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Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Admit strangers.

Order, please!

In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome representatives of the board of directors of Emmaus House Food Bank: Chairperson Susan Halley, Vice-Chair Georgie Chalker, Gary Sooley, Sharon Ready, Shirley Hearn and Norma Summers. They are joining us this afternoon for a Member's statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Lewisporte - Twillingate, Exploits, Labrador West, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and Harbour Main.

The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the oldest resident from my district, Mr. Victor Baker, who celebrated his 103rd birthday on March 3.

Victor grew up in Badger, where his father worked as a cook in the lumber camps. He later moved to Botwood and spent most of his life there working with his brothers in retail and wholesale distribution.

He married the love of his life, Mary, and together they had one son, Maxwell.

Victor now resides at Pleasantview Manor in Lewisporte, and on Tuesday they celebrated his birthday in fine style where he danced, sang and told a few stories.

As a testament of Mr. Baker's sense of humour, when asked by Reverend Art Elliott if he was getting any girlfriends since he moved into the manor, his response was: My son, I got to beat them off with a broom.

To end the party, as he done on his 100th birthday and so many times in his youth, Victor enjoyed a horse and carriage ride.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to rise as we celebrate Mr. Victor Baker's 103rd birthday and to wish him continued health.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this year the Kinsmen Club of Botwood celebrated their 46th anniversary in conjunction with the 100 anniversary of Kin Canada.

In 1973, Mr. Phillip (Den) Billard of Labrador came to live and work in Botwood. The following year, they established a clubhouse and rented from the local paper workers. The paper worker's union committed to its motto: Serving the Community's Greatest Needs.

Mr. Speaker, over the years, traditions and projects started and are still ongoing today. Some of those are: Christmas dinner and dances for seniors in the town, equipment for the local fire department, engagement in municipal projects, and individual and group fundraisers.

Mr. Speaker, at present, the Kinsmen Club of Botwood has donated over \$3 million to their municipality and region. The club is one of the top clubs in Canada and is very active with 46 serving members and seven charter members.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the Kinsmen Club of Botwood on their 46th anniversary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate Cain's Quest Snowmobile race 2020 as they prepare for the start of the race on March 7.

Cain's Quest was started in 2006 by Todd Kent from Tourism who felt that a snowmobile race had the potential to showcase Labrador and attract new visitors. A small committee was formed and one staff person was hired. Since 2006, Cain's Quest has grown to be an international sensation. It's been led by Glenn Emberley up until 2014 and now by Rob Pilgrim.

It takes months and months of planning and organization by a large group of volunteers and staff to make such an event happen. Without them, the race would not be where it is today. It makes me feel proud and a great sense of community from every volunteer, from Lab West right on over to all corners of Labrador.

Every layover and checkpoint throughout Labrador showcases our unique culture and our Labrador spirit to the world. This year is the biggest race yet, with a record of 50 teams including, for the first time ever, two female teams will be competing for the finish line.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking everyone involved with making Cain's Quest possible, and wish them all the best race possible on their journey through the Big Land.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Emmaus House Food Bank is a collaborative food bank operated by five parishes in the St. John's area. They are the Basilica of St. John the Baptist, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, St. Thomas', St. Patrick's, and St. Michael and All Angels. It is run by a board of directors consisting of the clergy and two elected representatives from each parish. A dedicated team of volunteers handles day-to-day operations in Emmaus House.

Emmaus House is one of several food banks served by the Community Food Sharing Association and serves our vulnerable friends and neighbours with the support of its parishes, sponsors and volunteers.

In 2019, the Emmaus House Food Bank served 8,500 community members – 2,000 of those being children in need.

During Snowmageddon 2020, the volunteers at the Emmaus House faced the weather to open their doors to support a community of people heavily burdened with food insecurity.

I ask all hon. Members to join in a round of applause for the parishes, sponsors and volunteers that bring us Emmaus House Food Bank – a crucially important community group for my district and the St. John's area.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Women's Day is celebrated this Sunday, March 8, 2020 and is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

This year's theme is: I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights. This day provides an opportunity to recognize strong women in our lives. For many that would be our mothers. For me this Sunday, International Women's Day, is especially meaningful as I will be remembering my mother, whose birthday falls on this special day.

I will proudly be attending an event in my district in North River on Sunday to celebrate women's achievements, and will be joined by almost 250 individuals. Each year a woman who has distinguished herself is recognized, and this year it's Alice Frances Baird Innes. Funds raised that day will be donated to O'Shaughnessy House in Carbonear, a shelter for people who suffer domestic violence.

The emerging global consensus, Mr. Speaker, is that despite some progress, real change has been agonizingly slow for the majority of women and girls in our world. Imagine a world where gender equality is the norm. Where men and women getting paid equally for work of equal value and sharing the care when at home.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me and work together to make this a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to acknowledge the receipt of the Muskrat Falls inquiry report.

As legislators, we are all keenly aware of the profound impact that the Muskrat Falls Project has on ratepayers and the financial situation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2017, a public inquiry was called to provide a greater understanding of whether all options were considered in the 2012 sanctioning; secondly, it was called to ask why there are significant differences between the actual cost of the project and the estimated cost; also, whether it was justified and reasonable for the project to be excluded from the Public Utilities Board oversight.

Mr. Speaker, we put a process in place to ensure all information was provided to the inquiry. Justice Richard D. LeBlanc received approximately six million documents and the report he delivered today is over 1,000 pages in length.

The Muskrat Falls inquiry was a comprehensive and detailed investigation that is of great importance to the people of our province.

I would like to thank Justice LeBlanc and his team, and everyone else who participated in the

inquiry, for their commitment and their dedication.

Mr. Speaker, while we can't undo the past, we can learn from it and make informed decisions as we take actions to minimize the impact of this project on current Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and future generations of our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to extend our appreciation to Justice LeBlanc for presiding over the inquiry, also appreciation to the Commission co-counsel: Irene Muzychka, Barry Learmonth and Kate O'Brien, now elevated to the Supreme Court of Justice for the province.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to reviewing the report when it's publicly released in the coming days.

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

I am sure the whole province is eager to read the findings of Justice LeBlanc. The inquiry, an investigation into a disastrously publicly funded project, was paid from the public purse. Justice LeBlanc wrote this for the public: I am deeply concerned that the Minister of Natural Resources noted to the media that it may be released with redactions. There cannot be redactions.

I am sure Justice LeBlanc, a well-respected and competent jurist with decades of experience, knew what he could and could not say in his report. The public needs to know the truth, the

whole truth and nothing but the truth without redaction.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

I rise in this hon. House to acknowledge the start of midwifery services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: Welcome to our four midwives – Renee Boland, Catha McMaster, Brianna Thompson and Maud Addai. Three of these registered midwives started providing services in mid-December, while the fourth midwife joined the team in January.

Budget 2019: Working towards a brighter future provided \$370,000 for the establishment of these services in Gander.

Establishing a collaborative and supportive environment for midwifery has been key to getting this program launched. We will use the lessons from Gander to begin implementation across the province over the coming year.

This team is a positive contribution to collaborative maternity care in the community, and at James Paton Memorial Regional Health Centre.

I would be remiss today if I did not acknowledge Gisela Becker, our provincial midwifery consultant, who provided quality leadership and guidance in bringing this implementation process to fruition.

I also wish to acknowledge the Association of Midwives of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Council of Health Professionals, Pearl Herbert and Kay Matthews, Central Health, midwives from across the country, educators and others, who were

instrumental in helping to develop regulations that will facilitate the safe governance of midwifery in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join with the minister and acknowledge the beginning of midwifery services in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Official Opposition also wishes to acknowledge all four midwives: Renee Boland, Catha McMaster, Brianna Thompson and Maud Addai. We hope that you and other midwives, which will join you in the future, have a long and prosperous career serving the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We also thank the many professionals and organizations that had a role in developing the necessary regulations to provide safe and accessible midwifery services to our province, such as the Association of Midwives of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Newfoundland and Labrador Council of Health Professionals and Central Health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I, too, thank the minister for an advance of his statement.

I'm proud to say in the 1940s, a time before electricity and running water, my great-grandmother was a midwife on Fogo Island. Her work in Joe Batt's Arm inspired generations of women, including my own mother, to become a nurse. Midwifery services are very close to my heart and I am proud to join the minister in celebrating these great accomplishments.

Congratulations to our new midwives.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this hon. House today to recognize the efforts of the employees of the Department of Transportation and Works who worked tirelessly during and after the storm this January.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: We all saw the photos and the impact the snow had on Eastern Newfoundland and the Avalon Peninsula and we all know, through our own experiences and challenges, what we faced to clean up after the storm.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the employees of the department who went to great lengths to ensure public safety.

Our plow operators pushed through snow drifts that were 15 feet high on provincial highways. Our mechanics and welders and clerk staff worked tirelessly to keep our snow clearing equipment in working order; the crews that weathered the storm on the ferries to keep them safe in 140-kilometre an hour winds; our security staff who watched over government buildings and were unable to get home to their families.

Mr. Speaker, our employees regularly go above and beyond their normal responsibilities. Their efforts during this storm and the days following were no exception.

On behalf of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, thank you to our Department of Transportation and Works employees for a job well done, and to everyone who helped somebody else out following the storm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker, we in the Official Opposition welcome this opportunity to applaud Transportation and Works employees for their incredible work during and following the January blizzard.

I have often said we have some of the very best crews, not only in the province but across the country, especially with the difficult, ever-changing weather conditions that they have to deal with. They do tremendous work to keep our roads safe for the travelling public.

Our operators, maintenance crews and crews on our ferries are skilled, dedicated professionals and while their work, perhaps, gets more attention during exceptional weather events, I know that all residents of our province are grateful for the amazing service that Transportation and Works employees provide each and every day.

Mr. Speaker – it might be a surprise based on yesterday – I would also like to add that the minister personally reached out to me and other MHAs whose districts and residents were impacted by the snow, and I want to acknowledge this and thank him for doing that.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

We all recognize the sacrifices made by workers at Transportation and Works during what became known as Snowmageddon. From my vantage point in Lab West, I was heartened but not surprised of how workers went above and beyond the call of duty, how communities came together and how many showed kindness and support to their friends and neighbours. Without

the kindness of most people, a lot more people would have been a lot harder hit.

Let us give thanks to everyone.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Yesterday, the minister said, referring to OilCo: we've also asked them to look at not only the requirement for having a consultant but also the contracts themselves. We expect to have some results very soon.

I ask the minister: Will she table the results of this in the House as soon as she receives it?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, we've been dealing with this the last number of days and, of course, the last number of weeks in public. I did indeed ask the oil company to review its contracts. The contracts went over to the oil company the first of January, Mr. Speaker. I've asked them to do – which I think is prudent and responsible – asked them to do a review of the contracts, asked them to look at what requirements they have going forward for consultants and look at their contracts.

Mr. Speaker, if there is something that I do receive – it is in their purview to look at their own contracts, but I have asked for that diligence, Mr. Speaker, because it is a new entity. If there is anything that is received – again, I do say, Mr. Speaker, there is a board of directors that is responsible for the corporation

but if there is anything received, I'm always happy to table whatever I have in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you for the answer.

We know that the contractor in question, the one who has the bloated contract for \$350,000 for part-time work and a \$3,000-a-month housing allowance has attended a trade mission in Guyana and that Guyana is now on track to surpass us in oil production.

What business has he generated for us, and how many jobs has he created for us here?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member opposite is indeed correct, Guyana has made a number of discoveries. I believe it's eight billion barrels have been discovered, Mr. Speaker, which is a tremendous amount.

We signed a memorandum of understanding with Guyana in the fall of 2018, which was prudent on our part, I thought. We want to have as many supply and service jobs as possible around the world. I know our companies are doing incredible work around the world in this industry. I know of, I think, 17 different memorandums of understanding between companies, some trade relations between various companies.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work diligently and robustly to make more contacts and more opportunity for our supply and service industry. Some of our largest industry is now working in Guyana, and that's a very positive thing for jobs and growth creation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: People of the province continue to be outraged about the \$350,000 part-time contract and \$36,000 annual housing allowance for an individual who rarely comes to the province and doesn't pay taxes here.

Instead of waiting for a review, will the minister stand in her place now and cancel this lucrative contract?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

I'm surprised that the Member opposite doesn't know more about corporate governance. Mr. Speaker, there is a board of directors at the oil company, there is a CEO at the oil company. If they require consultants – they are reviewing what consultants they need going forward and moving forward, and continuing the growth and opportunity in our oil and gas industry. They're reviewing what contracts they have.

I will leave that decision-making authority within the corporation itself, Mr. Speaker. The Member opposite does know governance, I know he does, so I'll leave it at that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: We've learned in the history of this matter that the board of directors of the OilCo does exactly what it's told to do by the government.

Would the minister confirm that?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are indeed some very honourable Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are serving in boards of directors around this

province. In particular, with our oil company; in particular, with Nalcor, Mr. Speaker. I can name more. They are learned individuals, they are dedicated individuals and they're giving greatly of their time.

I can say to the Member opposite, from time to time government can make written directives to the corporation, and I have given some written directions – I alluded to this the other day. Again, we're making repeated questions now on a matter that has been dealt with. But I will say again, I have given written directions on two very important things. One is on continued use of seismic, and the second is on allocations for the Bay du Nord project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial government is supposed to have five wildlife officers and three occupational health and safety officers stationed in Labrador. These positions are very important to the management of our wildlife populations, especially our vulnerable George River caribou herd and the three Woodland caribou herds that are threatened, actually, also for safety concerns with our vast mining industry we have in Labrador. These positions are important. However, the media is reporting that these important positions are not all filled. Actually, they're not even advertised.

Given that the Premier is retiring, I ask our only minister in Cabinet from Labrador: How many of these positions are not filled?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, we appreciate and understand the importance of having those positions filled, not only for our caribou, but for the other positions in Labrador. What I would like to report to the hon. Member – and I thank her for the conversation that we had just yesterday about this issue – we are actively engaged in not only seeking short-term, temporary arrangements to be able to make sure

that those positions are filled but, more importantly, we're looking at long-term strategies.

I alluded to just yesterday a more substantive effort to improve conservation and enforcement, not only in Labrador, but throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I'll have more details on that in the coming days. What I will report to the hon. Member, our addition of \$5.4 million in a conservation agreement for caribou leads to guardianship as well.

We have the resources. We have the will. We're going to get the job done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Right now, the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair is our only minister at the Cabinet table from Labrador. When the minister was asked on social media about the vacancies, she indicated that things are in play, but I learned later that the vacancies are not even being advertised, and that, actually, is a signal that they've given up.

We need to have enforcement. Occupational health and safety is very, very important in our type of industry; management – as the minister talked about – of the caribou herds.

I have to ask the minister: When you do expect the jobs to be filled?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If there's one thing that I am proud to stand in this House and talk about, it's Labrador and the progress that we've seen in Labrador under this government, Mr. Speaker. Everybody around this province knows the fiscal mess that we were in when we formed government.

Despite that, despite the fiscal challenges, hundreds of millions of dollars invested from the Trans-Labrador Highway to broadband, to cell coverage, to investments in communities, to

water and sewer. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on and on. Forty-five seconds in answering a question doesn't permit me to answer.

What I can tell the people of this province is that Labrador and advancing Labrador, mental health issues and the list goes on, has been a priority. There is a long list of accomplishments that we are able to point to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: I thank the minister for her answer. I might say that all the benefits she talked about, none of them are coming to the District of Torngat Mountains. None of those benefits is coming to my district.

