibility, they have adhered to the plan, and they found an alternative way of carrying whatever they buy.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: I thank the minister for answering all my questions.

A good bill; I support it.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm just to stand and have a few minutes on this. I was involved with this for a nice while. Before we go any further, I just want to thank the staff of Municipal Affairs and Environment for their hard work over the last almost four years for this. They've been working on this tirelessly. They've met with many stakeholders. They had many consultations.

We hear everybody around just say let's just ban the bag. But if we change the dimensions of the bag, it won't become a single-use plastic bag. So that's the kind of issue that the minister is facing. When you look at the usage of a bag and change your behaviour, if you charge 25 cents for a bag, it will go down 75 per cent of the usage for the bag. That's the kind of issue that you're facing when you get the retailers involved.

The other thing, the big issue that was facing the department at the time is what are you going to do now, say, for garbage. How many people in this province use the single bag for garbage in their garbage catchers? What's going to happen now is that you're going to end up buying the thicker, bigger white bags with the same effect?

So these are all the issues that the department has been dealing with for a number of years. I say to the minister, I remember when we were having consultations with it, and they always talk about the fees. One of the great things that was even discussed then about the fees, is take the fees and either put it back in some way that you give a discount to buy the cloth bags, or do some environmental projects with the fees.

Have the fees some way that people can see some benefit from it, not just, say, a taxation, not

just say, okay, we got the money. Put it back into promotion, education of single-cloth bags. This has been an issue not just here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but all around the world. This is not just a simple issue for the department. I know that when there was a survey done there was something like 18 or 270 sites, and most of it was Tim Hortons, Mary Brown's – very little was the actual plastic bags.

Then you hear all about the straws. I was glad to hear the minister talk today about the national association for food packaging in Canada, that there'll soon be a strategy for that, because that's a big part of it. If you look at all the plastic and doing it on the national level for the packaging for food will be a great benefit to all of Canada, which Newfoundland and Labrador will be part of – which is a bigger strategy than just plastic bags.

I have to bring something up to the minister that I know the Opposition were bringing up, about where are the regulations. I just want to let the people in the province who are listening and have it on record. It's normal to bring in the act and follow up with the legislation later. This is normal. You get the permission and then you go ahead and do the act. So this is normal. I don't think there's any need to pick up for the minister for this or defend him, but this is not something they're rushing through because it's election time. This is normal, to bring in the act, then follow up with the regulations later. They will have consultations with stakeholders on the regulations. So this is not something that was just the first time this has ever happened in this Legislature. That is not the case in this, and even though the Opposition are trying to portray it as that, you're just rushing it through because there's an election, just let the general public know that this is common.

I've been in the Legislature now for a long while and I've seen the Opposition, I've seen this government, I've seen all governments bring in the act and the regulations will follow later. So this is nothing new on it.

I know MNL has been pushing for this for a long while. They've been a big spearhead of this here. You have to give them credit, they were pushing, and they were doing it for the right reasons.

The other thing that I just want to advise people is that the biggest part of this whole endeavour of plastic bags is a change in behaviour for the people of the province. We'll always find situations, we'll always find a scenario where you're going to find plastic. A good example is down to the trade shows. You might not have the single plastic bags but you might have the bigger, wider ones. So, there's always going to be plastic.

What we need to do to try to help the environment, it's just not plastic bags, it's stir sticks and then you got cigarette butts. We all know the causes that they have for cigarette butts. So, it's a change of behaviour.

I'll just make a suggestion to the minister, when you're looking at the fees. If there's going to be a fee included, there's no definite decision made on that yet, but the thing I would say is that if you use the money for education; education in the school programs, education in some way that you can take the funds and the people in some town – I'll use Walmart, for example. When all the kids that are out our way and at the elementary school, at the school right next to Walmart, if you can see some great initiative for the environment at that school that would educate the kids: Look, here's what we're doing with those funds. Here's how you can save the environment and help out with the environment and be a legacy. That's the kind of thing that I would suggest to the minister to do with the funds.

In general, I will be supporting this. I thank all the staff, thank all the stakeholders and thank all the groups that participated over a while. This is a decision that couldn't be done overnight, you had to follow it through, and, of course, there are going to be growing pains. Once this is passed, everybody starts saying: Well, when are you banning the bags? Why is it banned, we still got more around? This is a bigger issue. This is going to take time.

Minister, I will be supporting this bill and the regulations. I look forward to the regulations. Once again, I thank the staff at Municipal Affairs and Environment for the work that they've done. I thank all the stakeholders involved that were a part of this here because a

lot of them too had to come to the table and help out with this here.

It will be a great step for Newfoundland and Labrador. It will be a great step for a lot of people, but we need the education and the youth is where the education is. So, I will be supporting this bill.

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 Environmental Protection 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 Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Madam Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 1.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 1.

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 Harbour Grace - Port de Gave and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 1 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 her to report Bill 1 without amendment.

When shall the report be received? Now?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

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

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

This House does stand adjourned until tomorrow at 10 o'clock.

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