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Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Are the House Leaders ready?

MR. CROCKER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Ready.

Opposition House Leader ready?

MR. BRAZIL: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Third Party ready?

MR. J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Okay, good.

Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin the broadcast, I just want to let Members know that we're still working on the bell issue. We have a way of disconnecting them now, so hopefully we will not have the problems with the bells, but we shall see. I predicted yesterday that we wouldn't either, but it continues. We'll see.

We will start the broadcast now. Before we begin proceedings for today, I would like to welcome Bobbi Russell, our Policy and Communications Officer, who will be assisting at the Table. Bobbi has supported the Management Commission for more than 10 years and, in recent years, has also supported House Committees and assisted at the Table. She is joining us today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper Motion 6. I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, the following motion: that the House of Assembly concur in the *Report of the Standing Orders Committee*, dated September 14, 2020.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the House concur in the *Report of the Standing Orders Committee*, dated September 14, 2020.

The hon. Deputy Premier.

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

It's a pleasure to be here this morning to speak about the Standing Orders Committee report for September of 2020. I'd like to thank the Members of that Committee. They are the Government House Leader and the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde; the Member for Labrador West; the Member for Windsor Lake; the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate; and of course, Speaker, you're a Member of that Committee, as well as myself, as I've been Chair. Members met regularly. We had lots of good debate and discussions on a number of matters related to the *Standing Orders* and have put forward a report for review by the House of Assembly and hopefully concurrence.

Mr. Speaker, for those that may be listening this morning, what the *Standing Orders* are, they are the rules of the House of Assembly. And we have to modernize and improve those rules on an ongoing basis to ensure that we are following best practice, as well as ensuring fairness and equity amongst Members.

So what we've done today, we've prepared a report and what we'd like to do today is make the recommendations that are contained in that report. We're going to address the following matters: establishing the length of Member statements based on the number of words, rather than the time allocation. Some people speak slowly, some people speak quickly, so rather than try and time people, we're going to base it on the number of words.

Increasing the length of time for a minister to respond to petitions from 60 seconds to 90 seconds. As you know, Mr. Speaker, from time to time we have petition – just about every day we have petitions in the House of Assembly, this gives the minister an adequate amount of time to be able to respond to that; 90 seconds is not a whole lot of time, it's just an additional 30

seconds but it does, hopefully, get a more fulsome answer.

Another rule that we would like to update, Mr. Speaker, is codifying that an infant in care of their parent is not considered a stranger. We have a colleague in our House expecting a lovely baby in very short order and we wanted to make sure we can welcome the baby to the floor of the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: We also needed to remove the requirement for a Member to stand in their place, uncovered, in order to speak. Again, that addresses some of the concerns around the pandemic and having to stand and sit. One might have noticed on Monday when we came back to the House, the House Leader had to make that change on a regular basis. We're going to codify it so that it is in our *Standing Orders*.

Assigning the speaking times currently prescribed for the Premier to the Leader of the Government in the House. As everyone knows, the Leader of the Liberal Party, the current Premier, does not yet hold a seat in the House of Assembly. He is in the middle of a by-election. The speaking times currently prescribed for a premier would now be prescribed to the Leader of the Government in the House. Just as we prescribe time for the Leader of the Opposition in the House, we will prescribe time for the Leader of the Government in the House.

We are also codifying debatable motions to ensure that we have a smooth process in the House of Assembly, giving adequate time to speak on bills, motions and resolutions and moving through our work expeditiously.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, enshrining the authority for the House and its Committee to meet virtually in a hybrid manner. As I said, Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a pandemic. We have done very well, I think, as a House of Assembly of both assembling and allowing for a virtual assembly, virtual meetings, and as the people of the province know we've worked very diligently during May and June to put forward a plan to ensure that we can do a virtual Parliament. This now enshrines that authority and allows it on an ongoing basis. We had

originally had said at sunset or completed in December of 2020, we are now saying we'll enshrine it and codify it in our *Standing Orders*.

I don't know, Mr. Speaker, if I need to go into depth. I can very quickly go through them as Members are listening to what it is exactly that we've done, so allow me to take these one at a time.

Members' statements currently provides – the *Standing Orders* provide one minute for each Member's statement. While as a rule of thumb one minute is generally 200 words, depending on an individual's pace of reading, there's a wide variance in the speed of delivery and the length of Members' statements. To provide an approach that is equitable to all Members, it is recommended to establish the length of the Members' statements based on the number of words rather than time. We all felt that was a reasonable resolution to that challenge.

Responses to petitions: in 2017, under the former government House leader, we did make changes to the *Standing Orders*. We provisionally made changes to the *Standing Orders* to provide a 60-second response from a minister. The provision was received positively and became a permanent Standing Order in 2018. The Committee was of the view that increasing the time available for a response to 90 seconds would allow for a more fulsome response.

Again, codifying that an infant in the care of their parent is not a stranger: from a parliamentary perspective, a stranger is any person on the floor of a Legislature when it is sitting who is not a Member or a parliamentary official. Consequently, an infant could be and would be considered a stranger. Whether to codify in the *Standing Orders* or not, parliamentary convention is that the consent of the House is necessary for a stranger to be present in the Chamber while the House is sitting. While this is not a common occurrence, we do hope it becomes one.

Many legislatures have accommodated the attendance of infant children in the Chamber with their parent. To support a family-friendly Legislature, the Committee recommends the *Standing Orders* codify that an infant in care of

their parent is not considered a stranger in the parliamentary sense. This will provide that any Member caring for their infant would not need to seek consent of the House in order to bring their infant with them when attending a House sitting.

It's about time we did that, I would say, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: We also are saying here today to remove the requirement for a Member to stand in their place uncovered to speak. Standing Order 44 states that: "Every Member desiring to speak is to rise in his or her place, uncovered, and address himself or herself to the Speaker." This Standing Order has been unchanged since 1951. It's no longer relative of a diversity of society.

To date, the House of Assembly has not had the experience of accommodating a Member who's unable to speak from a standing position or who for ethnic, religious or health reasons wears a head covering. Should either be the case, the *Standing Orders* would need to be amended to allow the Member to fully participate without the need to seek consent from the House for a variance or be subject to the point of order.

Other jurisdictions have dealt with this requirement in varying ways. Some have provided consent as the need arose to vary the Standing Order, while others have amended their *Standing Orders* to accommodate full participation of Members in an increasingly diverse society.

The *Standing Orders* Committee is recommending the latter approach; that the House amend its current *Standing Orders* to require that a Member be in their place to speak. The Committee is also recommending the removal of the requirement to be uncovered so as to accommodate a Member who wears a head covering for religious, cultural or medical reasons.

Furthermore, as a result of the pandemic, the chief medical officer of Health recommended that Members remain seated while speaking. A resolution – I mentioned this earlier – was

brought to the House to give effect to this recommendation on a temporary basis when the House sat in June. This advice remains unchanged for the fall sitting. To provide for such situations in future, the Committee is further recommending a provision be added to the *Standing Orders* to provide direction to the Speaker to recognize a Member who may be unable to rise in their place.

Codifying debatable motions: debatable and non-debatable motions are a matter of parliamentary convention. Many Canadian jurisdictions, the House of Commons, the Senate, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have codified debatable motions. While the *Standing Orders* of the House of Assembly specify a number of motions that are not debatable, those that are debatable are not codified. Codification of debatable motions in the *Standing Orders* will provide easy access and thus greater clarity to Members.

This would be especially important and useful if the House was meeting in a virtual or hybrid manner. Any motion not listed as debatable is non-debatable unless otherwise provided for in the *Standing Orders*. Examples of debatable motions are second and third reading of a bill, while first reading is a non-debatable motion.

Prescribing the Leader of a government in the House. Standing Order 46 provides the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition with additional time in debate generally, and with respect to the motions of confidence. Under Standing Order 46(5) these times may not be delegated. Standing Order 46 is very narrow in its expression and only gives those specific rights to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, by virtue of their positions in the structure of government as a whole. Standing Order 46(5) also prohibits the Premier or the Leader of the Opposition from delegating a right of unlimited time to, in accordance with Standing Order 46(3).

When a leader of a party in the Official Opposition status is not an elected Member, an elected Member is delegated as the Leader of the Official Opposition for parliamentary purposes. At the present time, the Premier is not a Member of the House; however, as the Member is

designated under the *Executive Council Act*, another Member cannot be designated Premier for parliamentary purposes.

Without a Member assigned as Leader of the Government in the House, an imbalance exists in the House that could affect how it fulfills its democratic functions, particularly given the essential features of the Canadian system of parliamentary government. Consequently, the Committee recommended changing the reference in the *Standing Orders* from Premier to Leader of the Government in the House, not unlike Leader of the Official Opposition. The same concept.

Continuation of virtual proceedings, I think I've dealt with adequately. As I said previously, we did have a Select Committee on virtual proceedings. It was established in May of 2020 to determine how we would be able to meet in otherwise an in-person environment. Of course, we did report those findings to the House on June 30. These recommendations provide for Committees of the House and the Management Commission to meet virtually or in a hybrid mode; however, the provisions expire on December 3. This is now seeking to codify them, to put them in our *Standing Orders* so that they can be continued.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the extent of the *Report of the Standing Orders Committee*. I want to thank the excellent work of the Table Officers of the House of Assembly, and thank them again for always being organized, prepared, doing the jurisdictional scans, looking at what is best practice across the country and helping and supporting the Committee as it does its deliberations and work. I also thank, again, Members of the Committee for their time, their excellent attention and their efforts.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll allow for the debate to continue in the House of Assembly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I speak on this amendment today with respect to allowing the infant in care to be not considered a stranger in our Legislature. I think this is a very modernized and progressive step and, as has been stated, one that is certainly overdue.

The importance of having women be supported in the Legislature and encouraged in this manner cannot be understated. We know that historically women have been an underrepresented group in politics. They were, in fact, in the past even barred from participation in politics and in our democratic system. We know that they couldn't even vote. We also recognize that there are still significant barriers which exist and which continue.

These informal barriers present obstacles to women, especially in what is a male-dominated career, as we see in politics and in the Legislature. We know that in our Legislature here, I believe approximately 23, 24 per cent of the Legislature are women. So this amendment is certainly consistent and supportive of encouraging women to be involved and be a part of this important democratic process.

Mr. Speaker, there also is an issue, of course, with the labour force. We know that women hope to re-enter the workforce. We know that many women want to enter the workforce for the first time, and this is something we need to encourage in a very significant way. We need to see increased participation of women in the labour force. This is vital to our economic recovery.

The last thing we need is obstructions or barriers to women that would exist, for example, if women could not have their infants with them in the Legislature. So it is a vital, important step that really indicates progression and support to our women.

For some women we know that they are responsible for many jobs. They often have to juggle two jobs throughout the day, not only child care and paid work. We know that any outdated processes and rules, such as not allowing infants to be present with women in the

Legislature, are obstacles and need to be overhauled. They need to be eliminated.

We need to meet the needs of modern women. We need to support them. We need to make reforms like these to support women. For example, even as far as maternity leave, I've spoken on this in the past with respect to Canada's maternity leave program. It also is an outdated bureaucratic and badly in need of overhaul.

So when we see steps like this that have taken back – especially, I might add, during this time of the pandemic, even before COVID-19, even before the lockdown, even before the economic crisis, women and especially single-parent women were among those most at risk, economically. They were vulnerable.

We know the studies have proven that they were most likely to suffer mental health effects and conditions. So we needed to see and we need to see the government take progressive measures like this and others with respect to supporting women and providing them the mental health resources that we see are necessary as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has amplified and it has increased the negative effects for women, not only in our workforce but in general.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that women are more likely to work in the retail and service industry. We know that they were more likely to find themselves out of work during the pandemic. In fact, in terms of job losses, more than two-thirds of job losses, unfortunately, occurred with women, especially those women in the retail and service industry.

So any efforts like what we see today with respect to this modernizing, progressive amendment can only be supported, and we need to continue on, though, in this frame of mind. We need to look at other progressive measures. For example, a feminist strategy going forward, an economic strategy, which will address the effects that women have incurred, the detrimental effects that have occurred as a result of this medical health crisis.

We do know the vast majority of single-parent households are women. Women have been on the frontiers, they have been on the front lines of

the pandemic. Eighty-three per cent of the health workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador is female. Women dominate the health care field and retail sector too, but we need to see more women step up for political office. I think this specific amendment really gives direct attention to that important piece.

We know if more women are involved in politics, Mr. Speaker, policy changes with respect to we have more women policy, women frameworks; we have a gendered lens from the perspective of women. I think that is an important part to a healthy Legislature, when we know women have so much to bring to the table. They have different perspectives that we need to acknowledge. When we only have 23, 24 per cent in the Legislature, that is an awful and inadequate representation of women.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, it is important that this is one step of, hopefully, many that we will see by the government in terms of recognizing the gaps that exist, as far as women are concerned, in politics. We need to have more engagement by women.

Women have so much in terms of the perspectives. So far in my role as critic for the Status of Women, I've seen many women's groups throughout the province – I've heard from many of them – who really want to be engaged more. They want to be involved in policy. They want to have more of a say.

I think we have to do as much as we can to facilitate and encourage the incredible networks of women and women's organizations in our province. We need to tap into that valuable resource. We have so many groups throughout the province, and I would submit, Mr. Speaker, they are really well suited to play more of an advisory role in creating a more equitable province as we move through and pass COVID-19.

Government needs to engage more women in our province because we know there are existing structural inequalities. They were evident even prior to COVID, but now they are exacerbated; now they are heightened. They are compounded because of the pandemic, so we need to engage

our women to seek ideas for more innovative solutions, like an economic recovery plan. We need to engage women's groups to ensure that any future economic planning, it needs to take women's existing inequalities into consideration.

So, yes, I am so pleased and very proud to see this step that's being taken, but we have so much more to do. Government needs to really take this on and get prepared in the future more to face the, I would submit, mental health crisis that many women are going to face because of the effects of the pandemic.

It's a progressive, it's a positive step, but more needs to be done. However, I applaud the government for this amendment. I also join with everyone to express our excitement for our colleague who is expecting a child. She will be the first to put this amendment into play, and we look forward to that and supporting that wholeheartedly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before we have another speaker, I think we're going to have a recess for a second and see if I can get those bells stopped.

I ask Members to stay nearby and we will try to get these (inaudible).

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: House Leaders ready?

Is the Government House Leader ready?

MR. CROCKER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Ready.

Is the Opposition House Leader ready?

MR. BRAZIL: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Yes?

And the Third Party House Leader is ready?

MR. J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Yes. Okay.

Order, please!

We're going to start the proceedings again.

The hon. Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just spend a few minutes to speak. There are a lot of positive changes in the Standing Orders Committee. In section 1.1, now they don't have to stand. This is great for people with disabilities that sometimes may be in the House also, so that's a great addition to it.

In section (3), I know my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands will speak on that one soon, so I'll just skip on that one.

Mr. Speaker, there are some great initiatives here to encourage more women to get in politics and make it more friendly, so I recognize that and I think that's great.

The section (5), more than 200 words, I think that is a good move also because some people do speak a bit slower than others.

The one I have a problem with is section (2). I just want to explain why and how that came up. I'll just read it into the record: "Except as noted in these Standing Orders, all other motions, including adjournment motions, shall be decided without debate or amendment."

How this came about was when we were into the pandemic, there was a motion made. I requested that we could speak a few extra minutes on health care. There were a lot of issues not being addressed through health care, and I wanted to bring it up in the House of Assembly. We were denied the opportunity to bring it up in the House through questions.