I also want to point out the Labrador Affairs office in Lab West has been closed and the executive director position eliminated. There's no Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs.

We're forced to use a ferry for both the North Coast and South Coast that doesn't meet our needs. The potential extinction of the George River caribou herd is not being adequately addressed. Residents are facing food security, not only on the North Coast but the South Coast.

Safety is being jeopardized at the airstrips. Our main airstrip doesn't even have running lights, so a medevac won't be able to get in at night. Residents are telling me that Labradorians are simply not a priority – very, very important.

I ask the minister: What's being done to reverse all these things that are happening to our district?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question from the Member opposite. There were a couple of things there that she had mentioned in her question. Number one, the office of Labrador Affairs within Labrador with the current deputy minister, is now looking for recruiting the next deputy

minister, which will be located in Labrador, Mr. Speaker. That was a decision that was made by this government for the first time; as has been mentioned before, some of the first of many of the investments that we've been able to make.

But it doesn't necessarily mean that there's not more work to be done. Mr. Speaker, we will continue as a government – all of us as a caucus and as a Cabinet will continue to make investments in Labrador. The Member opposite addresses some of the current concerns that we all know. More work needs to be done; we recognize that, on top of the investments that we've been making for many years in Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, back on February 7 we submitted a letter to the Premier as part of the budget consultation process. I ask the minister when we can expect to receive a response.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the officials in the Department of Finance have looked at the letter. Some of the items in the letter we will be able to respond to prior to budget; some of the items in the letter can only be answered in budget. All of the items, I submit to the Member, will be answered either before or during the budget.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: I thank the Finance Minister for his answer.

I follow up with: When will the budget be tabled in the House?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a surprising question. I wasn't expecting it this year.

Mr. Speaker, officials in the department are working hard on putting the budget together. It is a very comprehensive document. As you know, Mr. Speaker, mid-year update was a little bit later, in December, than ordinary as a result of the budget being debated last year later than normal. We're hoping to have the budget done within the normal time frames this year. The budget date I will be happy to announce very near in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: I look forward to the minister's definition of very near in the future.

Mr. Speaker, each year government comes to this House with a bill, Interim Supply. As a former civil servant, I know that this bill normally covers all of the expenditures that may be needed for the first three months of the year, from April to June, make sure we pay our salaries to all our staff, make sure we pay our bills.

The Interim Supply bill has normally been around \$2.7 billion to \$2.8 billion. This year the Finance Minister is asking for double that amount and I'd like to know why.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely hopeful that Members on the other side will vote for the budget this year. But in the spirit of being absolutely willing to allow Members to vote whatever way they want, I want to ensure, in case they decide they want to try to bring government down, there's sufficient money to see us through the process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, is the minister now telling the House and the people of the province that he intends to spend \$4.6 billion, 53 per cent of current year budget expenditure, without bringing down a budget?

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

MR. OSBORNE: No, Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. Ordinarily – and this would not be the first time in the province’s history. In fact, last year we brought in Interim Supply for three months, then we added an additional three months last year. We’ve had other years where we’ve needed six months of Interim Supply.

To offer the Members of the Opposition whatever option they choose in voting on the budget, Mr. Speaker, we’re putting in a six-month Interim Supply. They now have the freedom, should they decide to vote against this government – which I don’t think they will, because we’ll see what’s in the budget – but they have that freedom.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, the minister referred to the fact that last year they had to bring in two Interim Supplies. One, I would argue, was brought in for the first three months of the year. Then they threw in a snap election on top to the people of the province, and as a result of that, had to go back and bring in another Interim Supply.

So is the minister now telling the people of the province that we can expect to be going to the polls this spring?

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

MR. OSBORNE: I certainly, hope not, Mr. Speaker, but they’ll make that decision.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to Debbie Forward, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses’ Union, only 40 per cent of the nurses feel ready should there be a COVID-19 outbreak in this province. The minister said yesterday we are ready as any province in this country, and better prepared than some.

What does the minister say to the 60 per cent of our nurses who feel that we are not ready? Do other health care workers feel the same way?

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

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

With regard to preparations for a potential outbreak or a sustained community transmission of this virus, the regional health authorities have been working very closely with government, and we in turn have been working very closely with our national colleagues. We have a plan in place, that plan has been explained through the RHAs, and we’ve modified it in the light of their input. We have personal protective equipment stockpiled and distributed across the province, and a rolling program, starting with emergency department staff and first responders, to do the fit testing.

I can’t speak to the results and when their survey was done, but I can tell you that the preparedness is increasing on a daily basis and we will have further measures to announce as the situation unfolds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister talked about fit testing and redistribution of N95 masks.

Can the minister confirm that we have secured an adequate supply of N95 masks for all health care workers including front-line workers and first responders?

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

MR. HAGGIE: The short answer to that question is yes, Mr. Speaker.

To elaborate a little further, we have engaged in a redistribution exercise between various depots within the regional health authorities. Our shared services are purchasing on a national and international basis where needed and we actually have applied to the federal government for NESS stockpile access, that's National Emergency supplies.

You will recall from this time last year, that we actually have one of the few regional depots based in Labrador which was a request of this government to the feds because of difficulties with access to Labrador, particularly in the winter as alluded to by the Member for Torngat Mountains.

We do have the supplies, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, the regional health authorities, are they conducting fit testing for all first responders, not just for those who work directly for regional health authorities such as private ambulance operators or fire departments?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, we have a provincial planning committee which has various acronyms, which I always forget, but essentially it involves emergency services; that would be fire and emergency services, as well as representatives of the ambulance companies.

We have been in discussions with the ambulance groups – be they private, community or regional health authority – to ensure that we understand what their needs are. If they need additional resources we have asked them to let us know, and that dialogue continues. But the short answer, again, to the question from the Member opposite is yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The province has a HealthLine that people can phone in if they need health advice.

Has the HealthLine been provided with guidelines should an individual call in that are suspected that they may have COVID-19?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What about education for the public to ensure that they are taking the necessary precautions to prevent acquiring the disease. Do you have a plan for public awareness?

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

MR. HAGGIE: These are very good questions, Mr. Speaker, and it's nice to see substantive issues being discussed at Question Period and I welcome the opportunity from my colleague opposite to address these, so thank you very much.

Again, the short answer is yes. Health and Community Services has a button on its website which will take you to the federal website. We are refreshing our handwashing messages. The

staple for containment of this virus is simple, straightforward, hand hygiene.

Masks outside of the aerosol environment in health care are not recommended despite the pictures that one sees across the province or across the globe. There is no benefit to these from our advisors at the federal level and provincial level. Should this situation change, obviously we will change tact, but, yes, communications is a key part and we're using new social media rather than conventional methods, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I welcome that the health professionals in the regional health authorities are doing an immense amount of work to do this, the fact is the individuals need some tangible pieces of information so they would be aware of exactly what may be a notice that they may be exposed to a particular issue around the COVID-19 disease.

Can we have, as we had in the past, a public awareness campaign which would include print media and access for every individual in Newfoundland and Labrador, so that we can reassure that everything is being done to make sure they're safe and if, indeed, they do contract the COVID-19, that we have a process in place that they immediately can access.

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

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

I like these engagements where we have a chance to listen to some ideas. I am not averse to the idea. I think if the Member opposite feels that this is a deficiency in our current approach, I'm happy to address it and we have some techniques to do that.

I think, however, for the bulk of people, the approach we have adopted is satisfactory.

Should this be a gap, then we would be happy to work with them and with any other stakeholders to address that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, Canopy Growth has shut down two facilities in British Columbia and thrown 500 people out of work.

After receiving tens of millions in taxpayer subsidies, being a mysterious company on 7 Plank Road, what discussions has the minister had with Canopy Growth about the effect of their operational review on their Newfoundland operations? What assurances can he offer the job seekers that lack the inside track with the Liberal government?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me just be very clear: No grants, no loans, no direct investment has ever left the provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to a business agency, either Canopy or any other growth agency, with respect to cannabis in this province.

One thing I can say, it's a very good question that the hon. Member did ask. What have we done to assure this is going to happen? As soon as I heard this from the changes with respect to what happened in BC – and by the way, I'm very disappointed that happened, disappointed for the individuals that were impacted by that from the West Coast of our country.

I spoke to the management of Canopy. They assured me that they are full steam ahead with the process, that we have a \$90-million facility on East White Hills Road. I encourage any Member in this House to take the opportunity to drive by and see the investment that was put in this province by Canopy Growth.

Also, in addition to that, there's going to be a job fair that they're going to be announcing in the coming weeks for April. They're going to open the facility in the spring of this year. I (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: The assurances from the company that's been lying for so long is probably not that assuring.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the closures in BC, Canopy Growth has announced it will no longer open a third greenhouse in Ontario.

Again, given there appears to be a national glut of supply, why has the government not mandated secondary processing in Newfoundland?

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is wow.

We've set-up an industry here; two years ago this industry didn't exist. We've built an industry. They've put an over \$90-million facility in the east end of St. John's that's going to employ some 140-plus people in this province. There's a job fair that's coming in the near future for April and I look forward to being here to cut the ribbon in the facility in my district – in my district – later on in this spring.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, this government has entered into various lucrative deals now totalling over \$100 million in subsidies to various numbered companies with a production capacity of 42,000 kilograms.

Is the minister still confident there is even a market? Will he admit these deals should have included processing and packaging deals?

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

MR. DAVIS: The answer is yes. Our deals have included all of what the Member has talked about.

It's important; this is an industry that we're trying to grow – pardon the pun – in this province, we're trying to grow the industry. It's an export marketplace for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Would the Member sooner us import the product here and not create the hundreds of jobs in this province? We've already created hundreds of jobs with respect to the construction jobs. There will be hundreds more created when the production facilities gets up and running. I look forward to that day. Every Member in this House should look forward to it.

I know every Member in this House has contacted Canopy, in particular, about looking for jobs for their own constituents, like we all should. We all should be looking for opportunities for people in our districts to get employment.

These are good jobs for the people in our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, now that we know the Premier present is in charge, let's talk about what he's doing.

The PUB report on rate mitigation clearly outlines seven actions that must be completed within the first three months of the reports release. We are now almost halfway through this first three-month period.

I ask the Premier: Which of these seven actions has he completed? Please be specific.

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

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

We do indeed have a team of people on rate mitigation, rate management. There's a secretariat set up within the Department of Natural Resources that is working diligently every day on this matter, Mr. Speaker. They have taken the PUB report and the timelines that the Public Utilities Board has requested in its report itself and they are working towards the implementation.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, they have advanced on many of the key issues including, for example, electrification. There has already been an RFP put out there on that matter. They've advanced on ensuring more electrification for rural and remote communities.

I'm out of time. Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That was a remarkable lack of specificity.

The opening of Bishop Feild school in St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has been delayed several times now.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Works: What assurances can he provide that Bishop Feild school will reopen in time for the fall 2020 semester?

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

It is a good question. I share the frustration of the students, teachers, families and everybody with those delays. The reality, the envelope of repairs that we went in to do originally, Mr. Speaker, have been completed. When removing the coal room on the back of the building, we discovered infiltration of water in the gymnasium. Right now we have to wait for spring to come so we can excavate on the back of the building. The gymnasium is below grade.

What I can assure the hon. Member is we will certainly work for September, but at no time will we put children in an environment that's not safe. There's a water issue here and we have to resolve that before we can put children back in this facility.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, two members of the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council resigned over the minister's failure to release the natural area system plan. In the wake of their resignations, the minister has since decided to release it.

I ask the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, since he has apparently had an epiphany moment and realized the errors of his ways: Will he invite the two members who resigned to return to the council?

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

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

We deeply value the work of WERAC and all of its members. There was a context and a preamble that was incorrect.

One of the things that I think the House would gain benefit from is learning that WERAC provides advice to government; WERAC has not ever tabled their advice. They're independent of

government. I would never suggest to WERAC, nor I don't think any Member would, that they should be stymied or stifled or censored.

I did not ask WERAC permission to release the report; I asked them if they would consider releasing it themselves in its entirety without any reservations, without any qualification. WERAC has agreed to do that. They have not yet completed their plan. I asked them to do it at their earliest possible convenience and they have agreed to do –

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. DINN: I take it the answer then is, no. It would've been simpler.

Since 2017, government has lost two court challenges launched by conservation groups and concerned citizens as a result of its decisions to release major aquaculture projects from thorough environmental assessment. Government appealed the first and lost. That's three for three. It would seem government would rather spend public money on court cases and appeals rather than doing the right thing.

I ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment: Will he table a full accounting of the public funds his department has spent in legal fees and other resources to fight these court cases?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, it's not uncommon for a case to end up in court when you have a group of people involved in the environment. The environment is very close to everyone's heart. There are a number of people in this province and throughout this world who take the environment very seriously, as we do.

We do our due diligence in those projects; we do everything we possibly can. But when a case comes before the courts the outcome of that is

left in the hands of the judge. When the judge rules on these proceedings and in these cases, Mr. Speaker, we are left to deal with the outcome of that result, which we plan to do in the case this Member has referred to.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. DINN: A simple follow-up: Will he release the amount of money that they have spent in resources and public funds in fighting these court cases? I don't need the process; I need to know will he table that amount here in this House.

MR. SPEAKER: We have time for a quick answer from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. BRAGG: Of course, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to know how far the hon. Member would like me to go back. Would he like me to go back since 1949, the history of this province, or would he like me to go back in the last two or three years?

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise on a point of order, Standing Order 49, Mr. Speaker. During the Ministerial Statements there was a statement made by the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi concerning – what she attributed to me was that I had said about redactions of the report.

Mr. Speaker, what I did say about the Muskrat Falls report – *A Misguided Project* is the name of it – is it comprises six volumes and over a thousand pages. It will be reviewed for legal sensitivities and for legal interests. That is prudent and responsible and at the advice of counsel who was with me this morning.

I do not – and I said this publicly, I do not – anticipate any deferral of information, but we are going to make sure that the legal teams do have a chance to have a quick view at this for legal interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I will take this matter under advisement and report to the House at a later date.

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to stand on a point of order regarding the inaccurate information that the hon. Member for Terra Nova cited about the millions and millions of dollars offered to Canopy in this case. That is not the case. That is not true information that's been spoken in the House of Assembly.

I would ask the hon. Member to stand in his place and apologize because it's inaccurate information. This is about standing up and providing the general public with an opportunity for –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. DAVIS: Right, so it's very important that we get that apology, please.

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader, to this point of order.

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to this to outline. What my colleague from Terra Nova had outlined was the amounts of money that have been discussed around what would be given to that company. There was no discussion here around the total amount of money or that millions and millions – he was referring to what is known in the public domain as the agreement with Canopy Growth. I feel there is no point of order in this discussion.

MR. SPEAKER: Further to this point of order?

MR. DAVIS: No, this is the second one. That was my first point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: To that point of order, I'm going to take this matter under advisement. It seems to be a disagreement between two Members, but I'm going to review what was said and make a ruling at a later date.

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

MR. DAVIS: On a second point of order that was said later in that exchange about the fact that I was lying about the information that was coming forward, there's nothing further from the truth in that case. All I can say is that I'm disappointed that was the case.

The hon. Member for Terra Nova, I know he probably didn't mean it in the way it came across, but that's the way I took it and that's the way I guess the general public would. If that was what he meant, fair. I'd like him to clarify that or apologize for it if that was what he meant.

MR. SPEAKER: To this point of order, the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRAZIL: Just for clarification sake, the question that was asked to the minister was not inferring in any way, shape, or form that the minister was lying, but that the information wasn't accurate that the company was sharing with the general public, Mr. Speaker. I do encourage you to review it, but we feel there's no point of order on this particular issue.

MR. SPEAKER: I will take this matter under advisement and report to the House later on.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a petition here from Labrador West. These are the reasons for this petition.

Since 2010, the province has seen significant work stoppages, including a 16-month strike at Vale in Voisey's Bay in 2010 to 2011 and a two-year lockout at D-J Composites in 2016 to 2018. These work stoppages involve multinational corporations that have practices that have altered the balancing of collective bargaining.

The industrial inquiry into the Voisey's Bay strike recommended changes to the *Labour Relations Act* to include the imposition of binding arbitration as an effective means for fair collective agreements when all else fails. The only way to uphold the workers' right to a strike is to ensure companies are not permitted to replace their workers during a labour dispute.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to bring forward amendments to the *Labour Relations Act* to impose binding arbitration – when only one of the two parties make application – in cases where strikes or lockouts are prolonged, where collective bargaining has failed or when it's in the public interest to do so; and bring forward amendments to the *Labour Relations Act* to ban the use of replacement workers.

Mr. Speaker, I have 163 signatures here for this. This has been called upon time and time again. There has even been, at one point, a private Member's motion in this House to look at changes to the legislation.

Like I said, I have 163 signatures here of members of my community who feel that it's time to make these changes to the *Labour Relations Act* and to impose these changes that will stop prolonged work stoppages and to limit the use of replacement workers during labour disputes. This is one of the root causes of prolonged work stoppages and the breakdown of the bargaining process.

I agree with this petition and that we should have this. It's been in the Voisey's Bay report. I have a copy of the Voisey's Bay report. That was one of the two recommendations that have not been implemented in that report.

Thank you.

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity and I thank the hon. Member for bringing forward a petition.

I'd just like to make sure I stand on the record. It's very important as the minister responsible for labour that we always have to strike the balance between the needs and the wants of employees and the needs and the wants of employers. It's always important to strike that balance.

I thank the Member for standing on his feet and bringing forward a petition. I'm sure that the department will in turn look at that petition and deal with it accordingly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest incidence of cardiac disease in Canada and we need to do what we can to improve our ability to save lives; and

WHEREAS the implementation of a new registry can be completed for less than the cost of a new vehicle; and

WHEREAS after implementation, the annual cost will be five cents per resident;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to enact legislation requiring all AEDs in the province be registered with an online registry. This registry must also be linked to the 911 system to enable

faster response times in the case of cardiac emergencies.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition that I've presented pretty well since 2016, thereabouts. It's a very serious issue in that these AEDs are wonderful machines. They're a life-saving piece of equipment, but they're not looked after, registered – when I say being registered, we're talking about the batteries checked and the pads checked.

In a lot of government buildings and municipalities, they look after the maintenance of these machines. In other places, they're used as coat racks. It's a reality that we face, but it's unfortunate. Even though they save lives, people don't understand the importance of keeping it up to date.

I use the example similar to a fire extinguisher. If you're not going around checking fire extinguishers, making sure they're operational, they're not going to be there when you need them for a fire. They're not there for coat racks, they're there to save lives and we need to enact something to have these registered that they're ready when needed.

Another example is a 911 call. If they're integrated into the 911 system, when you call 911, the 911 operator can quickly tell you, if you're in the Confederation Building, they'll know where the nearest AED is. That's what first responders need to know. It's not always for first responders, it could be someone in this Chamber – heaven forbid – and we may need to know where the nearest AED is. That's the reality we live with.

Right now, they're everywhere and they're great life-saving pieces of equipment, but without this registry, to be able to know where they are, to be able to know they're always up to date, to be able to tie them into our 911 system, is a serious flaw.

Mr. Speaker, we're the only province in the country without a registry. I actually have been involved with this. I have a family in my district who suffer from this. One of them just had a heart transplant, the son, from this arrhythmia. Suddenly your heart – I'm lost for the word now, but they have the gene in this family. It's very common throughout the province, as we know. They've championed it, the Delaney family, and I've worked with them. I've also worked with the Heart and Stroke Foundation over the years with this as well.

This registry is right across the country, but we don't have one here. It's very cheap. It's not expensive. I know it falls down the priority of all the bigger issues in a lot of government departments, and I get that because one time I was behind the scenes with the previous administration, I understand priorities in all department, but people need to really take a serious look –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. PETTEN: Be respectful on the issue, please.

This issue is very serious because, heaven forbid, if someone were to ever lose their lives for the lack of a battery or bad pad because it could have been done so simply and easy and inexpensively, or the fact that you call 911 and there was an AED around the corner but no one could direct you to where it's too, the end result is unimaginable. One life is way too many. They save lives.

I respectfully ask government to take this as a serious matter, work with the Heart and Stroke because they're reaching out to us. They've reached out to government, they've come to me and they're speaking publicly about it. I support this cause and I think we all should support this cause; it's a very important issue.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to comment on that. Being the minister responsible for 911 and Fire and Emergency Services in this province, I know the value of an AED first-hand; I've used it first-hand. I've actually helped save someone's life first-hand, so I know the value of those AEDs, having their batteries checked and people knowing where they are. I think it's a great point if the 911 people know where these AEDs are. Most are in public buildings throughout this province.

I know this government have provided a grant in the last number of years to the Heart and Stroke Foundation to put them in numerous building. You go and you will see AED signs everywhere, Mr. Speaker, in a lot of our public buildings. It's very important because at events is when you see a lot of people congregated, so it's nice for your first responders to know where they are. Most would have them on their equipment, but it's nice to know when they get to an event that they're there. Sometimes there are volunteers actually in that area; it's nice to know.

So having a registry, Sir, to know where they are, I'd love to talk to more about this because I think it's a great idea. If you'd like to have this conversation with us and with me, I look forward to it.

Thank you.

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

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, the Adult Dental Program coverage for clients of the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program under Access and 65Plus Plans was eliminated in *Budget 2016*.

Low-income families and low-income individuals, particularly seniors, are struggling with the cost of living and struggling to meet some of their basic needs. Many seniors and low-income individuals and families can no longer access basic dental care and those same individuals can now longer access dentures, leading to many other digestive and medical issues.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call on the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the Adult Dental Program to cover seniors and low-income individuals and families to ensure better oral health, quality of life and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, I presented this petition on several occasions and it continues still to go underneath the radar of our province's administration. It's often said that the gateway to good overall health is good oral health. Good oral health has been linked to other issues within your mental health and your physical health, but one of them I would like to speak to today is mental health.

I've read several studies and I'm a big believer that a smile is a powerful way to change the way you feel and the way you think. It's actually clinically proven that smiling does improve how you feel about yourself. If those individuals who are not able to afford good dental care don't feel confident about smiling, how do you think they feel on the inside? This is a practical investment in our province's health and it will result in savings in medical issues.

Right now, what happens is if people cannot afford dental care, they just cannot afford it, so a problem that probably could have been fixed with a \$200 or \$300 visit to the dentist is allowed to magnify and accelerate to a point where it may result in a 10- or 14-day hospital stay at \$900 a day.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot see the financial reasoning for cutting out this program and allowing our people to suffer. The reality is if people cannot afford dental care, they can't afford it. That's where government should be stepping in.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

Orders of the Day

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From the Order Paper, Motion 5, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Select Committee on Democratic Reform to be established further to a private Member's resolution passed in this House on December 4, 2019, will comprise of the following Members: the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the Member for Mount Scio, the Member for Windsor Lake, the Member for Topsail - Paradise, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, the Member for St. John's Centre, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Committee shall establish its priorities within the scope of authority set for it in the resolution adopted by the House on December 4, 2019; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Select Committee on Democratic Reform may, in the completion of its work, travel from time to time within the province; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Select Committee on Democratic Reform report its progress to this hon. House before the end of the winter-spring sitting of this House, 2021; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the resolution of any further matters relating to the mandate or operations of said Committee be brought to this House for approval.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's very straightforward. It allows us to move forward, then, with the establishment of this Select Committee, which I think is important and has the support of the House. So I'll leave it at that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak to that, and I thank the minister.

I do notice that – with some amusement, actually – the date that's set out in the resolution for

when the Select Committee on Democratic Reform will report its progress to the House and that is before the end of the winter-spring sitting of this House, 2021. That could be a year down the road. It could be a year and several months down the road.

There are many wise people in the House of Assembly on all sides who would probably think that it's highly likely that there'll be an election before that point in time.

The problem with efforts made in this House on democratic reform since 2015 and the advent of the Liberal government has been a lack of interest in doing anything on the part of the Liberal government. This has been expressed by delay, by statements from the responsible minister – not my friend here today, but a different minister – that he, in fact, was too busy to be seized with and pay any attention to democratic reform.

There's a general lack of interest, lack of will and sense of awkwardness with the fact that in 2015, during the course of the General Election that brought the current Liberal government to power, they actually made a promise to act on democratic reform.

As we well know, we're now doing more procedural things that make it appear like something is actually happening, but will it? Because there does not seem to be a will on the other side to actually achieve anything along the lines of democratic reform. So, Mr. Speaker, you'll forgive me if I inject a note of skepticism into my remarks.

The fact of the matter is that there's a hunger in many sections of the population of this province for meaningful democratic reform that that embraces as well the reform of the electoral process. In fact, in the 2015 Blue Book my friends across the aisle in the Liberal Party resolved that the Committee, which they promised to set-up to examine into democratic reform, would examine electoral reform, finance reform and along those lines would also consider the need for regulation of party leadership election finances.

We have seen that the Liberal Party itself – and I appreciate that the Liberal Party is not the

government, but the government is a Liberal government – in the context of the current race for Liberal leader and Premier, has displayed a remarkable dinosaur attitude on the question of leadership campaign finance reform. In fact, they have brought forward not a set of rules around that but no rules.

Some people call that dark money rules. Dark money simply means that there's no reporting of how much, from whom or how spent. No receipting, no accountability, no transparency, that's what dark money is.

It's astonishing that in this day and age, with the hunger for democratic reform and with the precedent of political parties across the country requiring more transparency – it is absolutely remarkable that the Liberal Party of this province, which is the party behind the government opposite, would have the temerity to tell –

MS. COADY: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Point of order.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, SO 48 - Relevancy.

The Member opposite seems to want to get into a robust debate on issues within a political party rather than the merit of creating a Committee. I'll leave that to your good judgment, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Does anyone want to speak to that point of order?

I'll just remind Members to stay relevant to the debate. We're talking about the establishment of the Committee. I think Members will be given some leeway in terms of talking about why we need to establish such a Committee, so I'm not going to rule that it is not relevant to the debate.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Sir.

My reason for bringing this in is that electoral reform is part of democratic reform. Electoral reform is more specifically focused on how we run our elections and also on election financing; in fact, election financing has been, in the last House, a particular focus of the government within the context of democratic reform.

It is the government that campaigned on the premise that there might be a need to extend electoral financing regulation – which we do now in the context of general elections and by-elections – to the process of selecting party leaders. That's why I was making that remark. It's relevant to democratic reform, within which we have the topic of electoral reform.

It's the government itself that thought there might need to be regulation around that. It is the activity of the – or inactivity, depending on how you see it – of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador that shows the relevance of the need to regulate leadership campaign financing.

Mr. Speaker, much remains to be done in the area. There was a book published about democratic reform – we're all familiar with it, I think – by many contributors. Short essays on various aspects from people from all walks of life in the province, showing that amongst many people in the province there is a desire that we do get on with the job of overhauling how we do democracy here.

Let's face it; we are a democracy, a liberal democracy, a constitutional democracy, which means that the majority will does not always carry, because there are minority rights which are enforceable by the courts. They are constitutional rights and override things that Parliament or the Legislature sometimes want to do which infringe those rights.

We are all proud to be citizens of that system, of a great country, Canada, and a great province, Newfoundland and Labrador, but it needs improvement. That is the need for this Committee. That is the need for the Members of this Committee, of which I am pleased to be one, to get on with the work in a serious fashion of serious democratic reform – serious democratic reform, not just go through the motions for it. On that basis, I support the resolution.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity this afternoon.

I'll just take a few moments to respond to some of the remarks made by the Leader of the Official Opposition. First of all, I want to thank Minister Parsons and the staff at the Department of Justice for the tremendous work they did behind the scenes, because I can tell you, you wouldn't think listening to the Leader of the Opposition there was any work done.

There was volumes and volumes and volumes of work done, Mr. Speaker, because when you get into something like democratic reform – this whole process has been tried in many jurisdictions across the country and even around the world and it's a very, very delicate thing to actually reform. The Department of Justice, under Minister Parsons's leadership, did a tremendous job.

MR. SPEAKER: I just want to remind the Member not to use a minister's name in the House. You did it twice. You should refer to a Member by their district name or their title.

MR. CROCKER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been here going on six years and this is the first time I had to apologize. I do apologize to the hon. Minister of Justice for using his name, but I do want to thank him and the Department of Justice for the tremendous work they did.

Actually, that work that was done by the Department of Justice is now, my understanding, being transferred to the all-party Committee, so I think what the Members of this new Committee will quickly find is that there was significant work done previously. I want to thank the Leader of the Third Party for their leadership in actually bringing this to the floor and convincing, I think, this entire House to support that private Member's motion just before Christmas.

I don't think there's anybody in this House, Mr. Speaker, or in this province, that isn't looking forward to democratic reform. I fully support a lot of the things that will come out of this – campaign finance reform. I had the opportunity last week to actually join the Premier and his Youth Council over in the West Block in the afternoon. We spent I think it was little over an hour with the Youth Council. It was youth from all around this province. I can tell you of that day and in that hour they had a real keen interest in democratic reform and how they got involved in politics and how we get young people involved in politics.

For me, it was easy. I've been voting since I could find a way to vote, whether it was 14 as a youth or 16 or when I became old enough to vote in general and regular elections at 18, but we need to find a way to engage people. It's important. If we don't put the fundamentals like campaign reform, finance reform in there, it does make it harder to engage young people. I'm not going to belabour this, but I just wanted to correct some of the information from the Leader of the Official Opposition talking about nothing being done and that type of false information because there has been tremendous work done.

As a Member of this Committee, along with my colleague for Mount Scio, I look forward to getting the Committee up and running. I look forward to the involvement of the independent MHA on this Committee, because as democracy transforms, I think, or as our democracy evolves – if you look at European countries with our parliamentary system, they've long since evolved into many different political parties and independents. So we have to also define the role of independents and other political parties in a more fractured, I think, system that we'll see in the future.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time. I look forward to the Committee getting down to work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to stand and speak to this private Member's motion.

I have to say there's a little bit of skepticism here – just a little bit. When I first came to government, which is a little over a year ago now, we formed the Committee. We sat on the Committee and we had perhaps two meetings – maybe three but two for sure.

I agree with the Member for – I'll have to find out now, I don't want to say his name – Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. I have to agree with him that there has been work done behind the scenes, but bringing it together as a Committee and starting to get down into the brass tacks of it all hasn't been always on schedule.

To have a Committee in place and, hopefully, have some regularly scheduled work as we move forward would be fabulous. I know we've set a deadline for winter and spring of 2021, which is fabulous. We need a deadline; you need a target in which to work towards.