What we did, myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, to ensure that we got our points out – and people were in distress on why we needed it done – we spoke during the adjournments. Now we can see that's been stopped. In my opinion, people very rarely speak on adjournments, but because of the dire circumstances and the dire needs of the people

that were contacting myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands we spoke on the adjournments to get our points across.

One of the issues that I did was because of a guy who couldn't get in for eye surgery. Luckily, he had surgery just a while back. He had one eye done and now he has to do the surgery on the other eye. It wasn't that it was just some flimsy medical conditions that I was trying to get brought across to government; it was very serious issues. Now I can see that in *Standing Orders* they're shutting down an opportunity in dire circumstances that a Member, especially if you're an independent, to raise issues in the House of Assembly.

I always thought that the House of Assembly would be more inclusive and be able to speak in dire circumstances, but obviously the Committee feels that we should shut that down. I disagree with that. In general, the whole concept is great but that part of the changes to the *Standing Orders*, I disagree with totally, Mr. Speaker, because it does stifle debate. It stops people, like myself who are stifled by government, to not bring up very serious issues. It was something that I knew you could always speak on, but it was very seldom ever used in my years. When both parties and everybody agree, you shut down the House, you shut down, but when it comes to very serious medical issues I refuse to be quiet on it because I wasn't given the opportunity.

Go back again, it was during the pandemic and probably a month, two months ago when this House was open we asked for two extra questions and we were refused by government – absolutely refused by government to bring up medical questions. I disagree with that. I just want it on the record that it's an opportunity for any government that's in to stifle debate in this House. We always talked about let's be open, we're all inclusive, bring up your ideas, but this is one area where definitely you're not practising what you preach, I say to both parties – to all parties, actually.

I can assure people in this House there will come a time when some government get a majority and you don't have the opportunity to bring very serious points across, that you're going to wish that was there. I can assure you of that. You can

go back in *Hansard* from this day and remember I said this. I know how it works. I've been in government and it's something that's very rarely used. I guess myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands are the ones to blame for this because we refused to be stifled. I'll just move on from that but it is an opportunity to stifle debate in the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I have is 9(2): “The chair of the committee, in consultation with the clerk of the committee, may determine the manner of the meeting.” Many Committee meetings, you should always have consultation because if a Chair of the Committee sometimes got their own way, if it's the government or the Opposition, you may want to sway one way or the other the way the meeting is determined. So that part there will be in consultation with other Members of the Committee. I feel that it should be in consultation with other Members of the Committee.

I've been on Committees where before you even start the meeting, you have very frank discussions with the Chair on how the meeting was put forth, how it was arranged, what's on the agenda. I warn people of that, of having a Chair of the Committee who's going to be dealing with the Clerk of the Committee on how it's going to be done. That will cause problems down the road; I can assure you that.

We all know politics. We know when it's something very contentious and when we know it's going to a Committee, there's always going to be some way to sway it one way or the other. If you are leaving it up to the Chair and the Clerk of the Committee, I can assure you that somewhere, someone is going to use that to their advantage to sway the meetings. That's just politics. You want something done a certain way; if you're in Opposition or the Third Party, you're going to want it done another way. This is going to be problems down the road; I can assure you of that.

I'm just throwing this out if anybody wants to make an amendment that if there's a Committee that you held in this structure, the meeting will be in consultation with other Committee Members, instead of just having the Chair of the Committee.

I'll leave section (3) up to my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands; he will have a few words on that.

Mr. Speaker, most of this is a great piece of document. It does show up a lot of things in the House of Assembly and I will be supporting this here. There may be some consultation on section (3), but in general it makes it friendlier, it makes it more efficient and I just want to thank you for your time to speak on that.

I just feel a bit sad that I caused section (2), and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, but on behalf of the people that I represented for that week when on adjournment and on debates we brought up those issues, I make no apologies for that. Because of that, you can see how now you're being stifled. Independents are being stifled in this House.

When we met with the Premier last Wednesday, the Premier said no, no, it'll be open. You'll have the same opportunities, but now this is put in front of us here today. Obviously, this didn't go through the Premier. I'm not even sure if the Premier seen it, but he was saying last week that we would all have an opportunity to speak in the House; there would be no changes in the House. Here we are today with the changes in the House to stifle people and emergencies.

I feel sad for it, actually. I feel sad because there may be more independents. Now, if there are more independents there are less opportunities for them to be able to speak in the House and bring up very important issues.

I say to the Premier, when you have meetings with MHAs and you're making a commitment, you should pass it on to your Government House Leader and Deputy Premier that if there's a commitment made there's going to be more opportunity, but here you are stifling in this House of Assembly an opportunity that was rarely used, but only in dire circumstances, to be able to speak on issues.

I thought health care, heart operations, eye surgery and people in hospital for 25 or 30 days waiting to get surgery were dire circumstances that you should have brought up, which we did bring up, but because of that now we're being

stifled because of it. I think it's a sad day for democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak to this as well. Again, I don't want to repeat everything my colleague for Humber - Bay of Islands has said, but, no doubt, there are some good things in here, and I want to make that quite clear.

The issue around Members who may have children and making it more family friendly, if you will, and encouraging women to be involved in politics more than they are now, I think that's a great thing. Recognizing the piece that perhaps somebody has some – whether it's a disability, a medical issue or whatever and they can't stand, to make it a fair and even playing ground for everybody and be inclusive, I support all that 100 per cent.

There are a number of other things in here which have already been talked about, and I'm not going to get into it, but from a general point of view, the things that are in here I do support. A but is coming, though, of course; an however moment.

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker – and I've raised this in the House of Assembly a number of times – I understand the traditions. I understand the traditions of the House of Assembly and how the things always were, but times change, things evolve; hence, the reason why we're putting in legislation to allow a Member to bring a child into the House of Assembly in recognition of that, and that's a good thing. I totally agree with it.

Something else that has changed, whether people like it or not or agree with it or not – and people have their own views one way or the other – but the reality of it is that we have in this case, in this Assembly, two duly elected independent Members. And I'm not talking someone who got tossed from a party and got stuck in the corner, which I was one of those for a couple of years, but since that time I've gone

back to the people in my district and I got elected as an independent. They rejected all three parties. They chose me. The same thing for the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

Federally, an acquaintance of mine, who I have a lot of respect for, Jody Wilson-Raybould did it federally. The people of her riding decided they didn't want any of the parties, they wanted her. So we're seeing that.

In the last election I think there were nine independents that ran, or something like that, and I suspect there are going to be more independents who are going to run the next time. Now, whether they'll get elected again or not, I don't know. Whether I'll get elected or not again, I don't know. I feel comfortable. I'm not afraid to go to the polls tomorrow, I'll tell you that, but I don't take it for granted. I will run again and hopefully I'll be back here again.

The bottom line is we have to recognize that this is a new dynamic. There are independents, and the rules and the *Standing Orders* have all been based on the concept of political parties. That's what the rules have always been. That's what the tradition has been. Well, guess what? Times have changed. That's no longer the reality, like it or not, too bad. If you don't like it, tough, that's reality.

Our *Standing Orders* and our rules, in order to be inclusive and democratic, the same rights that are afforded to Members who are parts of political parties should be afforded to every Member of this House of Assembly, including independent Members, and we haven't seen a lot of movement on that. Even the Standing Orders Committee itself, the group that came up with this, did not include independent Members.

It is one thing, I suppose, we didn't get a vote on it, but we didn't even get a say on it. Nobody even consulted. They consulted with each other and came up with this. Nobody came to us and said, here's what we're thinking about doing with this or this, what do you think?

I know somebody can stand up and say you could have wrote the Committee yourself or you could have tuned in, but the reality of it is if there was true inclusion here we would have – at least, at the very least – a system in place

whereby we would have been notified in advance, here's what we're looking at doing, what do you think? That wouldn't have been too much to ask I don't think, but it didn't happen.

Certainly, as a result, we've seen one particular piece here that my colleague referenced under section 6, point two, about no debate on adjournment motions any more. That was changed and, as he said, we know why it was changed. Everyone here knows why it was changed. It was changed because the last time the House was open the three parties got together and they decided how the week was going to go. Here's what we're going to do; here's how long we're going to stay open; here's how Question Period is going to go; here's what we're going to debate; here's when we're going to adjourn.

They decided all that amongst themselves, and nobody had the courtesy to come to myself or the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands and discuss it, other than that's what we're doing, too bad if you don't like it, go along with it. As a result, the Official Opposition in particular – and I understand they're the Official Opposition, I'm not disputing any of that. They get the lion's share of Question Period, fair enough. The NDP on a much lesser scale, but they'll get their three or four questions everyday during that time.

For myself and the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, we get a question each, or in this case we decided two questions – we'll rotate. I'll take two questions one day a week and next week you take two. The last time I think I got the two questions and he got no questions.

Even though we're in the middle of a pandemic, even though we had all these issues going on in our district, we were being bombarded with emails and Facebook messages and phone calls from our constituents who had concerns about what was happening with health care and people requiring surgeries and a whole host of other issues, but we never had the opportunity to raise them; therefore, we had to find a way. We had to find a way.

The way that was made available to us – which I don't really see what the big deal was, to be honest with you. The House of Assembly doesn't close until 5:30 p.m. That's the time. We

all know that's the time. Sometimes it closes 5 o'clock or quarter to 5 or whatever when you get through legislation.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: Yes, or 10:30, the Member said, last night.

The reality of it is that under the normal *Standing Orders*, the House is open until 5:30. All we did was if we couldn't get the questions in and no one was willing to co-operate with us and we never had the opportunity to bring forth those concerns, well, when five minutes to 5 came and the motion to adjourn was called, we said, okay, we're supposed to be here until 5:30, so we have 35 minutes so we're just going to take an opportunity to raise the questions that we were asked by our constituents to raise. For that we were accused of hijacking the agenda of the government. I believe the Leader of the Official Opposition said it was a publicity stunt, he told the media. Imagine the Leader of the Official Opposition talking about publicity stunts in the media.

We were accused of all that, and why? Because we were trying to find a way to raise issues on behalf of our constituents, which we were all elected to do. If the time is there available to us, we're all here anyway. The reality of it is that it's not as if by shutting down at 5 o'clock or half past 4 that that's somehow saving money. All the Members are in here anyway. You all have to come in from out of town. All the expenses are all the same regardless of we're here until 5:30, 6:30, 10:30 or 12:30 at night. I know nobody wants to be here that late, but in terms of cost to the public, there's no difference.

I didn't see a thing wrong with what we did, to be honest with you. It wasn't a publicity stunt and it wasn't about just trying to make a point or to be nasty or to try to not co-operate. It was about legitimately trying to find a way to bring forth issues on behalf of the people that elected us. Now this has been shut down and I feel that it certainly does not reflect the spirit of co-operation that the Premier expressed to us. Quite frankly, I find it just being vindictive. That's my view on it – nothing but vindictiveness. Anyway, I don't agree with it; I don't support that part.

The other thing that I want to reference in particular, I want to reference bullet point (3): "That the Standing Orders be amended by adding immediately after SO 9 the following: SO 9.1-Manner of meeting." This has been put in place to deal with virtual proceedings of the House of Assembly, which I support. Interestingly enough, this was talked about yesterday when we were talking about Interim Supply and we were saying that we had to have 90 days and we said, no, we can have a virtual meeting of the House if we need more Interim Supply. Interestingly that this ties in nicely to that.

It's just basically recognizing the fact that in a COVID environment we could have virtual proceedings of the House of Assembly to deal with the business, whatever that business might be. Interim Supply is a great example if we needed more. Nothing wrong with it; I agree with it 100 per cent. But here's the little rub that I have a problem with, again, in recognition of the fact that we have two independent Members duly elected and we could very well have more independent Members next time around. I can't predict the future but who knows, it could happen.

Under that section it says: "The House may meet in a hybrid of virtual and in-person proceedings and the Speaker" – fine – "following consultation with appropriate officials" – fine, here's the rub – "and the House leaders, may determine if those proceedings are required." I don't have a problem with the House Leaders being consulted, obviously they need to be consulted and they should be consulted, but once again no mention of the independent Members. We don't need to be consulted; we'll just go along with whatever you fellows say.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: Yeah, someone said that's the way it should be. No, that's not the way it should be, whoever said it. I can tell you that the people of Mount Pearl - Southlands and the Humber - Bay of Islands disagree with whoever said that. It's not the way it should be.

MR. JOYCE: Tell them to stand up.

MR. LANE: Yes, stand up and say it. Stand up and tell everybody that's the way it should be, that democracy doesn't matter, that the people don't have a right to choose who they want to represent them.

MR. JOYCE: No one stood up.

MR. LANE: Nobody stood up, of course they didn't.

The bottom line is that here we go again, no consultation with the independent Members. That is fundamentally undemocratic. It is undemocratic and we do not support that notion.

With that said, I'm going to bring forward an amendment to the *Report of the Standing Orders Committee* of September 14, 2020. I will move, seconded by the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands that recommendation (3) of the report be amended by inserting immediately after the words "House Leaders," the words "and any independent Members."

I have copies here for everybody, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: We're going to recess to examine the amendment and report back in a few minutes.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Opposition House Leader ready?

Order, please!

We've considered the proposed amendments and found it to be in order. So we're now going to begin a debate on the proposed amendments.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And this time for real, because my colleague from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville is always saying every time you say you're only going to be a minute you go on and you take 10 or 20 or something. This time I'm not. I've said, really, all that I need to say, all I wanted to say about

this. I encourage all Members to give it due consideration.

This is something that, obviously, if it doesn't impact you or your particular party and so on maybe it's not a big deal, but I think we all have to look at it from the perspective of the rights of the people of the province in every district to be represented. That's what it comes down to.

We have 40 districts and people voting in 40 districts, and the whole idea of an election and a democratic process is that the people get to decide who they want to represent them. In this case, the people in two of the 40 districts decided they wanted independent Members to represent them, and all we're asking for is a little bit of courtesy and respect. We're not trying to take over any agenda. We're not trying to say that whatever we say go, we understand that. It's a numbers game, we understand that. It's all really a number's game.

We understand the government is the government and we understand the role of the Official Opposition and the Third Party. We're not knocking any of that. I know sometimes we can get a little bit passionate about speaking about these things but I put it on the record, neither one of us are trying to be adversarial, we're really not. We're just trying to be included. That's all we're asking for. A bit of courtesy, a bit of respect, to be included.

In this case, all we're saying is if you're going to go to a virtual session just let us know. If you're going to consult with the Opposition Leaders just give us a call and say, b'ys, we're going to go with a virtual session. Here's when we're doing it, here's why we're doing it, here's how it's going to work. We're not going to say, no, it's not going to happen. We couldn't stop it if we did.

All we're asking for is a bit of heads up and just include us in it. The discussion we had with Premier Furey just a couple of days ago was around that. We're here to co-operate and work with everybody.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador have been quite clear, they want us all to work together. Right now, at this particular stage, we're in the middle of a pandemic. On top of

that the ship is sinking, taking on water fast, from a fiscal point of view, financial point of view, and people are scared. And they have a right to be scared and worried; worried about what's going to happen with this province, worried about their jobs, worried about electricity rates. There are a lot of people worried about a lot of things and they want us to all be working, co-operating together, and that's all we want to do.

All we're saying in this particular thing, a very simple thing, pick up the phone and give us a call and let us know what you're going to do. It's just a gesture to demonstrate that we're all in this together. If we feel that everyone is willing to work together than we're willing to work with you, but if we're going to be continually left out and shut down and so on, then we will have no choice than to find every mechanism possible to get our points across. We don't want to have to do that. There's nothing in it for us, but if constituents come to us with issues, we have to find ways of getting stuff forward. We just want to be included. That's all we're asking for.