I look back to when I first started campaigning and people were asking me back in the by-election what you think about running and different things around that. One of the things I talked about – it relates to democratic reform – is the amount of money that people can utilize to run. There are so many individuals out there who may not have access to the funds that others have. So we're eliminating individuals that could be fabulous representatives of the people of their districts; yet, because of affordability, they can't run.

In terms of democratic reform, that's something that we should be looking at. Are we electing the person with the most signs on the road or are we electing the person that's going to do the best job? Unfortunately, sometimes finances come into that play. Either they don't run or they don't have enough opportunity to go out and see the people and take available of the different mediums that are available to promote themselves, at a cost.

I really applaud the move forward here. We talk about the voting systems, we need some democratic reform on that. You talk about

electronic voting and you talk about different ways of getting people to the polls, this is something we certainly need to address through democratic reform.

Voting age; voting age has always been an issue. How old should an individual be in order to cast a vote? I know it's a little different when you talk about your party politics and the age limit of how you can vote there, and it's for all parties. It's a lot lower than 18; you know, 14 or 16. We really need to look at some consistency there in terms of what's the age or what's the proper age in which people can be deemed to be responsible to vote? Some of those are issues we have to address.

Again, I talked about the funding for individuals, or what individuals can get to run. Like I said, I think it eliminates some people who could be running but can't run because they can't afford it.

We also need to address the funding around political parties. That's something we need to address through democratic reform. We really need to talk about individuals who can really and truly represent the people in their district. Again, not the person who has the bigger access to a bank account.

The role of third party groups in elections, we need to address that through democratic reform, making sure that everyone is represented. Democracy is representing the people through an individual.

It's wonderful to see, through this motion, that independents are going to be on this Committee, and I think that's a good thing. I think we really need to have full representation on this Select Committee to make it work, because we're all elected to represent the individuals in our district. If an independent is elected, then we should have that voice at the table. ‘

There has been a lot of work behind the scenes. There have been reasons why we haven't been able to meet on a regular basis, and a lot of those are perhaps beyond anyone's control. Other things take priority; other things jump in and throw your meetings off track. I'm really, really hopeful, moving ahead with this, that we have a time limit, winter-spring of 2021, to get

something done. I hope we set some regular meetings, make regular scheduling to sit down and make sure we progress this along.

I know in working with the past Committee and the Department of Justice and Public Safety that there was a tremendous amount of literature compiled – binders and binders. There are lots of templates and benchmarks, information that you can utilize out there. It takes a while to compile it, but it certainly takes an even bigger effort to go through that information. That information hopefully is still available and there's a lot of sifting through on that.

You don't want to push this too quickly. I realize that, because you want to do a good job on it. But democratic reform is so important that having a Committee together with representation from all groups within the House here will cover all the bases, hopefully. As we move forward, we can start having some real discussion on the issue, come up with some real thoughts and recommendations on the issue, with all the goal to make this a better run House in terms of how we deal with issues, how people are elected and what people can do and say.

As we talked about the other day with the artificial intelligence, things are changing. Technology is changing. Technology is affecting democracy, so we have to be ahead of that. We have to look at ways in which voting is done. Your population is changing. Your demographic is changing. Your election base is changing. It's probably getting smaller.

I look at the issues we talked to on the previous democratic reform. Some of the issues we were looking at there were the voting systems and methods, which I've already mentioned. So hopefully that will remain as an item. I don't see anything changing here.

Voting age was an item we had there previously, so I don't see that changing. Funding of political parties was there previously, I don't see that changing. I mentioned already the role of third party groups in the election campaigns. I see that as remaining on the agenda for this.

Timing and date of elections, that's what we had on the past one as well. I hope that'll stay there as well, because at the end of the day, you want

to be aware of when your election is happening. People out there want to be aware of when the election is happening. It's not fair, I don't believe, to the individuals out there – depending on the issue, the reason for it – calling snap elections, jumping in there. Most of that is done for political gain and not for to represent people.

So I need to ensure that those remain on the agenda, and I certainly will be supporting this Committee. I'm looking forward to our first meeting, and I'm looking forward to us making some advancements here and getting down to some real work and working as an all-party group.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to stand and agree with this motion. This is a real joy to see that democratic reform is going to be done quite democratically. I am pleased to see that we have a proportional or an equal representation of ideas and parties at the table, and we have a broad mandate that will allow us a great deal of latitude at looking at all aspects of true democratic reform.

Certainly, the Member for Topsail - Paradise and the Member for Windsor Lake brought up very good points about some of the things we can consider in that mandate. I'm not sure if any of the other Members have been attending the Green New Deal sessions they've had, but they are also quite interested and have offered a great deal of suggestions around democratic reform. I look forward to engaging them on helping us get a good sense of what our mandate ought to be and getting started on that work.

So I am delighted to be able to say that I support this motion and I'm sure my caucus also supports this motion and we look forward to getting started on this work as soon as possible.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure to stand up and speak to this motion. Obviously, I will be supporting it.

The first thing I want to say is that, really, when we look at the Committees of the House of Assembly that currently exist, in my view, and I know people can have their own views, but, in my view, this will be the first truly democratic Committee that we will actually have in this House because it will include an independent Member of the House. Whereas, in all of the other Committees of the House, independents are not recognized, which is something that needs to go on the list. It definitely needs to be recognized based on the fact that we now have two elected independent Members. We had a number of other people run as independents in the last election and I suspect there will be people that will run as independents in future elections. I think it's important to recognize that fact.

I don't want to belabour or get too much into what the Leader of the Official Opposition said. I'm not looking for any controversy in terms of the current leadership race within the governing party, but I do concur with him from the perspective of that current race that it indeed is very relevant to this House of Assembly and it is indeed very relevant to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is indeed very relevant to the whole concept of democratic reform because, in this particular case, this is not just about a party selecting a leader, this particular race is actually about selecting the next premier of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Whoever should win this particular race is not just going to be the leader of a particular party, they're actually going to be the premier and that person could be the premier for a year or more, potentially. It could be sooner than that, we don't know what's going to happen, but that person could be the premier for a year.

It is absolutely relevant, when you think about it, that we are going to be selecting a premier – my understanding is that under those leadership rules, similar to the last leadership rules,

anybody in the province can sign up and vote for that leader, if they so desire. So it absolutely is very relevant when you think about the issues around disclosure of donations and so on.

Now, I know one of the candidates, to his credit, placed his own self-imposed cap on spending; albeit way, way too high in my opinion but he still did it, nonetheless. He has indicated that he will disclose, on his own, any campaign donations. I think that's admirable. I hope the other candidate, and if there are other candidates who come forward, that they decide to do the same thing. I definitely think the party needs to look at changing their rules to make that mandatory. Anyway, that's their business what they do, but, again, it is relevant because it does impact us all, we're selecting a premier.

There are so many things, Mr. Speaker, that I could stand up and speak about when it comes to democratic reform. Certainly it's been something that I've raised in this House of Assembly on numerous occasions, as well as outside the House of Assembly through the media, the open-line shows and social media. I've written the minister a number of times; I've written the Premier on it. I'm very, very pleased to see that we're finally going to be moving forward. I'm certainly very pleased to be part of this Committee.

I do want to thank my colleague from the Bay of Islands because he, too, had a keen interest in this but he decided, after a lot of discussion, to allow me to be the independent Member on the Committee. I thank him for that.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that need to be looked. Certainly campaign financing, as has already been mentioned, that's a big one. I really believe that is a huge one.

One of the things that I think I was able to do and establish – I can't speak for my colleague here from Bay of Islands, but I know, in my particular case, the last two times I had run, I had spent somewhere in the \$25,000 range. Maybe a little more on one, a little bit less on another, but around that \$25,000 mark. I believe I could have spent \$35,000, \$40,000, somewhere in that range, based on the formula and the population. This time around, the last election, I did it on \$8,000. I didn't need to spend \$25,000.

I think that goes to show that the amount of money that we spend on these campaigns and, therefore, the amount of money that we need to raise to compete, that it absolutely be significantly reduced; don't need to be spending that kind of money. It's not necessary.

When we look at things such as election signage, as an example, do we really need to have a big election sign competition? I can understand, yes, if someone wants to put a small sign on their lawn or whatever, their personal property, fine and dandy. But do we need to be getting into this situation where I put up a two by two, somebody has to put up a four by four next to me so then I counter it with a four by eight? I put up one sign, my opponent puts up two signs, the next guy puts up three signs and we have the whole place littered in signage. What a waste of money.

Why not have a system by which – I'll just use my area as an example, Mount Pearl - Southlands – we designate four or five locations at each corner of the district and every candidate sticks up one sign and that's it; no more signs allowed on public property. What you do on private property is your own business, but I'm thinking of the rural areas. We put one at the beginning of the small town and one at the end; one coming this way and one coming that way; people can see.

Everybody in the community knows who's running anyway and give up the rest of the foolishness. What a waste of money, what a waste of time and what a waste of volunteer effort. Then they blow down and you have to fix them up again. They get damaged with vandalism; you have to fix them up again. Think about it. That's one little thing that costs a ton of money, all kinds of time and resources and everything and for what? How foolish is it?

We should be debating the issues. It shouldn't be about who has the glossiest brochure or who has the most brochures. I've said in the past, do we really need party leaders to have a great big giant bus with their face on it? What's that all about? Is it just a big ego trip or what is it, really? Is it necessary?

We can have our debates. The leaders can have their debates. Usually they'll have four or five around the province or whatever. The media will

put off one or two; I think the university usually will put off one. There's one on the West Coast, there's one in Labrador or whatever. Let the leaders get out there and have their debate and let everybody watch.

AN HON. MEMBER: Ban Brazil's rig.

MR. LANE: Do what?

AN HON. MEMBER: Ban Brazil's rig.

MR. LANE: Ban Brazil's rig. Yeah. Well, at least he's recycling. I will say for the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, at least he's recycling. He kept his vehicle with his face and his number on it so he'll recycle. That's good, I suppose.

My point is that if we're really supposed to be debating the issues and people really want to make informed decisions based on what that candidate and/or that party has to offer, then that's really what it should be all about. I definitely think that we can be reducing the amount of money that we spend and, therefore, reduce the amount of money that we need to raise. It puts everyone on a more even playing field and then you're not beholden. Then parties are not necessarily beholden to big corporations. Whether they are or whether it's real or whether it's perceived, if it's only perceived, then the perception is gone because you don't need them anymore. That's definitely something we need to do.

I think the use of Committees in the House of Assembly, we call them all-party Committees. I like this. Again, a Select Committee that involves – if there are independents, they should be involved as well, but the use of Committees, I think, is a very positive thing. We need to do more of it, particularly when it comes to legislative review.

I know we did a little pilot project on one piece of legislation for sure and I think it worked out well. I think we need to do more of it. We don't need to have a Committee meet on every single piece of legislation, particularly if it's just a housekeeping thing, something minor, but when we have a significant piece of – I think back on, for example, the Procurement Act that came through here. That involves the expenditure of

literally billions of dollars of taxpayers' money – billions. You come in, you get a briefing a day or so before it comes to the House, comes on the floor and then you're expected to debate that. So much of that was in the regulations and we had no input into the regulations.

When it comes to significant pieces of legislation, why not have all representation from all parties or Members and so on to actually have some meaningful input. I know there will be some who will say: You had your opportunity for input; it's called the floor of the House of Assembly. But we all know the reality of it is that government, particularly if they're in a majority, which, except for now – this is the first time, I think in our history, we never had a majority government. I could be wrong but I think so. Traditionally, government brings in the legislation and whatever they bring forward passes.

I can stand up here forever and say I have a concern about this clause or that clause. I can ask questions in Committee of the Whole and so on but, generally speaking, all I'm doing is recording my disagreement or my input for the sake of *Hansard* so if it gets passed and people have problems with it and they come to me, I can say: Yeah, I spoke about that. I said I didn't agree with that. That's all you're doing but you're not actually changing it.

As Tom Marshall said in this House of Assembly one time – a man I have great respect for, by the way – Oppositions have their say. Government gets its way. He was absolutely right. That's the way our system generally works. I understand; governments need to govern. I get that and I'm not against that principle, but the issue I have is that everybody in this House of Assembly was elected by the people. We all represent a portion of the population and we should all be heard.

So, yeah, at the end of the day it's democracy. We can vote and so on, but make sure we all have the opportunity for input and I mean meaningful input. If I can raise a point or my colleague can raise a point, someone in the Opposition or the Third Party can raise a point and it make sense that there actually was an oversight, that somebody over here actually thought about something that someone over

there didn't think about, that somebody acknowledges it and says: You know what? You're right. We never thought of that. That's a good point. We can make a little amendment if required. That's where we need to get.

I think that work would work better in a Committee structure where there are no cameras, there's no soapbox, there's no grandstanding, there's no politics. It is just individuals sitting around the table, hopefully all with the best intentions to do what's right that can compromise, can work together and can make things better. That's really what it's all about. That's what it should be about. The use of Committees, I think, is a good thing.

I think about things such as fixed election dates. Someone raised the issue about the elections and how elections are called. We have fixed election date legislation; however, the problem is that it sets a date for the election and then it gives this escape clause, basically, where the government can say, yes, fixed election date, but I've decided that I'm going to just ignore that and go the Lieutenant-Governor and call an election. Simple as that.

What's the point of a fixed election date if the government of – the idea of the fixed election date was supposed to be that there was continuity, there was certainty and that government, whatever government it was, wouldn't be calling elections based on: we better call it now before the bad news comes, or we better call it now because there's good news or the polls look good so for our advantage. No, it's a fixed date and the chips fall where they may on that date. That was how it was supposed to be put in place.

The problem, of course, is the legislation has that loophole that says even though there's a fixed date, as the government we can just go in and call an election whenever we feel like it. That's something that needs to be fixed as far as I'm concerned.

I could go on and on and on with the different issues that could be looked at. Recall legislation is something that was brought to the floor of the House of Assembly here in the past. My former colleague for Mount Pearl North, I believe, brought it in. I think it was a private Member's

motion if I'm not mistaken. It got defeated but they do have it in BC. I know people will say there are mixed reviews on it, but it's something that should be looked at.

Recall legislation doesn't mean that government can't govern. It's not as simple as you make a decision and all of a sudden the government is overthrown or members are overthrown. That's not how it works. For a Member to be ousted in BC I think there's a requirement of, I want to say 60 per cent – I could be wrong – of the population. It would require a concerted effort by someone in that community to go door to door to door to door to door and obtain the signatures of the majority of the district.

First of all, who's even going to go through that hassle and then who's going to actually sign that at the door, unless it was something so egregious, so egregious that the population as a whole said, yes, this person has to go. If they did something that was so bad, so be it, let them go but, again, it's something else that could be looked at and should be looked at. There are so many things, I think, that we could be doing, that we should be doing, to improve our democracy. Those are just a few.

I know the Member for Windsor Lake referenced the book – I think he's referring to *The Democracy Cookbook*. I think that's what he's referring to. There are a whole load of ideas, things around how do we better engage people in the democratic process. How do we make it easier for people to run? How do we make it easier for people to vote and encourage them to vote? How do we try to encourage more diversity in terms of who the candidates are and who is encouraged to run. There's a whole host of things. These are things that we need to consider.

Obviously, we're not going to agree on everything; it's a Committee and, again, it'll be a democracy. But I'm hoping that we will be able to get a lot of feedback from the public and that we can make a lot of good decisions to change our democracy for the betterment of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm starting to run down on time, so the other thing I just wanted to throw out there – and again, this was kind of alluded to by my

colleague for Windsor Lake – and that is the fact that right now in this motion we're naming seven people and we're basically saying to report back in a year with progress. I'm wondering how this is going to work.