That's all I'll say, Mr. Speaker. I hope that Members take that into account and hopefully support the amendment.

Thank you.

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

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

I certainly take seriously the comments that have been made by the independent Members and their concerns about having a voice here within the House of Assembly. I support that. I cannot support this motion as is written.

My concern is with the "and any independent Members," in terms of if we have five independent Members, if we have 10, are we now looking at consulting 10 individuals and they must all be on side? Right now, as House Leaders, they represent a group of people they speak for and it streamlines the process. It works here with two independent Members easily enough.

What I would support and what I would suggest – and I'm supportive of the idea – is that we do have a Standing Orders Committee and what I would support strongly is that this idea be brought back to that Committee with the intention of finding a mechanism of making sure that independent Members – because that is a reality – have a voice in this. How do we work it?

I can tell you that in my own previous experience, either with the Canadian Teachers' Federation or the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, that usually when an amendment like this came up, it was rarely decided, especially if it was first on the floor, in that body. It was usually sent back to a committee for proper consideration.

In this case, I can see where a jurisdictional scan of how other jurisdictions include independents into the decision-making, and more importantly, if there's not, how we can do that. I would definitely support that notion and bring it back with an actual proposal that we could then look at.

I'm not opposed to the idea of having any independent Member or independent Members being represented or having a voice. I totally get where they're coming from. They made a decision to sit as independents. More importantly, their constituents made a decision to send them back as independents and we might very well see more of that.

How do we accommodate that? I think we need to find some way in the Committee to have a good look at that. Not with the intention of whether it should or shouldn't work, but with the intention of how do we make it work. Maybe not just some virtual proceedings but in other aspects of it as well. I would support that.

Right now, I have no way of really knowing how amendments are made here and the precision with which they are made. We can probably come back with something but I would like to see if we needed a resolution to direct the Committee, or if we as individuals or I as House Leader would send a letter to the Chair of the Committee to have a look at that. That's something I would do.

This amendment as is written causes some concerns, but I would support the whole notion of having the Standing Orders Committee to look at this seriously and to bring back a recommendation as to how we go about including all Members, and recognize the rights and privileges of those who are sitting as independents. As it stands, I cannot support this amendment but I do support the principle behind it.

Thank you.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for his statements on that and his frankness on it. I understand that (inaudible) is great and I'll just give you some good examples. The virtual when they did the – we could do this virtually. The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands is on the Committee.

When we had issues with the school buses across the province, we decided – the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands – that we would have our own discussions and he would bring all the concerns to the school boards. It worked well.

I understand the concern saying that if there's more. I'm of the belief that if there are six, seven – what's wrong with a teleconference with six or seven and say here's what we're doing. The concern you're going to have – and maybe someone else here may be an independent or maybe more here – if there's a major issue like the pandemic, when you're coming back to the House, and if you're going to have a virtual session and constituents have concerns asking you when is the House open, what are you going to do? You're left in the dark and you can't answer those questions. This is when you're left out. People get frustrated and anxiety steps up when there's a lack of information.

Throughout this pandemic – and I will give government credit on a lot of those issues. I know Dr. Haggie's office, we've been in contact. We spoke about his EA last night; just great, fantastic, it worked well. The Department

of Education officials, we worked well with them during this.

Once we can get the information and pass it on to the constituents, it eases a lot of concerns and a lot of anxiety. If you're left out as an independent, and if any Member is left out, you can't answer to your constituents about why and how you're going to raise their concerns because you don't know, yet you're duly elected in this House.

I understand the concern from the Member for St. John's Centre about what if there's a big number. That is a concern. If there's a conference call and you want to make a friendly motion, you can. Here's the concern I have also, it may sound – but it's going to go back to the Committee and there are no independents on the Committee. So, again, no independents on the Committee. They're going to say, okay, well, there's nothing we can find. I take your points very serious, what if there are eight or 10 or something. It would become a bit of an issue.

Then, again, in our conversations with Premier Furey he said you will be included, you will be part of it, you will know things that are happening. I think he means it. I honestly feel he means to be inclusive for the independents. Because if there is an election call tomorrow, I'm sure that Premier Furey and the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the NDP are going to be down in Humber - Bay of Islands knocking on doors trying to get a candidate and getting a candidate and meeting with people in the area. I know that, but if you're going to do that and you're going to say, by the way, if you elect an independent they're going to be left out of it. That won't sound very good.

Maybe there are going to be other independents, maybe not. I don't know, but it's always nice to have it in place so that you will be consulted. Because I can tell you – and I'll use the Minister of Health as a good example – if the Minister of Health didn't include the independent, I know for myself, and I'm sure I'm speaking on behalf of the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, if he didn't give us access to his office to get information, there would be a lot more anxiety in Humber - Bay of Islands, Corner Brook area than what there was during this pandemic. I can assure you that. This is what we're saying,

without the information that we can pass on to our constituents, it's going to cause a lot of anxiety.

I'm going to support the motion and the amendment, obviously. I just think that we can find a better way to do it. It's up to both sides.

Besides those two points that I made, it's a great piece of paper for a lot of great orders here in this House of Assembly. I'll be supporting the amendment and, hopefully, the House will accept the amendment or make a friendly amendment. The Deputy Premier can make a friendly amendment to include the independent on the Committee and bring it back to Committee to see if they can find some resolution.

What the Member for St. John's Centre suggested, I would agree with that friendly amendment if the Deputy Premier or the Government House Leader wants to make that. I'm sure we'll be fine with that.

MR. LANE: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said we'll be fine with that, if that wants to be done, bring it back and consult us on this.

I'll close it at that and thank the Committee for all the work they did because, obviously, there's a lot of work going through this, and the staff that was on the Committee for doing this. We need to do this on a regular basis, a yearly basis or every second, third year to bring up the *Standing Orders* to match our culture, match how things change and match pandemics that we have here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further speakers?

Seeing none, I'm going to call a vote on the amendment. Copies of the amendment have been circulated to the caucuses, I believe. I'm going to call the question.

All those in favour of the amendment as proposed by the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The amendments are defeated.

On motion, amendment defeated.

MR. SPEAKER: We're back to the main motion now.

Further speakers to the main motion?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

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

I'm happy to see this report. When most people look at these reports they look at it as housekeeping, and, yes, there's a bit of housekeeping in there but there are three areas that I'm going to focus on as quick as I can. And no reflection on anyone else, but we probably should have been focusing on these sooner than later, but it's good that we're getting to it. That's in dealing with virtual committees and virtual meetings and the like. I think that's something very progressive that we need to be doing and, unfortunately, it took something like COVID to push us along that route.

In dealing with virtual meetings, I think it's the way of the future. I think we need to be doing more of this. I think it highlights also for businesses and education facilities and anything around this Island that if you're able to do things virtually, then we should be doing it. It does highlight some other challenges around broadband Internet across the province, so we need to be dealing with that.

The other issue there that was highlighted, and that's in terms of a Member to rise at his or her place. I think that's progressive in terms of it dealing with disabled individuals that may not be able to do so. Again, very progressive. I say progressive; I mean, we're moving forward, but in actual fact this should've been looked at a lot sooner, but we're moving forward with it and that's a good thing. I think we need to look at other orders and such in that light as well.

The amendment that's around infant care, I 110 per cent support that. I live in a household with three daughters and my wife. I know how progressive they are and how well they've done. I'm quite proud of them all in terms of their education and moving forwards in their jobs. I'm also aware of the challenges that are faced by many women and many of the decisions they make around their careers. It relates a lot to they also want to have families. Creating a progressive workplace that allows an infant to be brought to work is, again, something we should've looked at sooner, but I'm glad we're looking at it now.

I will look at the clause. I assume when we talk about infant, we're looking at the definition under the *Child Care Act*, which is from birth to two years old. Because I could have some older infants, I'm sure, that we might have running around, but I guess we're looking at birth to two years old and that's good. I do acknowledge that this clause is predominantly dealing with mothers, although it does say parents, so that is a good thing there because I guarantee you, if my wife had to work and I had to mind the infant, it would be right here with me too.

But it does affect predominantly women. When we look at our workforce, when we look at our population, we know that our natural population is declining. Of course, natural population is your fertility rate versus your mortality. So we have an older population, we have an aging population where more people are dying than are being born. So anything that we can do to allow families and mothers in particular to look after children while also pursuing a career should be utmost what we do.

I think right now as a government, as a House of Assembly we really need to be leading by example. I think this is a good start on that. When we look at the virtual meetings and look at putting in measures to allow disabled people to participate, and of course to allow mothers and mothers to be to participate.

People up in my district will know – I mean, Topsail - Paradise is a very young district. They know my office is – I always promote I'm a child-friendly and pet-friendly office. I have toys there for kids that come in. It should not be a detriment to people meeting with me. Bring your

kids. I have dog beds and dog toys on the floor. Bring your pets. And that's the way we have to be. Of course in some cases pets are kids to some people. So we need to ensure that we're open to that. My office is certainly open to that.

A politician, they always talk about you go around cutting ribbons and kissing babies. I'm not that keen on the cutting ribbons, but b'y, I can tell you, I'll be the first one to run over and grab a baby to hold. And it got nothing to do with politics. So the Member for Mount Scio I'm going to tell her right now and give her a warning in advance that I'll be first in line to hold that baby when he or she or them show up here.

I think this is a wonderful change, amendment we're putting forward here. It is progressive. It's just going to do so much more. It runs a lot deeper than just simply having a Member come in with their child here in this House. It lets the public know that, look, we need to be progressive; we need to do things to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the workforce.

We talk about child care. Child care is a huge piece of this equation as well. And there are people out there who cannot afford child care, so if we're going to have these progressive workforces where you can have your child with you, next to you and work away – and I think a lot of people are realizing that with COVID where we work virtual – then we need to promote that.

I know my wife on our first child was able to take her child to work. She actually had the crib and everything set up in her office next to the desk. No one was worse for the wear on that, other than some people probably didn't work as much because they were in to hold the baby, but that's one thing you go with.

I won't keep you much longer on this; I just wanted to speak to this. I wish the Member for Mount Scio all the best in health. We're all looking forward to the baby. I felt bad for her last night, 10:30, I really did, when you should have been home resting, but I'm sure you get that from your husband.

All the best and I really appreciate what we are doing here with the *Standing Orders*.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say that it was a privilege to actually work on this Committee with these Members, especially allowing an infant into the House with the care of their mother. It's kind of interesting that we – and I'm sure the Deputy Premier can understand this, when we were to talk about that question my first thing was we don't already have that?

It's nice that we were able to move forward in this more modern world. It's nice that we're following the other jurisdictions of this country of providing a space that a mother can look after their child in their workspace, especially here in the House of Assembly. This House of Assembly is a part of this province. It represents everybody in this province; therefore, families are a big part of this province, so making this space family-friendly is very important. I congratulate all the Members here for agreeing unanimously that this is a family-friendly environment and we move forward.

I also want to mention we talk about standing in place and speaking, which is a long time-honoured tradition in the Westminster system, but also it can be a hindrance for people with disabilities. I'm very happy that we are moving forward with that, allowing people who cannot stand in their place and speak. It's very important.

We all have to do it now with the current restrictions with COVID and so we now can see that standing in your place can sometimes be harder for others. Now I'm glad to say that people with disabilities and stuff hopefully will see in this House that they are also accommodated and can also voice their opinions in debate in this House in a safe manner for them as well. This is great stuff that we're moving forward as a province and making this

House a more inclusive place for all individuals to work and a place for debate. Really, most of what I want to say is that I'm very happy to be a part of this and that we are now moving forward with these progressive changes as a House of Assembly and making this place a family friendly safe space for all individuals to work, debate and discuss the matters of this province.

I want to thank all Members of the Committee as well, and all Members of this House as we all seem to agree that this is a good path forward as a House of Assembly and making it an inclusive and great environment to work in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to speak briefly on the amendment; especially – well, the only one I'm going to focus on is the changes to Standing Order 22. I want to talk about why it's important.

I think this House of Assembly – it's such a privilege to be here. When we speak we should be speaking on things that matter to us as MHAs for our district and for the province. I also think we should be judged on what we speak about. What that means is if it's so important to you to bring forward to the House of Assembly, it's very, very important and that matters to you. I think you should be judged on that. If I'm wasting your time talking about frivolous things or if I have my own agenda, I think you should judge me on that. I really think it's important.

I really want to thank the Minister of Digital Government. I'm not thanking you for having a baby or whatever, but basically for giving cause to this important issue. It's very, very important because if we want acceptance for anything and we talk about diversity, the only way you're going to get acceptance is by having a presence. The only way you're going to normalize something is by having a presence. By having an infant in here with the parent really will start to normalize it.

You know something? We're leaders here. We are MHAs, where we're called honourable. Ministers are actually talked about by their titles and talked to by their titles. It's such an honour to be here. The time here is so important but I just want to talk about normalizing, leading to acceptance, we as leaders here. Why is it so important?

I have a lot of role models, too many to count, but I want to talk a little bit about – a role model to me was my aunt Ruth Flowers, Randy Edmunds's mother, Muriel Anderson's daughter, my mother's sister. She's passed away now. She was awarded the Governor General's Award. She was a member of the – I should have looked it up. I was very, very familiar with it, but she was a leader in our communities on the North Coast.

My grandmother was widowed with six children. My aunt was the oldest of the family, a daughter, a woman. It was very hard to have money in a small community. You had to fish, and that didn't lead to money, it led to credit. My aunt actually needed money to support our family, my mother's family. She wanted a job in the store and she wasn't allowed because she was a woman. She was actually a teenager.

Now, you see the way I fight for my people. When you say no, I say I accept the reasons for your no, but we have to come to a yes.

My aunt got the job. She was the first woman to actually work in the store. One of the few jobs that brought money. Do you know something? Presence leads to acceptance.

We talk about diversity, but we have to make sure that if we want women in government, we have to find a way that women can be present in government, and that leads to acceptance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. EVANS: Another one of my role models was Dr. Penny Allderdice, who discovered the Allderdice syndrome. She was a research doctor, a female in the '60s and '70s, and I worked for her as a genetic student.

I don't know how I got the job, actually. I went over there and all the stuff I was doing, I was

learning a lot and one time I asked her, I said: Dr. Allderdice, why did you hire me? She said: Lela, you come from a place where people don't actually go into post-secondary. She said: I need you to be in post-secondary. I know what it's like to be a woman surrounded by men who don't listen to you, even though you're smarter than them. She said: I need you to go to school. I need you to succeed, and how are you going to succeed without any money?

What she was saying was she wanted me there as a presence from the North Coast so the people on the North Coast could see not only a person going into post-secondary, but a woman. The thing about it is we have to have presence to have acceptance. It's very, very, very important for us – very important.

I have something written down here, it says: Women should be allowed the opportunity to participate in all job opportunities. Now I used the word, allowed, because you know something, right now a lot of women are not allowed to go into jobs. In actual fact, there are still some jobs out there where it's an unwritten rule that women are not allowed to apply, and we're not saying as women that you should give us the jobs. It's not about giving women jobs, it's about giving women the opportunity to access the jobs.

You know something, we will get the jobs. We will do well in the jobs on our own merit and then we will gain acceptance. Presence actually leads to acceptance. It's very, very important for us.

The thing is with changing this rule, it's not about just the infant; it's about normalizing infants in the workplace. It's talking about diversity, it's talking about opportunities. It's talking about opportunities for single males and single females, as my fellow MHA talked about. It's not just about women.

The thing about it is we have to be able to create opportunities for people. As my fellow MHA talked about women, our numbers, she used the word: awful. The thing about it is we have to lead by example. So we need changes, and not just changes here for the House of Assembly but for all jobs, all job workplaces. It's very, very important for us.

It starts with child care; we need support for child care. Here we are decision makers, and everybody in the House saw what COVID did to us. COVID really brought a lot of problems to light, and one of the problems is staying at home with your kids. Who stayed home with the kids? Most of it was women, engineers, doctors, nurses, educators. The thing about it is women had to stay home to be the supporters. It brings that to light. So we need to make changes, and like I say, having the presence lead to changes.

Another issue is rotational workers. I remember back in 2002, I was on a project. I was just hired by Inco and we had the Premier come in, we had the MPs come in, we had the President of Inco come in, and I was there on the ground running around because I was trying to manage everything and it was just really funny. They wanted to take pictures of me because I was a woman walking around with a hardhat on. They could tell by my boots that I was actually doing the work. It wasn't just for the photo op, and I said, no, no, I'll get you somebody, and I went down and I got somebody. It was an Innu woman who was driving the 769 – great big trucks, the biggest trucks we had on site then, which is actually small compared to some of the larger ones now.

One of the things that really surprised people – they took the pictures of her and all that and they just started talking to her. One of the things is they were in construction, both her and her husband started working and all of a sudden they had kids, somebody had to stay home with the rotation because they were on a six and two – six weeks in, two weeks off. Of course they both couldn't do it. So what ended up happening was the woman kept the job and the man went home and looked after the kids. And the Premier – I won't say his name – and everybody was very impressed with that. They said: Why did that happen? She said: Because I'm the better worker and I'm making more money.

The thing about it is presence leads to acceptance, and we need to make sure that women have opportunities too. I'm not going to continue to go on and on.

The independent down there talked about Jody Wilson-Raybould. Do you know something? She is a huge role model for me. She talks about

honesty and integrity and it's something that we could all learn from. But it's very important for putting everything in context. We've got to make sure that we're inclusive; we've got to make sure that we're allowing for diversity. Women have 52 per cent of the population, yet in 2020 it's sad – I won't say it's shameful, because I use that word too much. I don't want you to become too used to me saying that. It's really sad to still be talking about trying to increase the numbers of women in the workplace. It's really sad to talk about trying to increase the number of women actually at the government level in the House of Assembly that influences the decisions, that brings in changes in law. Also it's very, very, very sad to talk about non-traditional jobs for women.

The only way we can actually get acceptance is by having presence, so then we don't talk about non-traditional jobs because everyone then has opportunity. I just want to thank you for actually providing this opportunity to bring this to our attention and to make sure that we actually make changes. It's very, very important for us to have presence that leads to acceptance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

MS. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to just speak briefly on point (4) of the *Report of the Standing Orders Committee*. So I believe I might've been an instigator for this change for allowing that an infant is not included in that definition, especially if they're cared for by a Member who is that infant's parent.

Obviously, I'm pregnant, and in August I thought, oh, I should let the Speaker and the Clerk know. I sent them both an email and I was very impressed by how supportive everyone has been. The House of Assembly and Transportation and Infrastructure, I believe, in short order, added change tables to the washrooms outdoors and changed them both to be gender neutral. That's very much appreciated. Thank you very much. It's very supportive for

women who are having children, but also for any of our male colleagues whose partners have children or who might have children themselves, or infants, specifically. I just wanted to say thank you and I'm very supportive of this.

I have three weeks left. Who knows what's going to happen, but I am planning on taking a few days off because the parental leave in one of our policies allows Members to not be here for one sitting without having to get special medical permission, which I didn't realize that was the case. I won't be using too much of that, but we will see how it goes. A week or two maybe, and then I'll be in with my little infant hopefully.

I'm going to hopefully be wearing him, or I have a little travel bassinet, so he might be here asleep next to me. If he's too disruptive or something, I'll make other arrangements. There's a big, long line of people who are waiting to hold him and stuff. Anyway, we won't be too disruptive, I promise.

I just wanted to say I support this. Thank you to the Members of the Committee and the House of Assembly and all staff who've been very supportive. I really appreciate all the other Members' positive words as well, so thank you very much. Hopefully, in a few weeks I'll bring my little guy in with me.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Any further speakers to this motion?

Seeing no further speakers, I'm going to call the vote on the motion.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If it's the will of the House, I would suggest we recess now. I think we're all anxiously looking forward to getting outside and supporting the oil and gas workers. So we'll take our lunch recess a little earlier today and we'll reconvene, Mr. Speaker, at 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: The House is now recessed until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Admit strangers.

Order, please!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Terra Nova, Exploits, Placentia - St. Mary's, Conception Bay South and Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. I understand that the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate will ask to present a Member's statement by leave.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, today I want to talk about an individual in my District of Terra Nova, a business owner and operator and an avid community supporter.

We all know how hard COVID has been on students, and extremely difficult on graduates of both high school and kindergarten. Early in May, this individual called a parent of a high school graduate that is also a friend and a kindergarten teacher because he felt bad that the students wouldn't get their planned graduations. He wanted to do something special for the students.

He decided to call a local store with a bakery and order 111 individual cakes, each individually named for each high school grad to be picked up on their graduation day. The bakery staff stayed all night to get this order ready for May 8.

The high school students, parents and staff were grateful, but not surprised by this individual's

actions. He is well-known in the community for helping people when they are in need, even so much as fixing basketball nets and never expecting anything in return.

He chose to do the same thing for the kindergarten grads, all 93 of them, and they were delivered Monday, June 8.

I'd like to thank this individual, Mr. Craig Haines, once again for his support and congratulate all the graduating classes of 2020. Not all heroes wear capes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Courtney Locke, a graduate of Botwood Collegiate, recently was awarded the 2020 Ted Rogers Scholarship. This scholarship helps inspire young leaders to overcome barriers to access post-secondary education and help fulfill their educational dreams.

Ms. Locke is currently a student at Memorial University faculty of nursing. She is a caring, compassionate and active student who thrives on academic success. Courtney also plays an active role in school functions as well as community involvement and volunteerism, such as volunteering at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Centre, the 2019 flu clinic, the Botwood Boys and Girls Club and community committees.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members in the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Ms. Courtney Locke on receiving the 2020 Ted Rogers Scholarship and wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Dildo area has a long history, going as far back as 2000 BC when Maritime Archaic people resided at Anderson's Cove. By 700 AD, people of the Dorset culture had inhabited Dildo Island.

During Dildo Days 2020, the local service district, in partnership with the recreation committee, hosted a community flag contest. On Monday, August 31, I attended an event in Dildo whereby the community celebrated in social distancing fashion the new community flag and the winner of the community flag contest, nine-year-old Addison Stead.

The beautiful flag flies proudly near Jack Spratt's Brook in the heart of the community. The colours that Addison used are the same as the colours in the Newfoundland and Labrador flag. The anchor on the flag symbolizes security and strength. The codfish represents the community's history in the fishery and the importance of the cod hatchery on Dildo Island to the economic viability of the residents. The dory on the flag represents the traditional boat that is still used in Dildo today.

The flag as a whole represents the past, the present and the future of the community. Congratulations Addison Stead and the community of Dildo.

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.

Mr. Speaker, today I'm going to go in a direct direction with my Member's statement, as what we normally do. As opposed to highlighting an individual, group or event, I want to give kudos to the many parents, students and teachers who have shown a great deal of patience and understanding while dealing with returning to school during this pandemic.

I've spoken to many parents who have expressed fear, stress and concern with returning to school. We all know this has been a stressful situation

for parents, students and teachers and they're doing their best in these COVID times.

As the school year unfolds, I have no doubt that there will be many more challenges along the way. As we are in these uncertain times, uncharted waters is a more appropriate term. But rest assured, we will get through this together, face whatever challenges come along the way, work together to achieve what we believe is right for all children in my district and, of course, our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Winsor - Buchans.

MR. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I sit in this House today to honour rotational workers throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. There are thousands of workers who leave their homes and province for weeks and months to earn a living, away from their families each and every day. These workers contribute millions of dollars to our economy each year. The stress and hardships these individuals endure with their families should never be underestimated and misunderstood by those who have never done it.

I travelled back and forth from this province and drilled oil for 17 years, putting every cent into the economy of our beautiful province like so many today. My rotational brothers and sisters could have left this province and never returned. No flights, no travel and no strain on their families would have been the easier way. These workers chose not to do that; they seldom do. Instead, they stay home and contribute to the place we call home.

Whether you are throwing tongs, driving vac trucks or working at an isolated camps in Alberta, Saskatchewan, BC or offshore here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we thank you. I have bled with you in minus 50 and will never forget the pride in working side by side to contribute to our families in this province.

To rotational workers in this province, in oil and gas or any other service industries throughout this country, thank you for getting 'er done.

Stay safe and God bless.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate is asking leave to present a statement.

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member has leave.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge a Canadian hockey community from my district that, this year, stands above all others.

On August 15, the Town of Twillingate was crowned Kraft Hockeyville Canada 2020.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BENNETT: The winning bid was the result of an only-in-Newfoundland story of an old aircraft hangar transformed into a sporting centerpiece of a community, and the overwhelming support of the people.

Despite the challenge of COVID-19, supporters of the bid showed an unbeatable passion for hockey and an energy that was inspiring to behold. Credit is due to the effort of the community that rallied support through the airwaves, social media and TV. In classic Newfoundland and Labrador fashion, all the province backed them all the way.

This win will bring new life into the historic George Hawkins Arena, with \$250,000 available for much needed upgrades. On the list is replacing the 33-year-old Zamboni, repairing the roof and improving the ice plant.

The win also brings a future NHL pre-season hockey game to the region. Once again, we get to show the world what Twillingate, and our great province, has to offer.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking everyone who contributed, and together recognize Twillingate as Kraft Hockeyville Canada 2020.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to offer my congratulations to the first graduates of the Drug Treatment Court.

Drug Treatment Court started as an idea in 2016 and grew because of the persistence of the legal community. Today we are celebrating how far we have come, but no one should be more proud than our four clients who have successfully completed this program. They made a choice, and with help along the way, they can stand tall today knowing they are on the road to recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Drug Treatment Court is an alternative approach for offenders with serious drug addictions who commit non-violent, drug-motivated crimes. Drug Treatment Court establishes long-term supports outside the criminal justice system by offering court-monitored treatment, random and frequent drug testing, incentives and sanctions, clinical case management and social services support.

Drug Treatment Court held its first sitting to review applications on January 18, 2019. Over the last 18 months we have had 20 offenders participate actively in various stages of the 12 to 18 month treatment plans.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to recognizing the hard work and accomplishments of the graduates, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our partners including the Provincial Court, the Crown Attorney's office, Public Prosecutions of Canada, the Newfoundland and Labrador Legal Aid Commission, Eastern Health and the Department of Health and Community Services.

I wish the graduates from the court continued success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I join with the minister in congratulating the first graduates of the Drug Treatment Court.

Mr. Speaker, hearing that four individuals are on their road to recovery and towards a life free of drugs and addiction is a very positive story. I congratulate these graduates on their perseverance, their courage and their willingness to participate. I wish them a bright future full of success. I know that these four individuals will continue to be role models for others going through the program.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to take a moment to recognize those who have made the program possible, including the court staff, members of the legal community, health care providers and the families and friends who supported them. I look forward to hearing more success about this program in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Than you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Congratulations to the first graduates of this program and to the many officials in the justice and health fields who worked so very hard to see the drug court come to fruition. I hope to see more Drug Treatment Courts around the province and, in order for them to succeed, more

community-based supports for when participants are past the treatment period.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and, again, congratulations to the graduates.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize Sexual Violence Awareness Week from September 14 to 20.

The theme for Sexual Violence Awareness Week 2020 is “Listen. Believe. Support,” which recognizes the importance of listening to survivors and believing their stories, which will support their healing.

Mr. Speaker, I offer thanks to our leaders and advocates who are raising awareness of the devastating effects of sexual violence this week and every week. For decades they have been informing us all on the insidious and widespread issue of sexual violence, while also highlighting the strength and resilience of survivors and communities through incredible events like the Take Back the Night March.

While COVID-19 has meant many of this year’s events have had to be changed, I applaud our community groups for finding ways to adapt and move many activities online.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to continue to educate themselves on the realities of sexual violence and the impacts it has on survivors. Let us keep survivors and their stories not only close to our hearts, but also use their stories as a driving force to create a province free of violence and inequality. Together, we can create the change we want to see.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I join with the minister in recognizing this week as Sexual Violence Awareness Week.

Mr. Speaker, sexual violence is unacceptable. Violence of all types is unacceptable. It is my hope that through awareness initiatives, such as Sexual Violence Awareness Week, that more supports can be made available to survivors and that we as a society can move towards violence-free communities.

Mr. Speaker, I’d also like to thank the dedicated individuals who work to provide supports to survivors. These individuals, whether paid or volunteer, go above and beyond in providing services whenever called upon. These individuals can be a true beacon of hope for a survivor during a time of despair and desolation.

During this Sexual Violence Awareness Week I will keep survivors of sexual violence in my mind, and I ask that we all do the same and together continue to take action towards a violence-free society.

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.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

I commend the advocates and service providers who work so hard in this area and whose efforts during COVID-19 led to the creation of a helpline for victims of violence.

I encourage all hon. Members and others to participate in the online events these groups are organizing. I also note support is needed not just to help victims heal, support is also needed for

proactive measures towards eliminating sexual violence in our society.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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, the Newfoundland and Labrador federal Liberal caucus was dramatically absent from today's rally in front of the building.

May I ask the Deputy Premier: Where were they?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that the value of the oil and gas industry cannot be overstated nor replaced by any other sector in our economy. Upwards to 30 per cent of our GDP, 13 per cent of our labour compensation, 10 per cent, I think, of all employment is attributed to the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker.

We have been working very diligently and hard as the Liberal provincial government to really work hard with all the industry, so operators, supply services, the unions and we've done a tremendous amount of work. We've written to the Minister of Natural Resources as early as March. We wrote a very comprehensive report in April. We followed that up. We had a press conference, of course, in May, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to ask the Leader of the Opposition, has he written or spoken to Minister O'Regan?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I think the questions here are usually one way.

The next one is: Premier Furey said he's turning over every stone. Obviously, this has not worked. So when is the Premier going to start throwing them instead?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is about people, not politics. I want to remind the Member opposite, we're all in this together. This has been very, very difficult on industry. We've petitioned the federal government, a partner in our offshore, for support. We have written constantly. We have spoken with them endlessly and, hopefully, they will come forward. They have said they're going to come forward. We take them at their word they're going to come forward.

Mr. Speaker, this is important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's not about politics. It's about people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, the government is now down to hopefully this and hopefully that.

The government engaged an individual with ties to the Liberal Party as a special advisor on economic recovery. I would ask the minister: Has the government received the Paul Mill's report, and will they table it?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

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

I say hopefully because we do not have it in our hands, but we are fully anticipating it, Mr. Speaker. I, again, say to the Leader of the Opposition, we've been working on a solution for the oil and gas for quite some time. I'm glad he's now joined that chorus of calls for support.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the Executive Council who engaged a consultant around the economic response to COVID, the short-term measures that were required. I have tabled the report of what we used that funding for, Mr. Speaker, and we've provided those expenditures.

These are short-term efforts to ensure that people get through the COVID crisis, Mr. Speaker. I think we're weathering our storm very well here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: The question was fairly specific: Has the government received the report from Mr. Mills? I didn't hear an answer.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I could look at every single action this government has had and done for the people of the province, for the businesses of the province, for the tourism industry. He worked with deputy ministers and had a whole-of-government approach to supports during this pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, if he wants each individual report, he can see it as we move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, the only problem with that non-answer is that the Premier himself told me six weeks ago that he had the report.