For example, what about if we start this Committee and in three months from now, four months from now, we have an election? Does this just die and that's the end of it? I see nothing here. I see no commitment, nothing written here that would say that should an election occur between now and then and people are displaced, there are new Members or whatever, which obviously could happen – I'm not planning on going anywhere, I hope not, but we all hope that.

Bottom line is if there's an election in three or four months time and now there are new people involved and people get defeated or they decide not to run or whatever happens, what happens to this Committee? What happens to the work of this Committee? Does it all just fall off the radar until someone brings in a private Member's motion again in four years from now? I don't know. That's what could happen. There's nothing here to guarantee that should an election be called before the work is done, nothing to guarantee that this work will continue.

So I don't know, Mr. Speaker, from a procedural point of view, I'm not sure if it would require an amendment to this, which I don't have, because it sort of just occurred to me listening to the Member. I don't know if it's something that the Government House Leader, when she closes off debate, if she is willing to stand up and make a commitment. Perhaps bring in another motion sometime in the near future to supplement this to address that issue.

I would like to see some kind of a firm commitment that should we find ourselves in the middle of an election in a few months' time and there are different players here and everything is rearranged and so on, the desks are all moved and whatever, that this work will carry on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader, if she speaks now, she will close the debate.

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

I'll begin by thanking all Members who contributed to the discussion here this afternoon. We had a rather robust discussion in December surrounding this and previously. So it was interesting to hear some of the discourse here this afternoon.

I will say to the Member for Windsor Lake who raised his skepticism, it is unfortunate that he feels skeptic that this House is now putting together a Select Committee on Democratic Reform. I would've hoped he would've been enthusiastic about a Select Committee on Democratic Reform, as they all voted in favour of this mere months ago, Mr. Speaker.

I will also say that he raised issue with "BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Select Committee on Democratic Reform report its progress to this Honourable House before the end of the Winter-Spring Sitting of this House, 2021," Mr. Speaker. The Committee can decide to report at any time before the end of the winter-spring sitting. We put it in just to be helpful to this House to make sure it reports back. I did discuss this with House leadership to make sure they were in concurrence and they were, so I'm a little surprised that he would not be in concurrence with that.

I did note that the Member opposite also said that – it was raised a couple times that he was skeptical about this process. Mr. Speaker, this is a House of Assembly process, not a government process. I will remind the Members opposite of this.

I will say this: We need a spirit of optimism and hope, not only in this House of Assembly but in this province. I ask Members to provide that hope and optimism going forward on the Democratic Reform Committee. I think there has been great work done. Again, I join my colleague in thanking the Justice Department who was leading this. They've done volumes of work and have advanced work on this very important issue. It's a complex issue, and I thank the Minister of Justice and this team for doing that. But it's now out of their hands and into the hands of the House of Assembly, which is what we all decided, together, in December.

Mr. Speaker, I will say, once the Committee is now struck, following today's debate, they will move forward to choose a Chair. The Committee will choose a Chair and we'll move forward then with deliberations and work.

To my hon. colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands, he talked about having impact on legislation. I remind him that he does, indeed, have impact on legislation. I recall very vividly this past fall when we made changes to legislation based on his recommendations and discussions. So he does have impact and I thank him for that impact. It was a great recommendation for improvement to legislation.

As we move forward, working to have more of a committee structure – I had committee structure when I was a Member of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I speak highly to the committee structure, I think it's a valuable thing for this House of Assembly and I support it. We're working to utilizing it even more than we already have and we already have had legislation go through that.

To my hon. colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands, he raised the issue of compelling a future Legislature to continue with this work. I don't think anyone in here can compel a future Legislature. I will say that should something occur, we are in a minority situation, I recognize that, so if the Members opposite decide by whatever means and mechanisms to call an election, if they decide to call an election, they can certainly come back to this House and restrike the Committee. That is always a possibility. I would hope that future governments – we had already moved and actioned this item with our own Committee, Mr. Speaker, and had invited Members opposite to join us on that Committee. Now that it is a Committee of the House of Assembly, I would suggest that we would have to compel that future Legislature to do that work.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very positive thing. There is an opportunity under the last section that the resolution that "any further matters relating to the mandate or operations of said committee can be brought back to this House for approval." I would say that we would likely anticipate to hear of this for the future. I am merely a conduit

of a private Member's resolution to bring this forward today.

I hope all Members, based on their commitment in December, are supportive of moving forward with the Democratic Reform Committee but we'll await the vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, second reading of Bill 24.

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

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

Again, I'm a conduit in this House this afternoon.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, second reading of a bill, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act, Bill 24, and that the said bill should be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 24 entitled, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act." (Bill 24)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm the conduit again of this legislation through the House of Assembly and I'll give a few remarks. We have dealt with this, of course, back in the fall of 2019 and it's now coming forward in its legislation form.

On May 2 of 2018, the House of Assembly unanimously passed a private Member's resolution directing the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to undertake the development of a Legislature-Specific Harassment-Free Workplace Policy.

Following the passage of this resolution, the Privileges and Elections Committee prepared for work it would undertake, including extensive cross-jurisdictional research and an analysis of applicable legislative and policy provisions. A significant portion of the work conducted throughout the summer and fall of 2018 was focused on consultations, as required by the resolution, with Members, employees and independent external groups.

The Committee developed a proposed Harassment-Free Workplace Policy applicable to complaints against Members of the House of Assembly and recommended that it be adopted by the House. In addition to the proposed policy, the Committee recommended changes to the principles of the Code of Conduct for MHAs, as well as the Code of Conduct provisions outlined in the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*. There were also recommendations for other consequential statutory amendments to the *House of Assembly Act*.

While the final report has already received concurrence in the House of Assembly, the Privileges and Elections Committee have no ability to introduce a bill in this House and has requested that the Government House Leader do so on behalf of the House of Assembly. All

public bills must be introduced in the Legislature by the Executive Branch of government.

The amendments being proposed to the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* are as follows: One, to change the process for initiating a review under the Code of Conduct by removing the ability of the Premier to request that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards give an opinion on a matter respecting the compliance of a Member with the Code of Conduct and the related requirement for the Commissioner report the opinion to the Premier and Member concerned.

Two, to require that Members annually file a declaration with the Clerk of the House of Assembly to reaffirm their commitment to the Code of Conduct and declare that they have read and understood the policy.

Three, to add provisions to protect the confidentiality of the identity of the person requesting an opinion under the Code of Conduct.

Four, to provide for consequential amendments to give effect to the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy applicable to complaints against MHAs. That's definitions, separation between the Code and policy, authority of the Citizens' Representative under the policy, and confidentiality of the complainant and witnesses.

Five, notwithstanding the report of a code violation to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, if that violation involves a harassment complaint against a Member, the matter shall be dealt with by the Citizens' Representative.

Six, if the Citizens' Representative determines that a complaint does not fall within his or her jurisdiction, the complainant may then request an opinion from the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

Seven, where a matter has been referred to either the Citizens' Representative or the Commissioner for Legislative Standards under the act or the policy, and that Officer has issued a report or discontinued an investigation, the decision of the Officer is final and the matter

may not be subsequently referred to the statutory Officer who has not yet heard it.

Eight, reports by the Privileges and Elections Committee arising from investigations by the Citizens' Representative shall be taken up and disposed of by the House within six months, or a longer time as determined by the House. Recommendations must be concurred in by the House.

Nine, if the complainant is the Citizens' Representative, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards shall have the powers and abilities of the Citizens' Representative under the policy. This is consistent with the motion to concur with the final report. The proposed bill would come into effect, if it is passed in this House of Assembly, on April 1, 2020.

I know the Privileges and Elections Committee, Mr. Speaker – of which you were Chair at the time – deliberated long and hard and put a tremendous effort into ensuring that you considered all the matters at hand. As I indicated earlier, a very significant cross-jurisdictional scan, major deliberations, put the report forward to this House, which the House has concurred in. This legislation is enacting that concurrence.

With that, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to just go through. For clarification purposes, I think it's important to set out again the brief historical background with respect to this bill and to place it in context.

When we go back, first of all, to February 12 of 2018, our leader, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Crosbie, called for a new workplace harassment policy to be introduced for the House of Assembly. At that time, he recognized that the policies in this House needed to be updated and modernized.

Then we move to May of 2018, the House debated – this was on May 2 – and passed a private Member’s resolution from the PC caucus. We see the private Member’s resolution which, in essence, resolved that the House support the introduction of the Legislature-Specific Harassment-Free policy. It was similar in principle to the policy in effect in Nova Scotia’s provincial Legislature, where elected representatives and their staff were held responsible for inappropriate conduct.

As well, the resolution called for the introduction of this policy to recognize all forms of harassment including bullying, cyberbullying and intimidation of all forms. Finally, it resolved to call for the consultation with all Members and employees of the House and with independent groups who had experience and expertise in handling harassment complaints.

The private Member’s resolution was then passed without descent. Then in May of 2018, from there we see it go to November of 2018 where that Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections issued the interim report to the House on this new policy.

From there we see it go to April of 2019, where the Privileges and Elections Committee issued or tabled the final report. Then December 2, 2019, the House concurred in this final report. It was at that time that I also rose in the House to speak on this matter.

Just for clarification purposes, concurring means that the House approved the policy and it was set to come into effect April 21, 2020. By concurring the House also approved other recommendations, including the amendments to this act.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at this particular bill, Bill 24, it does include amendments to the act that were recommended by the Privileges and Elections Committee and already concurred in by the House in December. This is simply the next step in this legislative process, I guess you could say. It’s really nothing new in its form.

As I pointed out, in December we concurred in the resolution to move this forward with the amendments to make this policy happen. This bill really, in essence, includes those

amendments. It’s the final step in the process. Once we pass it, hopefully, we will have the policy we have been – and all parties have been – working on so hard to create.

Getting to that point, I think I would be remiss if I did not say that it has to be acknowledged, the work of the Privileges and Elections Committee who presented this final report. They spent many months of analysis, consultations and deliberations that were involved.

I think that is very important to recognize, that the Committee saw the importance of this work and the importance that the Legislature must recognize that we have to lead by example in this area. They worked diligently to see that there’s a clear and fair process, that due process is followed and proper procedures are followed. It gives options for resolution. It protects confidentiality. It fosters a better work environment. It holds all of us, all elected officials, to the highest standard.

So I would submit, Mr. Speaker, we much be diligent to ensure that the House is not a place where harassment is tolerated but a place where everyone who wants to serve feels welcome, and that includes women who also wish to run for public office. I think this is a very important step in ensuring and encouraging women to do that in the future.

Mr. Speaker, another couple of points I’d like to emphasize with respect to this bill and the underlying, I guess, policy which is the foundation. This Legislature-Specific Harassment-Free Workplace Policy – which is the name it is called – outlines a really comprehensive definition of harassment. Again, it is an attempt to update the law, to modernize the law with respect to issues of harassment. I think the most important element of this is it separates the treatment of harassment from other aspects of the Code of Conduct. I think that is a really important piece. This is very necessary.

I would say on that point, we’ve learned in recent years that concerns about harassment have really come to the fore. It is now necessary to update the law to reflect our determination and our commitment to deal seriously with issues of harassment. By separating out that issue of harassment, this bill introduces new

definitions related to the Legislature-Specific Harassment-Free Workplace Policy. The bill also gives direction for separating harassment issues from the Code of Conduct so the appropriate legislation can proceed.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that harassment investigations will be conducted by the Citizens' Representative, and I think that's an important point that we need to be mindful of. This bill will give the Citizens' Representative the authority to act in accordance with the policy. I think that was a really important element to have and I think that needs to be recognized. It's very encouraging to see the reforms and the attempts that have been made with respect to the harassment piece of this policy and this legislation.

Also, I feel very comfortable, very encouraged about the confidential support mechanisms that are in place. These mechanisms protect confidentiality. I think that is something that is vital. That we need to protect the confidentiality of not only the complainant but witnesses and, as well, the respondents, at least to the extent possible, to comply with fundamental principles of procedural fairness. That is very important and needs to be, certainly, applauded and celebrated.

With respect as well, I find it very good to see that this bill will assign jurisdictions for complaint and resolution process to the Office of the Citizens' Rep. I think that is very necessary.

The other point I think we need to recognize, that I think is acknowledged in this bill, is that there's a clear process now for complaints. There's a process to provide for informal and formal resolution options. As well, there's the mandatory requirement to have respectful workplace training for MHAs. Those are some of the points that I just wanted to highlight.

Also, when we look at other changes that came from the Privileges and Elections Committee, in addition to the policy there were changes to the Code of Conduct, changes to the Code of Conduct provisions in the actual *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*. As well, we see these amendments to the consequential statutory

amendments to the act. Those are some points that I wanted to mention.

As well, finally when I look at this bill, I think it's important for us to remember why we are doing this. There's no doubt that the House of Assembly has to lead by example. Each of us have to lead by example. The House of Assembly, it goes without saying, should be a harassment-free workplace; otherwise, the good women and men will not step forward to serve here if they do not see this as a place where they are welcomed and where they are safe. I think that the good governance of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will be undermined if we do not see more women, for example, coming forward to run for public office.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we have all demonstrated that we're committed. By this legislation as an example, it demonstrates that we are all committed to raising the bar on our behaviour. Each of us, including myself, will strive to ensure that's done and to strengthen the process. We need to strengthen the process but ensuring that we do protect due process and fairness for all people, all men and women within the Legislature. We have all committed to that for dealing with violations whenever they occur.

By this policy, we are giving the new policy real teeth, if you will, to ensure that all Members are held to account for their behaviour. Hopefully that will deter that behaviour and it will ensure that there's a fair process for investigation wherever harassment has occurred.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand and speak a few minutes on Bill 24 and talk about how it came about. I just want to make it quite clear to everybody in the public, this came out of allegations last year. I just want to let everybody know there was no bullying or harassment found in any allegations. I want to make that quite clear.

Everybody is talking about this whole Legislature with the bullying and harassment. There was absolutely no bullying and harassment last year found in the House of Assembly in the investigations that were done. I just want to make that quite clear.

Mr. Speaker, where I disagree a lot with this being brought in now, is that if we're going to look at the accountability act, we should look at the whole act. We should not just look at portions of the act, just relate to a situation that came through. Why don't we look at the whole act? Why don't we look at the act where the procedures took place last year where there were so many faults? That's where we should go.

There's a timeline in place of 90 days. Why was that 90 days broken? How can the Commissioner for Legislative Standards set his own time when he's going to start an investigation when under the act it states it? How can the Commissioner say who should and should not be interviewed when the actual act says who has to be interviewed?

Why don't we just take the whole act instead of making a band-aid on this just because of incidents that happened last year? This is what happened. This is a reaction. Everybody knows this is just a reaction. This is a reaction but we won't look at the full bill because there will be someone next. If we don't look at the full act, we don't look at the whole accountability act in general, right from an appeal process right on through, this is what's going to happen.

Do you know what I'm going to have to do, Mr. Speaker, to get this out straight? I'm going to have to go to court. That's what I'm going to have to do. The only process that a Member in this Legislature has is court. I look at the Government House Leader; she was in the meeting that day. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General was in the meeting that day. The Speaker – everybody knows. I'm going to have to go to court in a legal action for the only possibility of appeal. Why don't we put an appeal system in here? Name one other incident where you can be accused of anything except in this Legislature and you don't have an appeal process. Forget me. The next one, there should be an appeal process.

I'll just talk about some of the steps they went through that's causing now so many changes in it. I know the Member mentioned it, the Government House Leader mentioned it – is now removing the Premier from requesting an opinion. Do you know why that's in place? I'll just go through it generally. The Premier of the province, last year, made a complaint to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. I've accessed the information stating that. Do you know to this day I could not get a copy of that complaint? My lawyers couldn't get a copy of that complaint.

The only reason why this is in to remove the Premier because last year he looked so bad. The Premier of the province, the Member for Humber - Gros Morne looked so bad where he stood here – well, I didn't make a complaint. I did make a complaint. He even asked one of the Members here, the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, to withdraw her statement because he never made a complaint, but I have it in documentation that he did make a complaint.

What process do I have to get it? Go to court. The only process I have right now to get a copy of what the Premier made. It could be nothing, I don't know – I honestly don't know – but the only process I have is to go to court. These are the changes we should make in this. This is all just a band-aid for what happened last year. We all know that. This is just a band-aid, just a reaction to try to make everybody look good. Typical of what the Premier does and a lot of times with the government, let's make ourselves look good now. Let's say we're going to really move on something.

Mr. Speaker, they didn't tackle the real issues. How can the Commissioner for Legislative Standards – we should make him or her, whoever's there next, to follow the legislation. We should strengthen the legislation so everybody would have the same opportunity. That's where we're failing as legislators in this here. There was a lot of great work done with this, no doubt, but when we bring this in all we're doing is putting a band-aid on it and saying here's what happened last year, we have to move aside. That's what's happening here. We never had the courage as legislators to tackle the whole act. We never had it. We just didn't have it.

Mr. Speaker, I just look at the declaration of all Members. I agree with that, absolutely. We should have a declaration. Confidentiality of the complainant – this is something I take a lot of exception to. Last year – well, in 2018, when some of this got up, do you know where this was brought up at? In the House of Assembly by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member at the time for Topsail. He was the former premier of the province. What confidentiality is in that? How did he get that information? Was there ever an investigation done to find out how he found out?

Do you know what I'm going to have to do? I'm going to have to take a civil action to find out how he found out the information. I will find out. That's what I'm going to have to do because there's no appeal process. There's no teeth in this legislation that if someone leaks something out, to do an investigation on how it got out – absolutely none.

This is the kind of thing, Mr. Speaker, that when I look at this here and you look at the whole incident that happened back in 2018, this is just a band-aid. There's absolutely no teeth in this whatsoever, when what you're saying here is confidential. How about the confidentiality of the respondent? There's nothing in here about the confidentiality of the respondent – absolutely nothing.

If there is a complaint made against anybody else, you're allowed to go out and talk about it because the respondent doesn't matter. You're allowed to be taken (inaudible) to be thrown out, do what you like because there's no accountability in this for the respondent. This is why, Mr. Speaker, this is only a band-aid.

No one wanted to really tackle the accountability and integrity act; they didn't want to do it. If they did, we would hold that act and hold the Commissioner to a higher standard. That's the issue that you're facing here today – band-aid. So why isn't there something in there about the respondent? I ask the Government House Leader: Why wasn't there something put in here about the respondent? Do you know why? No one cares. Who cares about the respondent?

Myself and the other Member, what happened? We got thrown out of Cabinet right away. Once

the Premier throws you out of Cabinet, you're identified, but yet here you're not allowed to identify anybody. The Premier of the province identified the two people last year. They already knew, of course, through Tammy. We'll work that out, too, through the courts.

Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of thing here. You're talking about confidentiality, but yet when the Premier dismisses two ministers that's all public knowledge then, but that's all right, though. You see the issue with this? There's no accountability. This is why I have a grave concern with this. I did back then and I still do.

Again, Mr. Speaker – and I'm allowed to speak about this; this is all part of it – I take when the report comes back to the Management Commission, I have a grave concern about this. I wrote the Management Commission three or four times and I get back the standard. I guess whoever helped you do up the letters wrote back the standard thing: We don't administer it; it's the House of Assembly. We just take the report and we pass it on to the House of Assembly. That is absolutely false what happened to myself and Dale Kirby – absolutely false.

Once the Management Commission got the report, they asked for or received – or it was offered and received – a technical briefing, they immersed themselves involved with the process. They had no authority under the act to receive a technical briefing, but they did. The minute they received the technical briefing, they were involved with the process.

What was said in that technical briefing should have been brought back to this House of Assembly. Mr. Speaker, that's where this has no teeth. The Management Commission, who had a technical briefing from the Commissioner for Legislative Standards – and there were statements made in there about the process – was never brought back.

Who's accountable to the Management Commission? What authority do we have to say to the Management Commission you have to follow your fiduciary responsibility and bring information back to the House of Assembly? Who?

Do you know what's going to happen? I'm going to have to go to court to get it. I'm going to have to go to court to find out who has the responsibility to all this.

This is the kind of stuff, Mr. Speaker, why I say this is just a band-aid; complete band-aid. If we're going to go at the accountability and integrity act for this whole issue of bullying and harassment, we should do it. We shouldn't just say: Okay, what, last year, can we say do something just to make ourselves look good? Because it's bad because we are not doing our duties as legislators.

Mr. Speaker, it's pretty sad when I start naming people in this House. The former Speaker, the Government House Leader, the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador can make statements, yet no one wants to deal with them. It's pretty sad. You just think about it.

Anywhere in the system of Canadian Parliament, if you were in any system in Canada and the Speaker made a statement, a Commissioner made a false statement, when he confirmed it in front of the Deputy Speaker; the Government House Leader is aware of it, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety publicly said what was done and the false statement, but there's nothing done – absolutely nothing done. We're not going to tackle this here because we just want a band-aid put on it.

We have the Premier of this province here who made a complaint. I don't know how serious the complaint was. I have no idea. I really don't. But you can't even get a copy of it. The only way I'm going to get a copy is file in court. That's the only way for me to get a copy – the only way to get a copy.

What I find also in the act, Mr. Speaker, is now they are separating the harassment and the Code of Conduct. I find that kind of interesting actually because last year when Bruce Chaulk went out to the media and he said: I'm no harassment or bullying expert but I have people who are willing to do it. So he went out and got Rubin Thomlinson. Do you know, to this date, we can't get a copy of that report.

A government employee – this is what we're fighting, that we're not government employees. If we were government employees, we can get a copy of that report, but because they're saying we're not, which I know the Clerk of the House gave confirmation that we're not government employees, so we can't get a copy of the report. We don't even know what was said in the meetings. Can you imagine? Just think about it. You don't even know what was said about you. You don't even know what you should've responded to because you can never get a copy of the report. Just think about that.

Anywhere in a court of law, if someone makes a statement about you or to you, you have access to it, but in this Legislature, you can't. It's just unbelievable the way this Legislature is just moving around this whole issue.

I use the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay as an example, as an RNC officer. I'll use you for an example. What if you did up a complaint, if you're doing an investigation, isn't the person who you did the investigation against, aren't they obligated to get a copy of your complaint? Sure, they are. Yet, in this Legislature you won't allow that. Any court in Canada, you have to get it, but in this Legislature you can't get it.

Mr. Speaker, last year when you were moving out the harassment and bullying – moving out – I remember Bruce Chaulk – sorry, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, I remember him standing in this House, and I don't know who asked the question, I think it might have been the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands asked the question. No, no, it was the Leader of the Opposition, actually. They asked and he said: No, the complaint is under the Code of Conduct for bullying and harassment. That was the complaint. Then someone asked the question later about the investigators. He said: Well, you'd only be a fool to go against your investigators. He made that comment here in the Legislature.

He said the complaint was on the Code of Conduct, bullying and harassment. When there was no bullying and harassment, he found the Code of Conduct anyway and we have no way to defend what was said in the Rubin Thomlinson reports. The man said in this Legislature: You'd

only be a fool to go against the experts. He said that here.

Guess what? He went against the experts, and the only way for us to get a copy of the Rubin Thomlinson report, I say again, is to go to court. Yet, anywhere in Canada, if any of us tomorrow was charged with a speeding ticket, we would get a copy of the speeding ticket, all the information there, you have a right to defend. But here in this Legislature – this is why this Legislature, in my honest opinion, is not tackling the real issue of the whole act. It's just taking enough flash for to cover up, to say – the Premier, of course, that's his normal procedure. If there's a problem, I'll fix it and just smooth everything over. That's the whole issue with it, Mr. Speaker.

If you're going to attack the whole act, you attack the 90-day limit, Mr. Speaker, make sure that every respondent has an opportunity to appear and present their evidence. You get what evidence is presented against you, which, in this case, I never received. I don't know about the other ones, yet we're not even looking at that.

Then also what the Citizens' Rep is doing. Is the Citizen's Rep qualified to do the investigation? Bruce Chaulk is not. Is the Citizens' Rep qualified?

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the Member to refer to the Commissioner –

MR. JOYCE: Commissioner, sorry.

Is the Citizens' Rep qualified, because I know the last investigation he did we asked the questions: Why wasn't the Premier interviewed? Why wasn't the chief of staff interviewed? Did we know about the \$20,000 severance that the other person paid? The Citizens' Rep, is he or she qualified? Those are the questions we have to ask, Mr. Speaker. It's easy to just say, here's who's going to do it. Are they qualified to do it? Obviously, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards wasn't. He went out and got somebody else. He went against their advice.

So what grounds, Mr. Speaker, does a person have to appeal? None, because we won't tackle it in this Legislature, because what they did last year is just try to push this aside, get this out of

the way. We wouldn't even bring it in before the election. This here was delayed before the election; wouldn't even bring it in, got scared we were going to bring it all up again before the election last April. What a reason. What courage, the Premier wouldn't even bring it in; wouldn't even bring it in because he didn't want to have it brought up during the election.

Mr. Speaker, do you find something very interesting now in this here, where they're separating the bullying and harassment from the Code of Conduct? You know the funny part about that now? Last year, when it was put under the Code of Conduct for bullying and harassment that it would've been a Code of Conduct violation, that's what the Commissioner for Legislative Standards said in this House, if it was. But, right now, what we're saying in this Legislature, the Commissioner said here if there was bullying and harassment, it would be automatic Code of Conduct. What we're saying now, no it's not – no it's not.

So, last year, when all this was going on, if any allegation was found, automatic Code of Conduct. What we're saying now, it's not a Code of Conduct. It's not a big deal. That's exactly what we're saying here. So we're taking the severity away from it. The severity of a Code of Conduct violation, which last year was a complete violation, now it's not a violation of the Code of Conduct for a Member in this Legislature. So it's diminishing what we can do. It's actually taking away the severity of bullying and harassment for a Member of this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I find interesting in here, and seeing my time is getting short, the other interesting part is when the Citizens' Rep does a report, and he makes the recommendation that goes to the Committee, do you notice now in the Committee that the respondent and whoever is the accuser now has an opportunity to appear in front of the Committee before a final decision is made. How ironic. Isn't that just kind of ironic?

You talk about putting a band-aid on something. So, now, if someone here – any allegation is made, whoever the accuser is and whoever is the responder, before it's brought to the Legislature, before anything is handed out, you have a right

to appear. Under the act right now you still have that right, but no one in this Legislature wants to stand up and say that – no one. Yet we're going to put a little band-aid on it now and say, okay, here's what we're changing. We don't want to go back and say okay – and I look at the Government House Leader again and I'll tell you why I have to look at the Government House Leader.

You were in that meeting that day. Your government is the one who brought the amendment here – and I don't know what the Speaker is going to rule on, but it should be your government now to bring in, because you know, the former House Leader was in that meeting and the Speaker was in that meeting. He admitted in front of the former Speaker that I was right on what he said and it's up to the government – it's all according to the Speaker's ruling. If he doesn't, it's up to the government to correct this. I put the responsibility right on the government.

I absolutely refuse, Mr. Speaker, to walk through and put a band-aid on stuff because if we're going to do something, let's do it right. But it's just very ironic that now you can sit down in front of Committees, seven Members, and explain yourself. Oh no, because last year we can't let that happen any more. Even though the act was violated, no one has the courage to stand up. This is what happened in this whole report. We should look at the whole act, Accountability and Integrity Act, not just put band-aid on it.

I can guarantee you, as sure as I'm here, there will be someone next and you're going to wish that you followed my recommendation to look at the whole act to make sure that your rights aren't violated and it's followed by law. I can assure you one thing, Mr. Speaker, I will get to the bottom of it, one way or the other, with or without the co-operation of the House. There are some Members that did stand up and got a lot of courage. But if we're going to do it and protect people, the complainant and the respondent, we need to look at the whole act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to the opportunity to speak on Bill 24 this afternoon, An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act. I listened intently to the speakers before me and it's good to know the power of a private Member's motion that brought this to the floor, and I would like to thank the Committee that came before us, before this legislative Committee that's established today, to bring this bill forward.

There are a lot of good things in this bill. There's a good reason this bill is here. I try and live by the motto never say to anyone, anything that I wouldn't say to my mother. I have the biggest sense of humour and the biggest sense of, I guess, blurting things out that sometimes I am so good at saying I'm sorry and this is all in a joke. But when it goes beyond that limit, when you find yourself in a situation that it becomes a conflict, this is why this act is written.

This is why this is very important to the Members of this House because on any given day, anybody can say something in this position to get their self in trouble. You hold yourself to a higher standard. You try your best, but there are times anybody, if you are made of steel, sometimes there will be a crack in that. Anything can happen at any given time, so we have a great policy and a procedure now to bring forward. It's good to know back in 2018 when this bill came to the floor that it's being entered today to be an amendment.

I look there and the Explanatory Note I think basically says it all. Most everybody have had their chance to say something before me now. "The Bill would amend the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* to give legal effect to the Harassment-free Workplace Policy Applicable to Complaints Against Members of the House of Assembly as approved by the House of Assembly." I guess it's a new world, Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves in these days and these times, but as the world evolves we must evolve with it. This is something we've done.

This bill would repeal sections of the act for the Premier's ability to initiate a review that would follow a different reporting mechanism if

initiated by another Member. It includes definitions relating to the policy and separation of what is investigated under the policy versus Code of Conduct. Code of Conduct, as the Member before me just said, is separated.

It gives authority to the Citizens' Representative to act in accordance with the policy and it also provides a role to the Privileges and Elections Committee and the options available to the Committee for the recommendations of penalties and sanctions. It also provides confidentiality of the complainants and the witness.

I guess a little bit of a backgrounder, Mr. Speaker, to this is on December 2, 2019, the House of Assembly concurred in the final report of the Privileges and Elections Committee a development of Legislature-Specific Harassment-Free Workplace Policy. The report was released by the Committee April 2019, after the Committee took a year and a half to complete this report.

That might seem like a long time for some people, a year and a half to write a report, but when you have something to do that's as valuable as this and what it means to everybody in this House of Assembly, for the people that sit here today and the people who will sit here tomorrow, it takes time to get it right. In doing that, I think the past Committee did a great job in bringing these recommendations forward to us.

The policy to be reviewed every five years, but obviously it will be amended from time to time. But every five years there will be a full review of the policy.

The Commissioner for Legislative Standards requests that the confidentiality aspects in this policy be the same as whistle-blower protections. Those are some similarities there we could use. The respondent has a right to know who initiated the complaint. The respondent will know who made the complaint against him – very important.