Will you table this report?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

MS. COADY: There is a lot of drama in the room this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I will endeavour – one of our other colleagues in this Chamber has already asked if we could table that report. I'm endeavouring to speak with Executive Council concerning the same and

certainly, if it's available to be tabled, I certainly will ensure that we would be able to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, finally half an answer.

The Mills mandate required him to analyze *The Way Forward on Oil and Gas* and examine practices adopted by other jurisdictions.

Did Mr. Mills recommend exploration incentives such as those of Norway?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, if the Member opposite, the Leader of the Official Opposition, had bothered to read any of the correspondence that we presented to the federal government, which is readily available on our website, he would know that we were calling for incentives in offshore Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I have said to this Chamber, as I have said to the people in the industry, we have asked for those supports. We have spoken to Ottawa about those supports.

Mr. Speaker, we have a tremendous opportunity off the Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have great prospectivity, exploration is essential and important, and we're going to continue to work with industry to make sure it happens. What's he doing?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The recent leak of information at the Labour Relations Board has sent shockwaves throughout the province. This unprecedented act resulted in certification cards being shared with the actual company that was involved in the certification process. The Federation of Labour has called for

an independent investigation, of which the minister has refused to get involved.

How does the minister believe that the Labour Relations Board can investigate itself?

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

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

I welcome my hon. colleague to the post of critic for Immigration, Skills and Labour.

I'm delighted to have this question because it provides an opportunity for me to enlighten the House about the nature of the Labour Relations Board. It is a statutory, it's a judicial guiding body. It sets, makes decisions. It sets and makes decisions which are binding in law. As such, it is a quasi-judicial body. It is the equivalent of a court; therefore, it is very important for political actors, such as ourselves, both the critic and myself, not to intervene in the activities of a quasi-judicial body.

With that said, however, it is important to point out that some time ago an Officer of Parliament, an Officer of the Legislature, the Privacy Commissioner did say he was conducting an independent review of this situation. It is occurring.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Labour Relations Division is responsible for promoting a stable and constructive labour relations climate while fostering productive work relationships. That division falls under the minister's purview and his responsibility.

I ask the minister once again: Why does he feel that he should not be involved in some way in ensuring that this independent investigation gets done and gets done quickly?

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

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member does flatter me, because he says that I'm responsible for fostering a solid labour relations environment.

Mr. Speaker, through the assistance and with the support of conciliation officers from the Department of Labour, we were able to resolve in a very important, very, very testy at times, labour dispute between ferry captains in this province. I just want to take this opportunity to say on behalf of each and every one of us in this House how proud we are and how satisfied we are with the labour professionals within the Department of Immigration, Skills and Labour, for their expertise that they lend to a successful labour relations environment for our province each and every day.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, there is an independent Officer of Parliament conducting an independent investigation. What part of yes does he not understand?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents who signed these cards in good faith have had their confidence shattered and the system we're at now, the company knows who signed up. Employees feel intimidated and fearful of backlash from the company, as some individuals who have signed cards have already been laid off.

What is the minister going to do to protect employees?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I would not wish to prejudice the outcome of the independent investigation of the Privacy Commissioner of Newfoundland and Labrador which was appointed by this House as an independent officer. With that said, I also take consideration to the fact that the chair of the Labour Relations Board has provided a public statement as to how they are dealing with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, to put this in a certain perspective, there are situations that occur in our courts that are maybe somewhat similar. I won't cast a direct parallel to anything that has occurred nationally or directly, but it had the appearance of human error. That will be decided by the Privacy Commissioner.

It is incumbent upon political actors such as ourselves not to interfere with a quasi-judicial body such as the Supreme Court of Newfoundland or the –

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The employees' privacy has been illegally breached. People have signed cards, have been laid off and others are living in fear.

Why does the minister continue to wash his hands of this matter and when is he going to stand up and protect the workers' rights against this gross abuse?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I might ask if this is the position of the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador that political actors should indeed become engaged in the matters of quasi-judicial body. That would be an interesting answer, because I think, as an officer of the court himself at one point in time, the Leader of the Opposition would recognize that matters before quasi-judicial bodies, where there are independent oversights, whether it be from the courts themselves, which is a matter under statutory availability, for such matters or matters which are available for adjudication of officers of Parliament, there is a process in place.

I do not take this responsibility lightly, but I also do not take lightly an intrusion on a quasi-judicial body by a political actor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, this party gets involved when there's an injustice. That's our stance.

Yesterday in the House of Assembly, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure stated 95 per cent of workers on projects in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are being worked on by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Unfortunately, we continue to hear reports of workers in Corner Brook hospital, Central Newfoundland long-term care facility and the Core Science building at MUN.

Can the minister table proof to this claim?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, what I have before me is not coffee-shop news, it's not rumour, it's not gossip. It's a document that was produced in August of 2020. Botwood protective care, 20 out of 20 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; Gander Academy, 48 out of 50 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; Paradise Intermediate, 45 out of 45. Do I need to say where they're from? Coley's Point – where's Coley's Point – 54 out of the 54; Gander long-term care facility, 67 out of 71 employees; Grand Falls long-term facility, 83 out of 86; Bay d'Espoir, Mr. Speaker – wait, hold it. You asked the question; I'll give you the answer – 27 out of 27, 100 per cent. And wait for the final one, the West Coast medical facility, the West Coast hospital 30,265 hours, 27,901 hours, 92 per cent Newfoundland and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: I assume the minister wasn't at the airport to greet the Quebec workers this morning that went to Corner Brook.

Despite cries from workers, the Liberal government still is not committed to putting

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first, requiring all public infrastructure, construction projects to require a community benefits agreement.

I ask the minister: When will you implement such a policy?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, great question; I look forward to answering this question. The Member for Grand Fall-Windsor earlier today admitted to 17 years of finding employment outside of this province as a rotational worker. We are showing 95 per cent.

Might I add, Mr. Speaker, those are only the major projects. Let's look at the road projects in this province. Let's look at J-1 in Clarenville, 100 per cent Newfoundland and Labrador employment. Let's look at the water and sewer. In every one of our districts, 100 per cent owned and operated by Newfoundland and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, workers in our province need jobs and they need them now, and the pandemic is more than enough reason to make that happen. They're ready and they're able to go to work.

Why does the Liberal government continue to sit down when they should be standing up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through a community benefits agreement?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, this year, as we all know, COVID changed the world, but I had the opportunity every Friday to have a meeting with the Construction Association of Newfoundland and Labrador who applauded us on a number of projects that we were getting out in April, May and June of this year, that we were getting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians out to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just over two weeks ago, the minister said the future of the offshore in this province was bright despite the exploration rigs leaving the province. Does he still agree?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

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

I think what I actually said was that I was optimistic about the future of this industry and certainly I still remain optimistic about this. I'm not going to go around living with pessimism because I don't think that's what people want. People want us to look forward, to be optimistic and to do our best. What I will say is we continue to work to try to help workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, to try to help make these projects work.

Again, we spoke about it today. I was glad to see all my colleagues out there in front of this building today in force to support the workers that were gathered there today, and will continue to work for them and on their behalf going forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the executive director of Trades NL said this morning that Husky is a symptom today but not the problem. The reduction in exploration is also a symptom of the stress in the oil industry.

I ask the minister: Have you gotten a commitment for exploration incentives yet?

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

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

We're continuing to do what we can as a province as it relates to the success of the offshore industry. In fact, I have a letter here that my predecessor in the department wrote to the minister and to the federal government, I believe about six months ago, talking about the different things that we need in this province. We pressed for exploration incentives and, as we all know, we continue to wait to see what is coming.

We continue to try to work with the companies which also have a role to play here, because at the end of the day we all want what's best for these workers; we want this industry to thrive. Again, I'm proud of the support here and I was proud to see I think every Member of this House out there today, because at the end it's not about the politics that gets played, it's about finding some solutions to the issues that we're faced with.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Norway's oil industry is withstanding the global downturn. Norway has invested in exploration, meanwhile, the Transocean Barents is leaving our province, the West Aquarius and Henry Goodridge are tied up at Bull Arm and for the first time in 20 years there's no exploration happening in this province.

I ask the minister: When will this exploration resume?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

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

Just a couple of points that I would address here. Again, I would reiterate here that while we're

getting in the cut and thrust of this, I do appreciate the question because they are important.

What I would say are a couple of things. It's very hard to compare Newfoundland and Labrador to Norway per se, given that they are a federation as opposed to a province here. We have to look at Canada as a whole.

The second thing I would say is that there was exploration going on here in this province this summer. In fact, one of the first meetings I took was an excellent meeting with OilCo, with people like Dr. Richard Wright, with Jim Keating, to look at the amazing seismic work that's being done here when we talk about 3-D seismic.

It was only last year, I think – the minister ahead of me might correct the amount – \$640 million in money that was spent on bids. That comes from the exploration work that's being done right here.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to caution you, Minister, based on the crowd of people we saw out on that front step in front of this building today, our oil industry is in serious danger and words are not going to cut it. We all have to step together. We need you guys – you're the government – to speak to the federal government, get them on side.

Without the federal government, our oil industry is in dire straits. Investment dollars will go to countries who value their oil industry and give incentives, like Norway.

I ask the minister: Where are the incentives for our industry? We have to get the federal government onside. Minister, we understand it's incumbent upon the provincial government to get the federal government onside.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

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

I appreciate the comments the Member is making. I get the fact that he's coming around. He is not blaming this particular government for what's going on, but there are a couple points I would have to make that I think are needed out there for clarification.

One is that we are competing in a huge global economy here, one that lost a trillion dollars last year. It's a huge loss, and you only have to read the stories that come out every single day talking about demand issues and supply issues that are going on. That's one of the issues.

Secondly, I do agree that our federal government has a role to play, and we've been at the table with them and talking with them.

Two things I would say; I heard today at the rally as well that I thought I would be remiss if I didn't address it. Your leader has not written once to the federal government until today, and that wasn't to say you needed to do anything, expect to make a political statement and get rid of a minister.

We need to work together on this to get the results for those workers out there in front.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, today, we heard loud and clear the importance of our offshore. Noia and its partners have worked hard to develop a supply and service industry in this province. When the offshore industry prospers, the supply and service industry prospers, and in turn all of our local and small businesses prosper.

I ask the Minister of Finance: How will small and medium local businesses survive if our offshore industry crashes?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

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

I echo the comments of the Member opposite when he mentioned about Noia speaking today. What I can say is I've enjoyed a long relationship with the head of Noia, from the arguing that went on in this House, but right now working together, with not cross purposes but the same purpose of trying to get a solution. Again, we realize the challenges and they trickle down through. We have a huge supply chain that has been built here that is affected by this, as it is affected globally.

What I would also point out that I thought was important that she said today, Charlene Johnson, was that Noia, CAPP and the provincial government work together hand in hand to make sure that we are going to get ahead of this.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Time for a quick question and a quick answer.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, small and medium local businesses are still suffering with the economic crisis caused by COVID. Now they have to worry about the economic impact of cancelled oil projects.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Will your budget include supports for small and medium businesses?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that of course we are concerned; this government has been concerned about the small- and medium-sized businesses that are involved with the oil and gas industry. That's why we've worked so closely with industry over the last number of months.

Of course, the budget is coming up, and I can only say to the Member opposite, of course we're considering all aspects of what we need to do in that budget and we want to continue to support small- and medium-sized businesses.

There are a number of programs under my colleague's Industry, Energy and Technology department as well to support them, and, as you know, the federal government has been supportive during this pandemic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Women have told me it is difficult to find the number for the new Domestic Violence Help Line. In fact, if you search the gov.nl website with the words domestic violence, helpline and NL, you will not find the number. Using those same search keywords in Google or Explorer will eventually get you to the link to a news release partially titled "Provincial Government and the Transition House Association ..." which does have the number if you thought to click that ill-titled link.

Mr. Speaker, a helpline is meant to help, not hinder. Individuals experiencing domestic violence do not need the extra stress of not being able to access the help they need.

I ask the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: What is the Domestic Violence Help Line number and how will you ensure it is easier to find?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for her very important question during what is now being recognized as Sexual Violence Awareness Week.

It was on the 30th of June that the Office of the Status of Women issued a news release indicating a provincial domestic violence line was now operating. Mr. Speaker, that number is

1-888-709-7090. We're very pleased to partner with our transition houses. It's my understanding that the call volume coming into that line has been active, and that tells me, Mr. Speaker, that the people out there needing access to the line are aware of how to find it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will try again soon.

Front-line workers have kept the Confederation Building clean throughout COVID, working for a private contractor for low wages and no benefits. They are still waiting for the COVID-19 wage top-up that went into effect July 1.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: Will he take some responsibility for the fact that these workers, who provide an essential service to government, have still not received their COVID wage top-up three months later?

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

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

What an opportunity this is to join with the hon. Member in highlighting and celebrating the incredible service that essential workers did for each and every one of us.

The provincial government in Newfoundland and Labrador joined with the Government of Canada in a Government of Canada-led program to be able to provide a top-up to essential workers. We followed the guidelines and the parameters around a federal program to provide that. We put in an intake portal. We have received over 2,000 applications and we have disbursed tens of millions of dollars to employers; 95 per cent of all applications have been processed. Tens of millions of dollars have been disbursed to employers. We call on employers now to do as they promised to do,

which is disburse the money to eligible employees.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West, time for a quick question and a quick answer.

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Labrador West is about to transition to a period of crisis where 50 per cent of its family physicians are going to leave the area. Even before they decided to leave many families were without a family physician. LG Health has just recruited one physician, but this will not fill the gap.

I ask the minister: Will he instruct his department to create a province-wide recruitment program and action plan with focus on rural and remote communities?

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

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

Recruitment and retention of physicians and health care workers in general is a significant challenge. We do offer significant bonuses, both as bursaries and as grants for Newfoundland and Labrador graduates who wish to go there.

I am aware of the situation there. Quite frankly, it's been exacerbated by the lack of air communication between Lab West and anywhere because these practitioners wanted to rotate to visit with their families who were in other provinces. I acknowledge the challenges there. We do have nurse practitioner-led clinics available in Lab West.

In terms of prenatal care, we're looking at moving in midwifery, and certainly physician recruitment is a hot topic in rural areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government were seeking bids for a P25 province-wide radio system, estimated value of \$250 million. The lead deputy minister was Charles Bown, and a sole source offered to present a proposal to come back to government with a proposal was Bell.

I ask the minister: Why weren't local companies given an opportunity to present a proposal instead of a sole source?

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

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as everyone in this House would know, I've spent a short time in this portfolio. I spent much of the first three weeks dealing with a ferry strike, and of that conversation and the questions asked, I'm not 100 per cent up on it and I wouldn't want to give any misleading information.

I will report back to this House as soon as I can get the relevant information, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the issue I have with that is apparently it's supposed to go through Cabinet and you were in Cabinet when it went through Cabinet.

I ask the minister, with such a huge fiscal cliff in our province, a local company was guaranteed an opportunity to present to Cabinet but it never happened.

I ask the minister: Will you pause the sole-source proposal to Bell, open up the process allowing local companies the option to be considered with the possibility of a better service and a possible lower cost to the taxpayers of this province?

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, from my previous time in Transportation and Works, or TI, I'm very familiar with this file and it's actually a file I carry with me now to some degree in Justice because it's a very important project. There were two bidders, they went through a fairness advisor and the proper procedures were followed.