The harassment policy is now separated from the Code of Conduct and all reports and harassment complaints will be completed by the Citizens' Rep who has authority to act on all complaints. After this policy is enacted, the Management

Commission will begin the process of removing the interim policy.

I'm going to give you some of the highlights of this act. It will apply to complaints of harassment against a Member of the House of Assembly by another MHA or by an employee, as defined in the policy of the employee of Legislative Branch. The Executive Branch of the Harassment-Free Workplace, effective June 1, 2018, will continue to apply to employees in the context of making a complaint against another employee.

It outlines the definition of harassment: abuse of authority; discriminatory harassment; sexual harassment; and bullying. It allows for an independent support advisor. This position is to be established independent of the Legislature. If it's outside the Legislature it's independent of the Legislature, obviously. It will provide confidential advice, support and guidance to individuals navigating the process and options available to them; and also in understanding and dealing with their feelings and concerns as they deliberate on the course of action best suited for them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure nobody ever wants to find themselves in this position, but if you do find yourself in a position where you're either the person that's being accused of harassment or being harassed, you need a policy that's clear and defined and help you and guide you through the process. Again, both sides, the person laying the complaint, the 'complainee' or 'complainor,' whichever that terminology may be, there will be some guidance for those people.

Submitting complaints is very important. How long do you wait? Do you wait five years? Do you wait five minutes? The complaint should be filed as soon as possible, but must be filed no later than six months after that last incident or the last allegation. So it's not something where you can say five years ago something happened. You have a six-month time frame which you can deal with it.

The complaint must be in writing and include the following: a signature, very important; description of the nature of the alleged harassment and identity of the respondent; and the detailed information, but not limited to, time,

date and location of alleged harassment. Like anything, Mr. Speaker, documentation is very important. This is all about making sure things are documented and we outline in that what we expect in harassment.

The complaint process: The responsibility rests with the Office of the Citizens' Rep. It's a dedicated position for intake of complaints and requires an intake officer to have the necessary skills, knowledge and training to receive and provide advice on complaints of harassment. It outlines the clear process with steps and associated timelines once a formal complaint has been received. It's not something, you make a complaint and you wait again three or four years. There has to be a mechanism and a motion that people follow the guidelines. You need to get things to go through.

Anonymous complaints won't be permitted. If it's not signed, it'll be deemed not a complaint. I worked for years in a municipal setting, Mr. Speaker, where people would phone in complaints, where people would tell you complaints on the roadside and you'd say to them: Would you please put it in writing? They're not willing to put it in writing. Unless you put it in writing and sign your name, it will not be registered as a legitimate complaint. I guess it will be filed but it will not be worked on. It has to be signed by someone. That's very important.

There are some resolution options – complaint driven, of course. The decision as to which option to pursue rests with the complainant. A complaint sometimes may result in a resolution as a simple: I'm sorry. Genuinely say you're sorry and you move on from there. The more and more it goes, the more extent, I guess the more detail goes into it. The Citizens' Rep would handle that.

The timeline for formal complaints to be switched from formal to informal would resume if the complainant decided to switch back. There's an informal complaint and a formal complaint. There is lots to this that's underlying. There are a lot of options we have there to figure this out.

Again, I hope I never find myself in a situation where I'm either on the receiving or the giving

end of this. People who hold this office, who hold their head high everyday as they walk in the door, to be proud to walk here in this building, to be one of the very few ever in the history of this province to sit in this seat, you hold yourself to an accountable level, more so than anyone else.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: I sometimes joke about it, because in my past life, God knows, I was probably fit to try anything or do anything, but when you're in this role – and everybody around here, you know where I'm coming from. Not a lot of us, I would think, drives the Trans-Canada at 100 kilometres or 99. There are times you may be a little over, you may be a little under; you're not supposed to, but you bend it a little bit. Here, you hold yourself to the speed limit. If there's any such thing as in here, you hold yourself to the speed limit. You hold yourself within the realm of what you should be, as an elected official.

When people mark their X for you, they put it there because they have faith in you. You're not here by one X, you're here by a multiple number of Xs, many thousands in many cases. So a lot of people put you in this position to hold you accountable for your position. This is very important.

The harassment policy and the harassment-free workplace, it's very important. There are times in this House the debate could get heated and we'll throw jibs and jabs back and forth, but that's all in the good nature of politics, I would say, in the running of this House. Sometimes it may go a little further. I think you've seen more apologies in this House this year than probably any other year before – just saying.

So as my time runs down, I look forward – I sit as the Chair of the Privileges and Elections Committee. This will give us the guidance we need. This will give us the supporting documentation we need to deal with whatever comes our way when it comes to harassment in the workplace. Any complaints, any reports that come back to us, it gives us a guidance and it gives us a set of rules to work by.

Before I sit, I'd just like to encourage everybody – it's terrible to say, but we have to be on our best behaviour. Anybody can have a bad day any day of the week, but when you get the opportunity to sit here in this House and you look around this building and you look around the walls of the people who first – and I don't know the gentleman's name way over in the corner there, but it's probably from '18-something that the gentleman sat there. The honour to sit here is greater than anything you –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. BRAGG: I would never imply that we are better than anybody else. That is not what I'm saying, that we are better, but we hold ourselves to a higher standard when we sit here, that we do the best job we can and respect the laws and the rules and each other's personality. We have 40 people in this room here. We know we're not all family, we know we're not all friends, but we all find a way to work together.

I spent a lifetime volunteering, Mr. Speaker, in which there were a lot of people – my time is running out, I'm being told my time is running. I spent a lot of time finding a way to work with people. Not so much work around with people – everybody has multiple different personalities and this is a great way and a great lesson for many of us in how to hold yourself and how to conduct yourself.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I will take my chair, and I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the minister, I thought we were all friends, but anyway.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take a long time to speak. I know I have 20 minutes, I'm certainly not intending on taking that.

As has already been said, Mr. Speaker, basically, we already had the debate over the harassment

policy. It went through the House of Assembly Management Commission. It came before the House; we had a great discussion on it. We all agree with the harassment policy specific to Members of the House of Assembly.

Really, all we're doing is simply taking that policy now and we're tying it to the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*. We're basically taking that policy and tying it to a piece of legislation, which makes sense. It's a procedural thing but it's really nothing new. I supported it then, I support it now.

I'm not going to go through that policy; I'm not going to go through what landed us here. The only thing I will say, though, is that I listened to my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands and what he had to say. I'm not getting into his personal situation, who was right, who was wrong, who said this, who said that. That's for him to deal with. He's indicated if he can't deal with it here, he's going to deal with it another way, fine and dandy.

I will comment, though, I will say that as I said when we talked about this before, everybody in this House of Assembly, everybody, it doesn't matter if you're on that side of the House, you're on this side of the House, it doesn't matter what stripe you are or no stripe at all, any one of us, potentially – I would hope not, we all would hope not, but anyone of us could be on the giving or the receiving end of this. It's quite possible.

This should be here to, really, protect us all. It's here to protect us all. Particularly, if you should find yourself on the receiving end, I will say, and it's important obviously for the person who was the victim, I'll say for lack of a better terminology, obviously, a lot of the focus here is on the victim, as it should be. Nobody in this House of Assembly or any other workplace should go to work and be bullied, harassed in any kind of way. We all agree on that, but there is a thing called procedural fairness as well. There's a thing called procedural fairness.

What I've heard my colleague say, the point he's made; I don't think he's against this amendment to the legislation. I'm going to speak for him, I don't think he's against it. I'm certainly not

against it, and I'm going to vote in favour of it because it's something that needs to happen and it's something we all agree to.

But, with that said, I do think he makes some valid points that if there are other things that are related to this – it may not be the actual policy itself – from a procedural point of view that relate to this that ensures that every Member of this House of Assembly is treated fairly and equitably and that time frames are followed and that the legislation is crystal clear so it's not open to interpretation, that time limits are met, everyone who's supposed to be interviewed is interviewed, that there's a mechanism for appeal, all those things. If those things are not being dealt with here, right here and now, and there are concerns, they definitely should be.

I'm not suggesting that we don't vote for this – as I said, I'm going to vote for this – but I am suggesting to my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands that he should write the Management Commission about the things that he indicated that are not being covered here, the concerns he has in terms of procedure that are not being dealt with here, write the Management Commission.

I would certainly encourage whoever's on the Management Commission – I'm not sure who it is off the top of my head; doesn't really matter – that once you receive that, to take a serious look at what he is saying. And that if there are other amendments that need to come forward to the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* that are required to ensure that when this policy gets applied, it's getting applied fairly and equitably. That justice is done, that everybody has the opportunity to defend themselves and appeal and all that stuff – which the Member is indicating it may not necessarily be the case right now or it may be ambiguous and needs to be clarified – then I would certainly encourage all Members and Members of the House of Assembly Management Commission to bring forward further amendments to this legislation at a later date – hopefully not too late; the sooner the better – to accompany what's already been done to ensure that we have a policy that protects us all.

Again, this is not about this Member right here. It's not about him. He was involved in what brought this here, but it's not about him. It's

about everyone here and it's about whoever's going to follow. It's about everyone who's going to follow, because he is right when he says that anybody in this House can find themselves at the wrong end of this, because anybody can go in, I can write a complaint, I can go up to my office here now and write a complaint that someone said something or did something or whatever that I found offensive or whatever and it can happen.

I would hope it wouldn't happen that nobody would just do it in a mean-spirited way but it can. Maybe it's a misinterpretation, whatever, but I think we all need to have the comfort of knowing that should such a complaint be brought forward that falls under the harassment policy, that the legislation within the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, that legislation around, not just the policy but the other procedures that sort of tie in to the utilization of that policy, I think it's important that we all, for our protection, know that it's going to be bulletproof. That not only is it going to protect the victims, which is the primary purpose for having this particular policy, obviously, but also ensures fairness and also ensures that those that are being accused have absolutely every right to defend themselves and that they have a right to appeal.

Furthermore, we have to ensure that if there are any frivolous – and I'm not certain because I don't have the actual harassment policy, I think it maybe addressed in the policy, but I will also add that if there was any frivolous complaints, unfounded complaints that were done maliciously then there has to be accountability for whoever does that as well.

There are a number of things around this whole policy that, as far as I'm concerned, we need to ensure that we dot the i's, cross the t's and everything is covered.

So, again, I will support the bill, bringing in the harassment policy, but, once again, if there are other pieces of this legislation that need to be amended to accompany this policy to make sure that everyone is treated fairly, I certainly again encourage the Member to write the Management Commission. I certainly encourage the Management Commission to take a look at it

and make whatever adjustments that need to be made as soon as possible to protect us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Obviously, we are debating, of course, An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, Bill 24. Just to reiterate some of the definitions that pertains the bill. The bill would give effect to the policy designed by the Privileges and Elections Committee for a Legislature-specific harassment policy and to outline some of these changes that are important, that are obviously different from the process experienced just some time ago here in our Legislature.

This bill would repeal the Premier's ability to initiate a review that would follow a different reporting mechanism than was initiated by another Member. So that in itself right there, Mr. Speaker, would set us on an entirely different track than what we did experience.

I was a Member – and still am, of course – of the Privileges and Elections Committee that was struck and, of course, that was tasked with designing this new policy, as were you, Mr. Speaker, the Chair, actually, to that Committee. As you know, we spent a lot of time – we spent the whole summer in here, into the fall, creating, doing consultations with different groups: Respectful Workplace, Human Rights Commission, Egale and Equal Voice. A number of these people that we heard from in organizations, a lot of work was done. Of course, the final report includes the proposed Harassment-Free Workplace Policy applicable to complainants against Members of the House of Assembly and a recommendation that it be adopted by the House.

The Privileges and Elections Committee, of course, was pleased then to recommend the proposed policy that outlines a comprehensive definition of harassment, which is important. As you know, those definitions can get tangly and there can be loopholes, as we've seen and experienced: provides a confidential support

mechanism through the establishment of a position, independent of the Legislature including its statutory offices, to provide support and guidance to individuals throughout the process. Again, it's a major contrast of night and day, what was experienced here previously going through this process – the lack of process, if you will – that was available to Members at the time.

Assigns jurisdiction for the complainant and resolution process, including formal investigations, to an independent officer of the Legislature, the Office of the Citizens' Representative; establishes a clear process for complaints; provides both informal and formal resolution options; includes mechanisms to protect confidentiality, which we know there was no respect for confidentiality in the process that was undergone here just some time ago; includes mechanisms to protect confidentiality of the complainant and witness to the extent possible, complying with principles of procedure and fairness; and make respectful workplace training mandatory for all MHAs – and we've all undergone that training.

I've heard some interesting comments made by Members here throughout this debate here this afternoon. Some Members have suggested that it was simply relating to the process that we've just experienced here recently less than two years ago. But, Mr. Speaker, I would venture to say with great confidence that there has been questionable conduct and treatment that have gone on in this Legislature for many, many, many years prior to 2015, and not just this Legislature but legislatures across Canada.

That said, one of the groups that we did consultations with, of course, was Equal Voice. Just last month I was invited to come to the Equal Voice national conference, which was held in Ottawa, to present the work of the Privileges and Elections Committee that we undertook here in our Legislature and all that work and what we're trying to accomplish here today. I really have to give hats off – especially during the week before International Women's Day, which is coming up on Sunday – really give props to this group because they are designated, of course, to empowering women.

Statistics have shown that the victims of harassment or bullying or sexual assault mainly are women. It's great to say some people can't relate or they think it's an inconvenient topic or it's uncomfortable. Yes, it's uncomfortable but if we don't have these conversations now and make these legislative changes now, how can we expect healthy change? I put that question out to all my colleagues here in this House, on all sides of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. P. PARSONS: Absolutely. It's an uncomfortable conversation but we have to have it. I know there are a number of people in this House, the new class that have come in, of course, in just the recent election, that are dedicated to enforcing this very, very needed good, healthy change.

I would like to recognize the national organization Equal Voice, a non-partisan network with chapters and campus clubs across Canada dedicated to electing more women to political office. As we look around here in our Legislature, we have 40 seats here, Mr. Speaker, and only nine are occupied by women. So right there and then that says something. That speaks volumes.

In February, as I mentioned, I travelled to Ottawa to present as a panellist at the Equal Voice forum on gender sensitivity legislatures to identify and address some of the systemic barriers women face within legislatures across the country and to help create a political culture conducive to attracting and retaining more women in politics.

My neighbouring MHA – actually, my colleague for the District of Harbour Main – said: How are we going to attract more good strong women, and men for that matter, to legislatures if we can't get it right in here? We do have to lead by example. As politicians we're on the ground, we're talking to our constituents, we're getting that feedback and it's safe to say that the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador have expressed great disappointment in what they've seen here lately in our Legislature, Members. You know what, it's not one Member; it's not two Members. Every MHA in this House wears

that, so we are responsible to have these conversations.

I don't care if they're uncomfortable. If we don't do it, how can we make it better for the next generation coming up? How can we make change? Unfortunately, we find ourselves having these uncomfortable situations and conversations, but they have to be had. Please, God, we can create some good change here and that's what's happening in this bill.

I certainly believe there's room to improve on the bill. I agree with the comments made from other Members about what should be included. We can certainly build on that, but this is a start and it's certainly more than what was available to Members at the time.

This forum in Ottawa was focused on solutions and opportunities for action. The agenda began with identifying systemic barriers women and gender-diverse people continue to face. This was followed by a panel, of which I was a Member, on how to bring about change. It was followed by group discussions to further explore these issues and identify ways to make politics better for everyone – not just women, not just men, for everyone.

I also presented the work, of course as I mentioned, of the Privileges and Elections Committee, an all-party Committee in establishing a Harassment-Free Workplace Policy for the House of Assembly. Mr. Speaker, as you know, progress has been made but there's more work to be done.

You think about it. Sure, we've made progress across Canada since 1916 – 1918 when women won the right to vote, and then again later in 1929 when women were finally considered persons, based on the lingo and based on language in a law. It was only until then when women could be eligible to be appointed to the Senate. Imagine. So, yes, we have taken small steps.

Some people think that it's not necessary to make these changes when they make reference to a certain incident, but let me put this question to you. I'll take you back to 1989 – and we recognize this every year in December. Do you think if the women in that post-secondary

establishment in Montreal back in 1989 on December 6 would have appreciated tougher and better policies when that gunman walked in that post-secondary educational institution and separated the men from the women? Told the women to go to one side, told the men to leave and then shot and killed so many women in what we know as the Montreal massacre. Do you think that they would have thought these policies are not something that we should be discussing here on the floor of our Legislature?

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, work has been done but a lot more has to be done. I stand by that. I'm committed to that. I'm proud to represent the District of Harbour Grace - Port au Grave. I get a lot of great feedback from my constituents saying we're proud of the work you're doing. Stand your ground. Stand strong. That's what we have to do.

The onus is on every one of us here to do that. There's just no room for bullying of any kind or intimidating or cyberbullying. Of course, we have to contend with social media. I'll use the Twitter platform. Anyone can create an anonymous account, put up a silly picture of anything of their choice and go on and attack someone. If you look, statistics prove that it's women who are more so attacked than men. There are a lot of systemic barriers.

I want to recognize we're coming up on International Women's Day. We have a big day on Sunday out in my neighbouring MHA's district, North River actually, the community. I'll be attending. Our Lieutenant-Governor is going to be there as well to be our keynote speaker. I look forward to seeing that room full of strong women empowering women, just like I was part of, of course, in Ottawa at that Equal Voice forum. I understand Members on this side of the House – the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development also just waving out. She's going to be there. I encourage everyone to come and be there if you can.

We need to do these things. Again, this is a step, Bill 24. I certainly believe we can build upon it. I believe and I agree with my colleagues across the way who said it needs to be a complete, fair process. That is absolutely, positively the way to go. I stand by that. I think this is something we can build on. That said, we didn't have this

process previously. This is putting something in place now, but it's something that we can build on.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I don't need to belabour this issue. Everyone here knows this is something we have to do and we have to stand up for if we want change. Ladies and gentlemen, we have to stand strong and we're committed to that change.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to discussing this further.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank everyone for their speeches.

I just want to say, I come from a different world than the job that I'm in, the role that I'm in. But I want to say one of my disappointments is how far behind we are because it's been over 20 years. When I went to work for a company – and in actual fact, one of the first trainings I did was on a respectful workplace over 20 years ago. I'll tell you now, the definitions that included harassment, included gender, included sexual orientation. It also included things like social isolation.

I'm glad we're actually updating the terms to include behaviours that are part of harassment that we're aware of, but it's very, very important for us to understand that in the House of Assembly the province looks to us for guidance. As my fellow MHA for Harbour Main said, we lead by example so we have to set the bar high.

In support of Bill 24, I'm not going to go into a lot of the history that led us to here because my co-worker, my peer, did a lot of that. She did say this is the next step, the final step in the legislation process, but I'd just like to mention to people why it's important.

We're elected officials and one of the things that I'd like to point out is the importance of what we included, as the PC caucus, when we put forward our private Member's resolution. We talked about supporting the introduction of a

Legislature-specific harassment policy, where elected representatives – that’s us and our staff – are held responsible for inappropriate conduct.

The most important thing that I’m going to say, and it doesn’t matter who’s listening, because once we put this into law everybody else will have to follow, but one of the things that is very important for me is the trickle-down effect.

When I worked in industry we would always talk about best practices, whether it was safety, environment or workplace – best practices. Basically, what are the best leading companies out there doing? Basically, that determined whether you got a contract or whether you renewed your contract. As a consultant, I spent a lot of time working – and my fellow MHA across the road from Lake Melville understands this quite well is we have to follow best practices. Where does best practice come from? It comes from leaders in industries. Well, do you know something? We are the leaders. We are the people that put the legislation in place.

So it’s important for us, two things, one is to provide protection for people who may be harassed in the workplace. We have to make sure when we conduct our business as MHAs and our staff that work on our behalf, that there’s no one being harassed, no one being bullied. The trickle-down effect will be that other businesses and companies will have to follow suit. It’s disappointing to learn that we are actually behind – 20 years ago, b’ys, I learned about this stuff that we’re proposing now.

The other thing, too, is fairness. We also have to make sure that nobody is falsely accused, because you can’t actually have faith in the system if people are not treated properly. That’s why we have to have the processes. A formal process for people who want to go through the formal process, and also the informal process. But like I said, too, we need to send a strong message that harassment in any form is unacceptable. That’s why this legislation is important to say: What is harassment? What’s unacceptable behaviour?

Coming from industry for over 20 years, some of the practices that I witnessed and that I know about are, in actual fact, if you didn’t want

somebody in a job, you harassed them out of it. You harassed them to the point where they rebelled and either got fired for acting inappropriately or they just went quietly and they quit.

The thing about it is, that’s why legislation is so important and that’s why we have to be the leaders. This is why this legislation is so important to me and to everybody. We have to modernize the law. It’s long overdue.

One of the things I’d also like to point out that I really like is, for any complaints it’s going to be the Citizens’ Representative that will do the investigation and that there will be a set process. So whether you’re on one side as somebody who’s being harassed and wants to stop and you’ve made the complaint, or if you’re on the other side where you’ve actually been accused of the harassment, everybody has rights and we, as leaders, have to make sure everybody’s rights are respected. That’s why we have to put this bill in place. We have to update things and we have to make sure, because we conduct the business of government and we lead by example. That’s probably the most important thing for me.

I think it’s about 18 years ago I went to work with Voisey’s Bay and one of the main contractors there was a huge international company: engineers, planners, everybody there. The way they were actually paid was on the bonus system. If you completed a job ahead of schedule you got a bonus. That’s a practice that goes on today.

It was about 18 years ago so I was really young, I was probably about two then – I was young and a part of my job actually resulted in me shutting down jobs; shutting down jobs, interfering with the timeline, interfering with their bonus. So you know what happened to me a lot of the times. The most blatant, brutal harassment: bullying, sexual, physical. I actually had a guy put his hand up to the door and close the door, he was a bodybuilder. The only thing that wasn’t really well developed on him was his calf muscles. So there’s a lot of different forms of harassment and physical and verbal are not the only ones. It’s important for us to update that.

I have to tell you as somebody on the receiving side of harassment, it's very, very important to have strict policies in place so that you can protect yourself. On the opposite side, we're very vulnerable, especially here as elected representatives if we're falsely accused. Like I said, we are leaders, we need to make sure there's a balance, that people are treated fairly.

The other thing that I just want to mention here, too, is I'm really – I don't mean to be tooting our own horn, but the PC caucus, the private Member's resolution we talked about not only when we develop the legislation and bring it in, we need to consult with Members and employees of the House – very, very important – but also independent groups who are experts and have experience in handling harassment so that when we put something in place it's going to be fair to everybody. It's very, very, very important. I've actually witnessed harassment, I've also seen how devastating it can be.

Actually, one of the most devastating stories I've heard was not something I witnessed personally, but I know it to be true, and it happened out West. A lot of our people go out West – and it happens here as well – where a supervisor basically didn't like a worker and he wanted to get rid of him, so everyday he basically picked on him. Toolbox talks on the job – you know what I mean – picking on him. To the point where one day, actually in the lunch room, the young fellow snapped and he actually took his hardhat and he jumped across the table and started actually attacking, physically attacking his supervisor.

Do you know something? That's a perfect example of why we have to make sure we lead by example, and that our legislation trickles down to the companies. Because you know who got fired that day? It was that young man that was harassed, that was bullied by somebody who was in a position of authority that didn't like him. That actually, if you go out and you talk to people, you will hear that same story repeated over and over and over again with just different individuals.

So we here, we're at the height of power because we are the elected Members of government, we actually bring in legislation and we manage staff.

I want to point out one of my personal experiences as an MHA that I actually kind of found it shocking. In actual fact, when me and my fellow Labrador MHA from Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, we were going into a meeting in Goose Bay. She's actually the Minister of CSSD, so she's a minister. It was my first time actually seeing how a minister was treated by staff – yes, Minister; no, Minister; do you need this, Minister?

I talked to her a little bit about it. The power behind being a minister is so great. I think that's the ultimate.

I think we're very, very lucky because, in actual fact, my co-worker and my fellow MHA from Labrador, the Minister of CSSD, I find her to be a fair minister; I find her to be very respectful, honest and she treats her workers with respect. The thing about it is not everybody has that type of personality, that sense of fairness, so we have to make sure that our staff are protected, that our staff are treated fairly. Because how can we lead by example if we don't do that?

Also, we have to be protected because whether we're in government or we're in Opposition, our opinions are going to differ with our counterparts. We're going to have differences within our own parties and what happens – and I've seen it in industry – if you don't like what somebody is saying, you try and change it. One of the venues that's open to you is harassment, social isolation.

When I went to work in Voisey's about 18 years ago, social isolation was a tool for this international company. But you know something? I didn't care because I didn't want to sit and eat with them; I didn't want them to actually come over and talk to me. The people that were disrespectful to me, I didn't care and I was able to actually overcome it. But I saw the impact it had on our people. Within our own caucuses, we have to be mindful of harassment. It's not just physically intimidating or verbal; it's things like social isolation.

Like my fellow counterpart for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave talked about, the other definitions: cyberbullying. You know something? Another venue is damaging somebody's reputation – the

devastating effects of that, so we have to be mindful of all these things.

More importantly – I’m not going to stand here and talk all day – very, very important for us is we have to lead by example. We actually have to catch up and make sure that we’re setting a good example and that we are protecting everybody. One of the things I do say is in 2020, unfortunately, we have a lot of people now that are suffering from stress. It actually causes mental illness; it actually causes a lot of social issues, family issues. One of the contributors to the stress that people encounter now is actually harassment.

Like I said, I just thank everybody for looking at the bill, but more importantly for us to support it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to pick up on something that my colleague from Torngat Mountains talked about: the respect for the office. I guess one thing about this, the House of Assembly and other organizations to which I’ve belonged, it’s about respecting the position and about the office, regardless of the differences. It has an awful lot of procedures in place that are designed for that, even to the point of addressing the Speaker or the Chair, depending on what institution you’re involved with. So there is an element here, there’s formality, and it’s about trying to create some decorum over issues at times which are going to be very personal to us.

I will say this, in many ways I look at it, we’re talking about power, a power imbalance or a power balance and trust. I know I belonged to many organizations where people would say that it has an open-door policy. But open-door policies only have an effect as long the people have the courage to walk across the threshold of your door and make the complaint or to have that conversation. Certainly, as I used to say even in my background as president that people

could always come in and have that conversation, we could have a yelling match, but under the assumption that when we walked out we walked out and had a beer, walked out as friends and the problem was solved.

We all know that’s not always the case. When I say talk about trust, I can think of the colleagues. I’ll start closer to home – I’ll start with home. Growing up with three sisters and brothers I can tell you that if there was a harassment policy around at that time, I’m sure each and every one of us would’ve been guilty of harassment at some time or another – most of them trying to pick on me because I was the favourite son, that kind of thing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. J. DINN: But anyway, I digress.

But the point is that there is an element of trust. You knew that we had each other’s back. I think of my colleagues in a formal workplace, yeah, I can tell you that if people listening to the outside figure that we were – it’s a wonder that charges haven’t been brought. But it was an equal amount of abuse hurled at each other, but I can tell you that in all of that there was an underlying sense of trust that we were not out to purposely humiliate. It was give-and-take. You bring that into a workplace environment and it changes because many times we don’t have that relation of trust built.

What I like about this, what I see here in this legislation, is an attempt, basically, to bring a procedure in place that is fair. It lays out a procedure that is objective, it’s fair and it’s transparent. It uses terms such as “investigation,” “informally,” “expeditiously as possible,” “the right to procedural fairness” and then there’s a report, and a report which both the respondent and the complainant have a chance to react to. There are many steps along the way in attempt to resolve this or to reach a satisfactory conclusion. I do not get the feeling from it that there is an attempt to be punitive; although, there is that option at the end if it gets to that stage where you do have it.

I think most importantly, though, the benefit of this, it’s about changing attitudes. We went to the harassment training; is that enough to change

a person's attitudes? No. But it does set up within whoever is taking it that, okay, this is something that this organization, this body has determined is important; therefore, it's important that you know about it. It sends a very clear message. It's something we all need to be reminded of regardless of the institutions that we came from before. I can think of a number of the organizations I've been with. There have been harassment, bullying, respectful workplace policies in place for a long time.

We come here; we expect that. That doesn't mean we can't have intense debate and that we can't argue our point, but it does mean that we have to argue it respectfully, that we not only respect the position of the person but the person themselves. I won't belabour this, but I do say that I think this is something that's very important. The amendments here are certainly designed to create a more, as I said, transparent, objective and a fair approach.

I'll take my seat now with the intention that should my colleague from Topsail - Paradise wish to rebut anything I said, he can have the stage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the minister speaks now, she will close the debate.

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

I thought it was a valuable afternoon listening to my colleagues on this very important matter. I will remind everyone in this House that an all-party committee of the Privileges and Elections Committee took considerable time to make these recommendations, that we debated those recommendations here in this House and that now we're debating the legislation. We've had plenty of opportunity to make the required changes that we see fit. We've had plenty of opportunity to voice our concerns.

I thought it was a great afternoon of listening to Members of this House all acknowledge that as a House of Assembly it is not only important, it is imperative that we understand the concerns around harassment, the concerns around making sure that our conduct is appropriate. Not only

because that is the right thing to do in society and, more importantly, we are leaders in this House of Assembly, we should be modelling the behaviour. I think it's very important that we recognize that.

Some Members questioned whether we should do something a little differently or change it. I accepted the hard work of the Privileges and Elections Committee but, I will say this, if there are more changes that we think are important, if there are better processes, more robust processes that we need to undertake, then let's have the Privileges and Elections Committee review them. We should be a House of continuous improvement. Just like government should be a government of continuous improvement, this should be a House of continuous improvement.

I ask Members, as we continue down this path – and I agree with my colleague, the MHA for Torngat Mountains when she said it seems like the House was a little behind in getting this done, that she had been involved in this 20-plus years ago in the corporate world. I agree with her completely, that is the case, but we're here now. Continuous improvement is I think the call of the day.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and we'll move forward with the vote.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

The motion is that Bill 24 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act. (Bill 24)

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

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

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 24)

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

MS. COADY: 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 24.

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

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Bennett): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 24, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act.” (Bill 24)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 7 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 7 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 7 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 House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration 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 Bill 24 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 hon. the Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move the Committee rise and report Bill 24.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee will rise and report Bill 24.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 24 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole has reported that the Committee has considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report Bill 24 without amendment.

When shall this report be received?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

MS. COADY: 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.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Great co-operation this week, several bills moved through the effective process here in the House of Assembly and resolutions as well.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Is the pleasure of the House that we shall now adjourn?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The House is now adjourned until Monday at 1:30.

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