Mr. Speaker, what we need to realize here is what the real reason is we're doing this. This is for our first responders, our fire departments, our police officers, our ambulance drivers. Right now this province operates on three or four antiquated radio systems. It's not becoming of the people that need it.

Mr. Speaker, there's a company been selected to do a request for proposal, so there's an RFP process. If my memory serves me correctly, the RFP process is now happening and that proposal I think will be received shortly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

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

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act* I'm tabling three orders-in-council relating to funding pre-commitment for fiscal years 2020-2021 to 2023-2024.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The petition I present today has been presented by myself on behalf of my constituents and the people of the province over a dozen times.

The background of this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS there are no current operations at the Bull Arm Fabrication Site; and

WHEREAS the site is a world-class facility with the potential to rejuvenate the local and provincial economies; and

WHEREAS residents of the area are troubled with the lack of local employment in today's economy; and

WHEREAS the operation of this facility would encourage employment for the area and create economic spin-offs for local businesses; and

WHEREAS the site is an asset of the province, built to benefit the province and a long-term tenant for this site would attract gainful business opportunities; and

WHEREAS the continued idling of this site is not in the best interest of province;

THEREFORE we, the residents of the area near the Bull Arm Fabrication Site, petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows:

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to expedite the

process to get the Bull Arm Fabrication Site back in operation. We request that this process include a vision for a long-term viable plan that is beneficial to all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. Furthermore, we request that government place an emphasis on all supply, maintenance, fabrication and offshore workover for existing offshore platforms as well as new construction of any future platforms, whether they be GBS or FPSO in nature.

Mr. Speaker, I've presented this on several occasions and I have received some response from it. Just looking at this copy as well that's been approved, I have people from Bellevue; I have people from Thornlea. This really affects this area big time.

The second-biggest town in my district is Arnold's Cove, which is basically right across the street. We have CBC with the refinery, we have the Irvings that are looking to buy the refinery. Why don't we talk to them about what their interest would be if they had an opportunity to work and take over the Bull Arm site? This affects everybody, right from Goobies, Sunnyside. All these places. Southern Harbour, and right down to Marystown, to be quite honest; right across the province.

We have the skilled labour. We have the facilities. Let's start utilizing our assets to the best of our ability and stop marketing ourselves as the tenth province in Canada and start marketing ourselves as a place that has the oldest city in North America. We are COVID-free and we know how to flatten the curve, and we can start attracting some global partners.

Like I said, the people of the area need this. This is not a want, this is not an ask, this is not being selfish; this is a need to not only my district's economy but to the provincial economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

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

I'm happy to respond to the Member. We've had discussions on this. One of the first requests that I had after coming into this portfolio was from

the Member opposite who contacted me and wanted to discuss this issue. I appreciate that because while we may sit on different sides of the House, we can appreciate that we want people in our district to be working and facilities operational.

What I can say is – especially as it relates to the sale of the refinery, I can tell you that Irving has specifically been contacted to discuss these possibilities. Within the department – and, again, I'd love to take credit but I can't. There are diligent public officials, public servants who have been working through this and trying to get the very thing that you want, that I want and that we all want. That work has been done.

There has been an expression of interest process that's gone out. It's not where we'd like it to be, we're not getting the response that we would like to get yet, but we continue to do that. I do think there is some positivity around the possible sale and what could come from that.

There have been some lease agreements with DF Barnes at the sites and working with Transocean. They have also done some work to improve the site. We realize the asset we have. Every time I drive home on the weekends I drive right by it. I've had an opportunity to visit the site and to see the site, so I recognize its importance and what we can do.

What I would say is this is another one of the issues that we face and mainly caused by issues that are facing us globally. I recognize the importance that is placed on it by the Member opposite. I share that, and we'll continue to work together to try to come to a positive resolution.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the Member for Exploits, I just want to say the motion we passed this morning, responses to petitions are now 90 seconds rather than 60 seconds. So if anyone is wondering why the minister ...

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Exploits have a great concern from the 24-hour emergency service cut to the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Centre in Botwood. All residents feel that the 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. service does not adequately and efficiently address the emergency requirements of this district, affecting both patients and residents to receive adequate care when needed.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to restore the 24-hour emergency service at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Centre immediately.

Mr. Speaker, this is still an ongoing issue in my district – a very big issue. In October 2018 to October 2019, 7,833 people used the emergency department at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre. Another additional 4,620 people from Exploits used the emergency service at the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Care clinic. This leaves a total of 12,453 people needing emergency service in the Exploit's District in one year.

Mr. Speaker, the former premier promised to open the emergency service in September but, of course, the premier is gone with that promise. All I'm left now is the agreement from the minister to evaluate this situation after the long-term care unit is finished at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre. According to the contractor, Mr. Speaker, that unit should be completed by mid-October. But in a letter to the Town of Botwood, September 11, only five days ago, this is the reply that the minister has already given to the Town of Botwood. So his evaluation has not been done yet.

“Finally regarding your inquiry about the reinstatement of 24 hour emergency service at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Centre, please be assured that the usage of emergency services at the site, as well as after-hours usage of nearby emergency sites, by the residents of Botwood and neighboring communities, is being monitored regularly by the Department. Based on analysis of the data collected, there are no immediate plans to reinstate a 24 hour emergency service at this site as current health services needs are being met within the existing service delivery model.”

Mr. Speaker, it's not October. When did he make his evaluations? This is September 11. So I ask the minister: Will he do the evaluation and get the 24-hour emergency service back up and running as promised?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The evaluation is ongoing. October may be the completion date for the building. The commissioning will not happen until probably in the middle of winter. The undertaking was that we would continue to evaluate, and at the time when the staffing was ramped up to staff the protective care unit, the issue of the need for 24-hour service would be decided upon at that point.

That point has not yet been reached. There are, on the basis of current data about usage, no concerns about volume and demand that cannot be met with the existing arrangements. Should that situation change between now and the time that the unit is fully commissioned and fully staffed, obviously, we would address it at that point. Failing that, it's likely that it would be commissioned and fully staffed sometime over the course of early winter 2021.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: I don't think we have time for another petition before our *Standing Orders* require us to start the private Member's motion, so I'm going to call on the Member for Lake Melville to introduce his private Member's motion now.

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

Yes, let's get started. We have a very interesting private Member's resolution this afternoon. I'm very pleased to introduce it. If I may, I'll read it into the record.

I move, seconded by the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune – who's also the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, and a very appropriate minister it is indeed. I give notice of the following motion:

WHEREAS this government is aggressively investing and partnering with farmers, harvesters and food producers; and

WHEREAS traditional industries, such as agriculture, are important economic drivers and help to diversify the economy; and

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has further identified the importance of local gardens, country food and the agricultural sector in Newfoundland and Labrador;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly supports the continued growth of the agricultural sector and supports the initiatives of government to meet the goal of increasing provincial food self-sufficiency to 20 per cent by 2022.

As I look along the room, I think I can probably anticipate who some of the speakers are going to be. I'm not going to use all my time because I do want to try to see if we can get as many people onto the record as possible today, because there are a lot of good things going on, Mr. Speaker, in the world of turning this province into a more self-sufficient enterprise in terms of food.

I thought I would start off first of all with just a little definition of what we're talking about because sometimes you hear in the community, in the media and so on interchanges of words like food security, food self-sufficiency. What we are talking about here today is food self-sufficiency. That is defined as, for a jurisdiction, being able to meet consumption needs, particularly for those staple food crops, from a jurisdiction's own production rather than buying or importing.

As I said, it should not be mixed up with food security, which is talking more about the

inability to reach food. While it's more expensive for us, while there are a whole bunch of issues about bringing food into this province, we do have, for the most part, stable and accessible markets. When you think around so much of the world and third-world nations who are really struggling with food security, this is a much different situation and one that we all need to understand and see what we can do.

As a jurisdiction, Newfoundland and Labrador is blessed to have several features associated with it. That's why government, back in 2017, said we want to take advantage of that and we want to grow this.

Some of those reasons – I just alluded to some of them – include, frankly, it's just important to reduce the risk associated with those sudden food-price hikes we all know. It takes nothing like a frost in Florida to watch our orange juice prices go up, or certainly the fires on the West Coast of the United States right now and moving into British Columbia, waiting to see now how that's going to affect many of the crops that we source from that location.

Sudden drops in export commodities can affect our ability to purchase foods. We've all just been on the steps of this Confederation Building listening and understanding and seeing for ourselves the full effects of the oil and gas sector; a really important industry, and generates up to one-third of the revenue, one-third of the GDP of this province. That buying power, that ability to have a diversified economy and such a strong contribution to the economy actually influences our ability to be self-sufficient in terms of the food that we consume.

We do have some 450,000 square kilometres of beautiful natural resources – a very large Island and a big, old piece of land up in Labrador that has a tremendous resource base and tremendous opportunity.

We also have seen, as I just said, not so much in our jurisdiction, but there are situations where some of the food crops that we need to import come from jurisdictions which also could be subject to other situations. Maybe it's civil stress wars, conflicts, droughts, things like that could all affect, and as we diversify our cultural makeup and different ethnic groups look to other

food groups and so on and as we explore and expand our palate, some of these foods, frankly, sometimes can become completely inaccessible or very expensive. Again, these are situations on the other side of the world that can influence what goes on to our own kitchen table.

Shipping costs – my colleague from Torngat Mountains knows full well and, certainly, if you understand anyone who has a constituency here on the Island, 94 per cent of our population is in Newfoundland. All of the entire North Coast of Labrador relies on food stuff being brought in my shipping. Marine shipping can be very expensive and also has its own set of logistics challenges.

Finally, wearing my climate change hat, which I never take off, up to one-third of the greenhouse gas emissions in our province come from marine and ground transportation. A lot of that transportation is bringing food into our province. Lots of good incentives to move in this direction, to see what we can do.

I wanted to tackle this because often I sit in my chair and I listen to the Opposition, I listen to everyone talk about where's your plan, what's the plan. Well, back in 2017 a plan was launched on agriculture, *The Way Forward on agriculture*. I thought it would be useful to, in this PMR, revisit the commitment and take a look and see just how we're doing, because I think that really forms the crux of why we're here this afternoon and what I hope to see us talk about for the next two hours.

Just by way of a background, the provincial agricultural industry, including the secondary processing, is valued at some \$500 million and employs some 5,000 people, including my colleague over there for Mount Pearl North. It's a very important aspect of our sector, of our economy and one that we can continue to grow.

I'm pleased to, on behalf of the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture – he provided me with a nice update which I'm pleased to introduce to the House today. I'm just going to quote your words, Sir: We have been making great strides since the Agriculture Sector Work Plan announced on October 23, 2017 – so we're not yet into three years since this plan was first released – that committed to increasing

Newfoundland and Labrador's food self-sufficiency from 10 per cent to 20 per cent by 2022.

I'm very pleased to inform the House today on behalf of the minister that our progress to date has resulted in a steady increase in self-sufficiency from 10 to nearly 15 per cent. I believe the exact number was 14.8 per cent. We are already, after less than three years, at the halfway point and continuing to make great investments.

That's what I wanted to talk about today. That's what I wanted to put on the floor here today because I believe this is an idea factory. We should have our heads thinking today about how else, what else we could do to grow and try to reach that final 5 per cent. I would push the minister, let's see if we can set higher goals at some point, but right now we want to make this goal by 2022. That's why I wanted to introduce this topic here today.

I'm just going to highlight a few examples that I know my colleagues, and I anticipate others, each of our in our districts could probably point to great investments that have occurred since October 2017. Here are a couple of summaries from the Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture Department. Some of these initiatives include supporting new and existing farmers. There are some 67 new, first-year farmers to date since 2017 through programs such as the Canadian Agricultural Partnership and the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program.

For this year, 2020-2021, we have 14 first-time, new entrants that have been approved for funding. We're seeing a lot of new entrants into the farming industry. I grew up in Nova Scotia in a pretty poor area of farmland I can tell you, but what I saw and witnessed there in my generation was a lot of people leaving the farming industry, so I have to say it's very exciting and refreshing to see so many coming in.

Additional initiatives include providing supports for land development. In addition to making more land available for farming to date, approximately 380 hectares have been made available of new land that have been prepared

for fruit and vegetable production with the support of our funding programs.

We've identified some 59 areas of interest, totalling approximately 62,000 hectares for long-term agricultural use, and currently there are 48 of these areas of interest available for application through an open request for proposals process. So you can go online in these identified areas throughout the province – I even have some in my district – that prospective farmers, people wanting to get into this industry can actually go in and apply.

Producing vegetable transplants at the Centre for Agriculture and Forestry Development in Wooddale – I've heard the former minister often talk about this – some nearly five million vegetable transplants have been produced, with three million vegetable transplants in 2020. These help commercial farmers diversify the crops and increase yields through the Vegetable Transplant Program and the newly established Asparagus Crown Program.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to throw that out there. We're halfway to our target. Let's see what kind of ideas we can generate over the next two hours and I look forward to hearing from all the speakers. I'll be back to wrap it up. With that, I'll take my seat that I'm taking.

Thank you,

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to be able to speak on the PMR, Mr. Speaker. Being from Exploits, of course, I have a lot of farmers in my district, Wooddale in particular as was just mentioned by my colleague there. There have been a lot of farmers in that way and we have the agriculture facility in there as well.

Mr. Speaker, those are the livelihoods of hard-working individuals that work on their farms every morning. They get up, they go to work and make an honest living and they produce different foods and try to diversity in other products in

our agricultural fields. I'd like to acknowledge that our own colleague from Mount Pearl North has a farm and does well with regard to our agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic, of course, has turned us in a different direction. It gave us a fear of not having enough food in our province, relying on outside provinces, relying on outside districts, having food shipped over from different parts of the country, different parts of the States and wherever. That incurs a big cost to our province, to our local buyers, to our individuals. That gives us more incentive to increase in food supplies, especially in the agriculture-agrifoods departments and to supply our farmers with the knowledge and the need and funding that they need to be able to keep us self-sufficient for years to come.

We need to diversify the farmers, educate farmers. And not only educate them, but we also need to take from the farmers that are already there. To get their input into growing products and what else they can do. They know the industry. A lot of us can talk about it, but they know the industry. So we need to get their input into what they're doing, what they've done and what they've seen and how they keep their vegetables and what can be done in order to grow and diversify in that industry, not only in vegetable farming but also in dairy farming, that sort of thing, whatever we can do as initiatives to keep the food supply sufficient for years and years to come.

Not only doing that, certainly while we're using their input for supplying our farmers, they can also bring in younger farmers, younger people into the industry to carry on that food supply, as we need it, as we grow and as the future grows.

Mr. Speaker, I did hear the Member say that there are 500 million acres of land for the farmers. I'm hearing stories that lands are hard to come by. The restriction with regard to land is the first obstacle when becoming a farmer. If you don't have land, you're not having agriculture. So, Mr. Speaker, we have to make it easier access for land.

I did hear the minister mention in his preamble yesterday, we have to be able to make easier access to land for farmers, for individuals to get

involved in that industry or even diversify the industry, expand on their current industries, current farms, that sort of thing, and make it easier so those people can get involved in the agriculture sector. Without that, if they don't have land and able to clear land, then this is all for not.

That is the biggest part is land, and if they don't have that, Mr. Speaker, then this is all for not. It's not even any point of trying to consider putting more funding into the agriculture sector.

There have been some great initiatives, I have to say, like some money that's after going in and some experiments that have been done. There is still more to do.

To get young farmers involved again, we have to teach those young farmers. We can get support for those young farmers and help those young farmers along the way so that they can grow much better farms than probably what their fathers and forefathers have done now.

Mr. Speaker, when working with the farmers, once they get their land cleared and diversified and ready for the products, Mr. Speaker, we'd have to help them along the way there. Because I know talking to some farmers in to Wooddale in my area, some years they have bumper crops, they have enough crops to spare everybody. Some years, if it's bad, then they have a bad crop.

Some of the problems I've heard in my area in Wooddale, in the farms in there, is irrigation. They have poor irrigation systems in there. So maybe that's something we can look at to help the farmers along the way is, of course, water. Irrigation is one of the biggest parts of growing our crops.

Mr. Speaker, that gives us an opportunity to work with the farmers, not make every expense beyond the farmers because, like I say, especially in their first years of growing, they have to build their stocks, they have to make a farm, they have to make a livelihood of it. So it just doesn't happen overnight, especially in the farming industry, Mr. Speaker. It takes years and years to build and hours of painstaking labour to keep them in the industry. They put a lot of effort, they put a lot of work into it, Mr.

Speaker, and they believe in what they do. They believe in what they grow.

When they grow their vegetables, at the end of the day, they look at their fields, they look at their crops, they are proud of what they do, they really are; the work they put into it. Then that goes out into the economy, out into the stores. They help us live, they help us survive. When that's going out into the stores, they feel very proud to be able to do this for us. That gives an option then of buying local. Something else we have to stress is to buy local.

When I go to a supermarket and I look at vegetables, the first thing I look at now is where they are shipped from, where they were manufactured. If I see a Newfoundland label, I'll buy it, and I'd encourage anybody else in the province to do the same. Lots of times you go to our larger supermarkets, our larger establishments, they're bringing them in from – I've seen them there from the States. I've seen them from different parts of the States. I've seen them from different parts of Canada. I've seen them there from other countries.

So buying local is very important to keeping our food supply here. If we buy local, our farmers can put back into their farms. We can help them out to develop those farms diversify in a lot of product. Again, I'll go back to the farms in Wooddale because I've been in there a few times and I've talked to the farmers and I enjoy the conversations we have in there. I must say, it's great just to be in there to see the vegetables and how the farms look and grow. It's something we can put back into the farming industry, Mr. Speaker, and help those people grow their farms and to keep the food industry, food supply to us for long periods of time.

There are other industries and they are experimenting, Mr. Speaker. I was talking to one farmer in there. When I'm talking about a farm, I'm still at the potatoes, turnip, carrot, cabbage, but they're into different items now that they're trying to grow that they've never grown on this Island before. It's good to see those products being there, and for those people to get those products out into the stores and we buy them and keep them here.

Mr. Speaker, we do need to work with the farming industry. We need to be fair to all farmers, not just one industry over another. I think we need to be fair to all farmers if we're going to support farming and be putting funding into the farms. I think we have to be fair to this farm, that farm or the other farm, not make it competitive to each other that they're trying to compete and knock down one over the other. That doesn't work either. I guess we can also flood the market where there's probably too much of it and that way it goes sour. We have to diversify but we have to be fair. We have to watch our economy as it grows so that everything is streamlined and our products are getting to market, there's not much spoilage and it's all being used.

Mr. Speaker, it was great to speak on this PMR again because, like I say, in my area we have a lot of farms and there's more farming in there. I know there are more animal farms going in there, there are cranberry farms, the standard farming like vegetables, dairy farming. We have a very wide range of farming in my district, just in the District of Exploits and I am very proud of that, very proud of that industry.

It does employ a great deal of people in my district, and that's great to see. They're hard-working individuals, they're up 5 o'clock in the morning and those fellows work all day. They do well. The farmers and farms are providing work to other people. So it's good to see all those farms in my area.

Right now, I think most of the farms – cranberry, I don't think, is as big as what it was one time. Funding wise they're not getting the dollars for it, so that's something we can look at as well. To see all the farms in there – right now, this year was a booming year. If you took a walk around the fields now, the farms in there this year, it seems to be a very booming year. It's great to be a part of that, Mr. Speaker.

I have talked to the farmers in my area; I told them if I can help them, put them in the right direction, talk to the ones I know, we'd certainly work together. That's a promise I've made to the farmers. If you want to come out and we'll go through the farms and talk to those individuals, we can certainly do that. We have to help the farmers; they need help at times. They need to

be treated fair. They need to be able to go and put their hands on and be able to work and have the tools and equipment, the land and the opportunity to be able to do so.

With that, Madam Speaker – I didn't see you change. No trouble to fool me at times, just saying.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, it's great to talk to this PMR. I am in favour of the PMR, by the way. Right now, I'll just take my seat and I'll probably let the farmer have some more say.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (P. Parsons): The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

MR. WARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm so fortunate to be able to say my district is well-rounded. I come from a district that's rich in mining, rich in forestry, rich in aquaculture, rich in the fishery, and certainly we are becoming richer in agriculture.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to express my support for this private Member's resolution today to ensure the continued growth of the agricultural sector, as well as the initiatives of the government to meet the goal of increasing provincial food self-sufficiency to 20 per cent by 2022.

The public state of emergency due to the snowstorm in January and the COVID-19 global pandemic has shone a light – and I know the hon. Member for Lake Melville said that we weren't going to take about food insecurity, but within my department I hope you'll oblige me to be able to do so, because the global pandemic has shone a light on food insecurity, particularly for those most vulnerable in the province.

Increased food self-sufficiency in our province is an important aspect of food security. Food security is impacted by many factors, and as a government we remain focused on identifying solutions that will help address the underlying causes of food insecurity, especially for people

who have low incomes and/or struggle to access food, including seniors and persons with disabilities.

Our government continues to take a comprehensive approach to food security. Through the collective work of many departments, community groups and with our federal counterparts, we are promoting locally driven, longer term solutions such as community gardens, community freezers and bulk-buying clubs.

During the pandemic, our government established a food security working group, co-lead with Food First NL and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, which included over 40 community food and meal providers. This solution-focused group identified needs and solutions, one of which was for government to support community food programs so they in turn could support community groups. As a result, our government provided \$578,000 to Food First NL to establish the COVID-19 Community Food Program Support Fund in March of 2020.

Madam Speaker, this fund supported access to food and supplies; modified operations such as transporting and delivering food to vulnerable populations, including those who had to self-isolate; and hiring staff to replace volunteers unable to be involved. I am pleased to report that over 130 community food programs throughout the province received funding.

Another area of focus for the food security working group was the need for a Community Food Helpline. I'm pleased that in partnership with 811 HealthLine, Food First NL, the Jimmy Pratt Foundation, Seniors NL and the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of the Deaf, people can call, text or video-play service the Community Food Helpline to seek help on accessing food during COVID-19.

I was pleased to recently meet with Josh Smee, the executive director of Food First NL. I am thankful to Food First NL for our community food programs, their staff and volunteers for their ongoing efforts during this unprecedented time, as well as to many generous business and private donors.

Our government has also implemented a number of initiatives that support the food security of individuals and families such as tax benefits that increase individuals' income, including Low Income Tax Reduction, the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit. Programs that provide access to healthy food for families and children, including the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement, Healthy Baby Clubs and the School Lunch Association, School Milk Foundation and the Kids Eat Smart Foundation, which supports school breakfast programs.

Our government remains committed to working closely with approximately 40 community groups on the food security working group. I would also like to highlight that our government continues to support community gardens throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker. Since April 2018, government has invested over \$245,000 in 156 community gardens.

If I could leave that for a second, Madam Speaker, I'd like to speak a little bit about building industry capacity in the Newfoundland and Labrador agriculture industry. Agriculture has long held a promise of significant opportunity, both nationally and provincially. The production of food is clearly a necessary function of food security and, in the process of achieving it, it also entails significant economic activity, especially in rural areas. Likewise, the full scope of agriculture extends well beyond the production of food in such commodities as floriculture, sod farming and fur, just to name a few.

The Barton Report, which produced a comprehensive set of recommendations from the federal government's Advisory Council on Economic Growth, set up by Finance Minister Bill Morneau, recommended that the agriculture sector be used as a pilot to test new approaches to sectoral development. "The 2017 federal budget referred to the work of the Council and set an ambitious target to grow Canada's agri-food exports from \$55 billion in 2015 to at least \$75 billion by 2025, supported by key actions."

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador also set some ambitious targets for its

provincial agricultural sector in 2017. Agriculture was selected by our government as the first industry selected to build a template on achieving jobs and economic growth. *The Way Forward* strategic document produced by our government in concert with industry, which was represented by Merv Wiseman, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, outlined 43 actions aimed at doubling food self-sufficiency from 10 to 20 per cent by 2022.

This initiative was reinforced by the announcement in the spring of 2017 to set aside 64,000 new hectares of land designated for agricultural production. With the new five year federal-provincial-territorial framework known as the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, or CAP agreement, taking effect in April of 2018, the stage was set for a full range of action items necessary to bring this ambition to fruition. Additional funding under the annual Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial agriculture and agrifoods program added a very complementary set of funding program to bring *The Way Forward* ambition to fruition.

Fast-forwarding, Madam Speaker, to 2020, the worldwide pandemic related to COVID-19 illustrates beyond description the importance of food self-sufficiencies in places like Newfoundland and Labrador, just from a public good standpoint. Similarly, ways and means of rebuilding the economy, especially in rural and remote areas, speaks to the priority of incorporating agricultural activities into the economic opportunities in a post-COVID-19 era.

In review of the government's performance towards its targets of doubling food self-sufficiency, the following items were noted: The 43-point plan contained in *The Way Forward* document was completed and adopted in the fall of 2017 as an overarching strategy for provincial agriculture development. Set aside and offsetting financial programs have been designed under the five-year FPT agreements called CAP and AAP. CAP and AAP are designed primarily to assist primary producers in Newfoundland and Labrador and secondary processing is included in targeted areas.

Significant progress has been made towards achieving targets of food self-sufficiency as

measured in additional land base brought into production in the last two years. Institutional research and development programs have been undertaken across the province in facilities like the agriculture and forestry research centre in Wooddale and in Pynn's Brook research facility. Significant partnerships have been undertaken with the MUN Grenfell campus in Corner Brook and research in Labrador at the Frank Pye research site in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Similar partnerships exist with MUN, the College of the North Atlantic and the federal research station in St. John's, Brookfield Road facility. Significant field trials are under way in locations across the province in new and emerging crops, as well as grains and oilseeds. A major transplant program has been in place for at least two years to assist farmers in getting an early and cost-effective start to their crop-growing season.

Pilot projects have been undertaken with private partners on establishing and increasing storage capacity for agricultural crops in Newfoundland and Labrador. Institutional undertakings have been initiated in places like provincial hospitals to utilize locally-grown products.

Significant progress, Madam Speaker, has been made with the layer industry – that would be the egg industry – to have producers in Labrador engaged in producing for its own population. A major undertaking, which would be a government and private investment in secondary processing of milk and dairy products, is underway in Deer Lake.

Significant investment and focus on rebuilding community livestock pastures are in progress across the province. Rebuilding the provincial beef industry is a priority and significant steps have been taken to build better beef breeding herds of cattle. The Beef Cattle Enhancement Program has been underway for the last four years and recently accelerated to include more farmers and more herd genetics.

Significant growth has been seen in the sheep industry and supported through the CAPP and app. The bee industry, as our hon. minister had spoke to just recently, has been growing and secondary processing has been supported through the CAPP and app. Likewise, import

disease protocols have been instituted to protect and grow the bee industry and its breeding stock needs.

Madam Speaker, opportunities and potential in agriculture cannot be achieved without understanding the challenges and shortcoming of the current industry. In this regard, one of the overarching characteristics of agriculture in Newfoundland is its limiting capacity. Among other things, many commodities lack scale and are not supported by research nor marketing development and key infrastructure necessary for commercial viability.

Likewise, there will always be new and emerging issues to manage. Climate change and the global pandemic are two of the best illustrations. The overall expectation over the long-term is to work with a collaborative, flexible framework such as *The Way Forward* where a full range of shared contributions are made by all stakeholders to achieve industry objectives.

That's my comments on today's PMR, Madam Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Lake Melville for giving me the opportunity to speak to his PMR.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll turn it back to you.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thank the previous speakers being the Member for Lake Melville, the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, and Exploits,

Well, I guess most of you know that I've been involved in agriculture probably since the day I was allowed out of the house. I can remember as a child my job was to go along and throw the feed out to the cows when I used to ride along in the feed bucket.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LESTER: Yeah, that's right.

My family has been involved in agriculture since we arrived here in Newfoundland, and that was back in the early 1830s. Our family has seen a lot of changes. We don't farm the same way we did back in the 1830s. I can guarantee you my children and my grandchildren won't farm the same way I do today. It's an evolving industry. Yes, it's important that government foster and sponsor the environment for the agriculture industry. While we have so few farmers in our province, we have a little better than 500,000 that depend on farmers three times a day, and that being for food.

I know in this past sitting of the House – actually, this past spring prior to COVID – the issue of food supply was raised here in the House. I believe myself, along with the Third Party, expressed some concern that we weren't adequately prepared if we did have a food shortage. At that time, the sitting administration said no worries, and within two weeks our past premier was out in the news saying we have nine days of food supply left. That does show how precarious we are.

We're the last place in North America to get food. Everywhere else receives the delivery truck before us, so it is necessary to increase the amount of food production we have here on our own Island and in the sector of Labrador, and we have the capacity to do it. Prior to Confederation, we grew all our own potatoes, we grew all our own carrots and we grew most of our own cabbage. We were more or less self-sufficient in what we needed to get by.

I kind of chuckled, and I know global warming is a bit of a trend, but the Member for Lake Melville mentioned if we have frost in Florida, the price of oranges is going to rise. As of yet, I don't think global warming has caught up enough that we can grow oranges in this province, but I do understand the analogy. Over 35 per cent of the food consumed in North America is grown in the State of California, and California is in a severe drought. Each year, the Colorado River, which irrigates most of the crops in the California Salinas Valley, is retreating further and further from the coast.

As it pertains to our strides in capturing that 20 per cent versus the 10 per cent we were at just a couple of short years ago, I'm at a loss as to where this has happened. The dairy industry was at 100 per cent capacity prior to – well, the dairy industry has been self-sufficient in fluid milk. We do have a lot of potential for expansion in industrial milk, which would be for secondary products, but right now the economics are just not there for it. We do need to establish our own processing. Dairy production has basically stayed the same for the past 15 years. It actually shrank a little bit as more people take dairy out of their diet and substitute it with other things.

The chicken industry is the same. The egg industry is more or less the same. So I guess the growth that they're referring to would be within the horticulture sector and the livestock sectors. There's no doubt that there has been expansion happening, but I seriously, seriously question how we've added 5 per cent more to our food security volume. It's beyond me. I know on my farm we have increased a little bit. Other farms have increased a little bit, but to increase production – and we're not talking 50 per cent production; we're talking way more because eggs, dairy and chicken make up almost 85 per cent of our food production in this province.

That's a hell of a big jump – excuse my language, that's a big jump in the production of horticulture and dairy products. I look forward to the next speaker to clarify that and give me some numbers, because farmers are pretty practical people. They're only going to listen to theatre and stage for so long. That's the challenge that we've been having.

Food security, food sustainability is a hot topic because, again, everybody thinks about it three times a day. What has happened is under the previous minister's direction, it was becoming a vehicle of political promotion and farmers were pretty much fed up with it. As I've said time and time again, when funding programs are announced, they're announced for farmers. They're not announced for politicians to stage little media shoots or their own self-promotion throughout the summer tour. Farmers need money when they go to put their seeds in the ground. They need money in the spring so they can plan out their whole year. They need money

in the spring so they can plan projects and execute them in a timely fashion.

It really boils my blood every time I hear this administration talking about the 64,000 hectares of land that they discovered or created. Do you know what? That's been here from time immemorial. That's not new land they've discovered, that's always been here, but there are factors that have prevented it from being developed and turned into productive agricultural land.

One of the most, I guess, important factors is economics. It's fine to grow crops, it's fine to produce crops, it's fine to expand, but you will not plant again next year if cannot sell your crops. If you cannot process your crops, be it reasons of storage, reasons of mechanical ability, not being able to have access to the right equipment or labour – because one thing about farming is when you're talking labour, the first thing that most farmers think is: Can I get a machine to do it faster? It's about economics; machines have been proven to do farm work faster than humans. It's not going to be an area where we can highlight the mass employment created, not in primary agriculture. Where employment is created is in secondary processing.

I know my colleague from Exploits spoke of Crown Lands and the delays within Crown Lands. These are not rumours. These are actual facts. As a matter of fact, I personally know two young farmers involved in an operation who had an application in on one of these areas of interest. After two years, one of the farm operators received a call from the deputy minister and said: Yeah, we're going to cancel your application now and we're going to put it out for public proposals.

Now, after two years of stringing those young farmers along saying everything was going through the channels, under the direction of the former minister that application was cancelled.

AN HON. MEMBER: Shame.

MR. LESTER: Horrible.

Now, it's only one story like that that an aspiring farmer needs to hear and they'll think twice

about getting involved in our industry, in the industry that we all depend on.

It's great to have ideas and concepts, but you have to look at the practical application of those ideas and concepts. The Member for Green Bay happened to speak of the beef enhancement project. This project is where, basically, they've injected \$1 million into the purchase of 200 cattle at \$5,000 each. That sounds great, but did you know that if they had looked at the practical approach to that versus the way they looked at it, we could actually have about 25 times the amount of cattle.

You see they spent \$5,000 per cow and gave each individual 10 cows. From an economic point of view, 10 cows is not worth getting out of bed for. You're looking at, at least 50 cows in a herd in order to make it in any way viable. So how you could do that?

I remember Howard Morry; he was a sheep farmer in Goulds. He said to me when I was very young and I was attending the sheep producers' meeting: the ram or the bull is half of the herd or the flock. So what this government should've done, instead of going out and buying 10 expensive animals, they should've bought one top-quality bull and 30 good cows. That way instead of 10 cows on each farm, they would've had a viable herd within a very short period of time.

Another thing that farmers are great at: farmers are great at leveraging. They're great at putting their sweat and their hard work, along with a bit of capital or equity, to expansion. This government, unfortunately, has taken the approach to do 100 per cent investment in certain projects. Yes, they're good, but they could be so much better.

I know there are rumours that there's a large potato farm going to be developed in Central. Government is looking to spend about \$2.5 million to get this property ready and they're going to pass 500 acres over to one individual. Now, they would be so much better off taking that \$2.5 million – because as we all know, we're in a financial crisis. We need to get \$4 out of every \$1 we spend.

How we can do that is instead of giving that \$2.5 million to that one farm, we could give \$100,000 to 25 farms. Those farmers with their credibility, their hard work and their initiative could leverage that into \$500,000 worth of investment in the farm, into the agriculture industry. That's where it is. Not only that, those farmers, they'd have skin in the game.

I'm not saying that the individuals who will get these farms outright and for free would not put their all into it, but I can guarantee you on a rainy, slushy day when snow is coming down your back and you're out cutting turnips and you just realized these turnips aren't worth anything, they're insect damaged, or the moose have come in and just made them unmarketable, I tell you one thing, if you can walk away from that, there will be many who will. But if you've got skin in the game, your name is on the line, your credibility is on the line, you're going to work your hardest to make the best of that year and you're going to plan for next year. That's what needs to happen.

The idea of propping up one individual farm for a photo op or a promotion – look what we've done here everybody, look at this one farm, everybody should be able to follow – that's only discouraging people from doing it. We need hand ups, not handouts and that's what's happening. We have to look at investment and we have to look at being able to leverage the money that we invest in agriculture. Put the money in the hands of the farmers.

Just look at my family farm. My kids are the seventh generation of farmers to work that land.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LESTER: Do we know of any bureaucratic program or facility within the civil service that has lasted seven generations? There is none. Farmers want investment; farmers want support from the government. It is not this government's job or any government's job to become farmers. Just like business, it's their job to put in an environment that will foster the development of the industry, not be competitive with it.

To the new minister I have a little bit of advice. I do understand that you're new to the portfolio,

and forgive me if I say something incorrectly, but to the best of my knowledge, you have very little farming experience. That's not a bad thing at all. You just need to be able to listen to the farmers and acknowledge that you don't know everything. Like I said in the House once before, there's only one thing more dangerous than a minister who doesn't know anything; it's one who thinks he does.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

There you go. Passion for farmers.

Seeing no further speakers –

MR. BYRNE: I do.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Member for Corner Brook.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It really is a pleasure to stand and to support this private Member's motion, but as well to support the new minister, who I have utmost confidence in and has already enjoyed tremendous support and respect from the community that he serves, which not only includes farmers but includes also fishermen, aquaculturists, foresters and those that enjoy the renewable natural resources of our province. I want to say my hearty congratulations and a thank you to the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape la Hune for stepping up and filling a job that is absolutely vital to our province, but one that is respected by our province, because our primary food producers enjoy the utmost respect by all members of our society.

This private Member's motion is very important. It highlights the fact that not only do we have a problem but we have an opportunity and a solution, because those who offer problems without offering solutions are otherwise known as whiners. We are offering solutions. That's really important to emphasize because when we took office in 2015, we confronted with a very dire statistic. Statistics Canada provided us with details that just in the five short years preceding 2015, 20 per cent of all Newfoundland and Labrador farms were dissolved.

We had lost 20 per cent or almost 100 farms in a very short period of time, according to the national statistics agency. We knew this had to be corrected. We also knew that when a province grows just 10 per cent of the food that it consumes and imports 90 per cent, you're leaving your citizens vulnerable and we had to confront that as well. Instead of just simply outlining the problem, as has been done for countless generations or at least countless governments prior, we set forth a course of action to combat it and we set an ambitious target. We said we would double our food production by 2022.

Doubling from 10 per cent to 20 per cent may not seem necessarily ambitious, but it is and it's realistic because we're already well under way to accomplishing it. We can do more and we will do more, but we'll do it from a realistic vantage point by putting resources where they are needed and seeing those resources pay dividends.

With that said, Madam Speaker, we recognized upfront what were some of the challenges. Land base is a challenge. In a province which has been notoriously or improperly feted as The Rock, we have significant tracts of arable land in our province. The problem was much of it was designated as forestry under Reid lots, under timber rights afforded to paper companies, which made it inaccessible to agricultural proponents. The other thing is that it's expensive to develop.

So, yes, we did identify 62,000 hectares of agricultural areas of interest. The important point to that was that it identified agriculturally important areas and valuable areas, but it was not with the assumption that 62,000 hectares would be developed within a five-year period.

It had two functions associated with it. One is to identify it, to ease the burden of the application towards it. Much of the work is already done. The preliminary assessment work towards those agricultural areas of interest from a Crown Lands point of view is already done, as well as an agricultural point of view. The second component of this is very much relevant: It was to protect it.

What we know in other areas, other jurisdictions in the western world, agricultural land is being lost to suburban sprawl and industrial development. While we are enjoying a renaissance of agriculture and the development of new agricultural areas, other areas of North America are seeing agricultural land in decline. Protecting it was an important objective. Those two objectives – making it ready for development, but as well protecting it – are what is appreciated by farmers and new farmers of our province.

We also recognize that in terms of the capacity to be able to develop those 62,000 hectares, we took it from a realistic point of view; we took it from a realistic assessment. After we established the 62,000 hectares, we recognized that some of these areas were not developed previously because they were highly inaccessible. There was a question of economics. That's why our government developed and announced in a photo op a \$1.5-million program to create agricultural roads to develop those agricultural areas of interest.

I say, Madam Speaker, a photo op worth doing, but what's more worth doing is developing those roads, developing the agricultural areas.

There are a number of different initiatives, and I appreciate the speakers that came forward to address this issue. Some said that this cannot be done overnight. I think we all recognize and appreciate that. A Member of the Opposition, a colleague of ours, said that this should not be expected to be achieved overnight. That, I think, is a true statement to make.

The second thing the hon. Member said was that we need to educate farmers. I couldn't agree more. Farmers have a natural, long-standing base of knowledge, of expertise, of scientific information, coupled with their own traditional knowledge that really propel expert farmers in our province, but access to resources to be able to further educate not only themselves but their successors, future generations within their own family or outside of their family is important. That's why our government established – for the first time ever, in the history of Confederation, we added a post-secondary agricultural program developed for educating farmers in our province.

In 60 years, Newfoundland and Labrador had no post-secondary education capacity in the agricultural sector. We changed that. We said this is important and it must be done, and so we did it. The College of the North Atlantic now hosts every year upwards of 16 new farmers that will become the future farmers, but they're also, of course, included in the ranks of those who are existing farmers. A job well done.

The second thing we did is we recognize that there are certain sectors of the agricultural industry that need additional supports. That's why our biggest sector, the one that shares the most promise for growth in the immediate, obviously, is our horticulture sector. Do you know, Madam Speaker, in our province we consume the equivalent of about 6,000 acres of potatoes; we grow about 600 acres of potatoes.

I'll say that again. We consume upwards of the equivalent of 6,000 acres of production of potatoes but we've grown only 600. That's why our government dedicated a specific fund in a photo op to generate new production of potatoes. While we announce these initiatives, it is not for the sake of a photo op, it's because the initiatives come from farmers. Our advice and our decision making follows through on the direct consultation with farmers.

It was spoken earlier of the importance of secondary processing. It's one of the reasons why, Madam Speaker, we decided to invest \$5 million towards a dairy secondary processing facility for our province. We've reached out; farmers initiated a proposal, a co-operative or a collective of dairy farmers, coupled with investment from overseas and the expertise in marketing that that investment brought with it.

Dairy farmers from our province asked the provincial government to partner with them in a secondary dairy processing facility, the main component being butter and other products, but the primary product being initially butter. Madam Speaker, the dairy farmers have a request in to the federal government for partnered funding. We're hoping that will occur quickly with an approved application. The Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture has taken the lead on that file and is doing an incredible job.

With that said, Madam Speaker, there are a number of different initiatives. It was spoken earlier that there was some doubt cast on the decision to improve our beef industry. Madam Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador consumes, or I should say – I'll start again. Newfoundland and Labrador relies on importation of 99 per cent of its beef. We produce actually less than 1 per cent of the beef that we consume in our province. We have to import 99 per cent. To invest resources, to invest money and to announce that money in the presence of farmers who requested such a program was a wise initiative.

The decision that was taken based on consultation with farmers – because the uptake for that program was so strong, but as well the economics of that program merited the decision – we chose to award on a competitive basis 10 pregnant cows for distribution across the province. Some question was brought forward as to whether or not the economies of scale can possibly be met. Well, Madam Speaker, it was said earlier: when you don't know something, don't pretend you do. If you're not involved in the cattle industry, don't make suggestions for those that are.

Madam Speaker, those that were engaged in the industry of beef production advised us this was a prudent approach to take. The cattle that were purchased were not just simply bulls and cows; they were deliberately pregnant cows. It was specified they must be pregnant cows, so when they were brought across to the Island they would automatically double the production, but as well they would be coupled with studs.

Madam Speaker, when you take the combined expertise of the farm community of our province coupled with the incredible acumen and resources and capabilities within the Agricultural branch and you let that flourish by giving them the resources to get the job done, you succeed. That's exactly what this government has done.

I could list off a number of different initiatives that the government has done to be able to enhance, improve and grow food production for our province. I would take hours to be able to complete that list because the list is so extensive, but one program that I would like to highlight

for the benefit of all Members, but as well for the benefit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to learn more about the Vegetable Transplant Program. This has probably been one of the greatest success stories of agriculture in our province in decades, and I say that totally deliberately and without reservation.

It started out in 2018 as a pilot project to grow 225,000 vegetable transplants. The purpose of it was very simple, that we have a short growing season in our province; a relatively short growing season. Whenever plants are started under greenhouse conditions, in controlled atmospheric conditions, environmental conditions, you get to extend your seasons. The growing season, instead of starting in June in a direct seed to ground operation, when you start it in a greenhouse you advance the production by weeks.

We started out in 2018 producing 225,000 vegetable transplants from cabbage to rutabaga, turnip, to onions, to a variety of different stock. There was some apprehension. I think there was some feeling from certain circles that this might not necessarily be as successful as hoped. Madam Speaker, it was more than successful. The following year we had to, by basis of subscription, we had to advance that program from 225,000 transplants to 1.7 million transplants. Demand exceeded supply for the second year.

In response to that, in 2020, in the middle of COVID, in the middle of a global pandemic we advanced the vegetable production program from 1.7 million to over 3 million transplants. A Newfoundland and Labrador made success story and it could only have been accomplished by two factors; one, demand by farmers. They were voting with their subscription, their applications –

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As most people would know, food security is a massive issue here in Labrador. It goes well beyond the agricultural sector. It goes far beyond increasing food sufficiency by 20 per cent. If food production is increased by 20 per cent in this province, still we have to address the problems in Labrador because food insecurity is also hampered by poor transportation, weather conditions and, at some points in time, even the cost of food in Labrador, especially on the North Coast, can be extremely expensive.

I actually have lived in Happy Valley-Goose Bay for a period of time. It used to be interesting there; we used to get fresh eggs. I was actually surprised when I moved to Goose Bay about the farming culture that is there. It's actually a very farm-friendly area. It was really interesting that growing up I never got fresh eggs from a farm. Having them delivered to your door when you lived in Goose Bay was nice.

You can grow stuff in Labrador. The possibilities are there.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. BROWN: Not Goose Bay. Where I'm too, yes, actually it is rocky.

I spent my summer this year gardening, myself and my wife and my in-laws. Just the idea of an individual gardening, I was very surprised with myself, with the abilities that a community garden can do. Those small projects just show that you as an individual can also help things. I actually like the idea of community gardens and I do commend the department for the initiatives that they did put into community gardens around the province this year.

Myself and my district neighbour, the Member for Lake Melville, I stopped in to visit him on my way to vacation. We had a great chat about gardening. He showed me his garden and we were doing similar things. The community garden aspect of this is a great concept. If people have the ability and the space and the time to do it, I highly encourage people to garden. It is a great pastime. It's a great way to get outdoors and everything like that.

Another thing is, to my colleague from Torngat Mountains, it's a place that actually faces food

insecurity very bluntly. It's very obvious. Everyone has seen on Facebook the pictures of the price tags in the grocery stores and that up on the North Coast. We've all heard the stories of ferries being delayed and food being delayed and stuff like that. There was a time that they actually used to keep very big gardens. They grew it on the North Coast, these gardens and stuff like that.

It's a thing that we miss out sometimes on is the importance of encouraging people sometimes, if they have the means and the ability to do so, maybe promoting community gardening as a community thing. I do say, during the COVID, the department did put some money into community gardens. I know the community garden association in my district did benefit a little bit from that program this year. I was happy to see that it went well, because there are no plots left in our community garden this year. That was a great thing to see that people got out and did it.

I'm actually very impressed with the bumper year that we had. I still don't know what I'm going to do with all those potatoes. It is little things like that that will also help with food security.

I want to go back to the food insecurity in Labrador because, yes, community gardens are all fine and dandy, but it's the encouraging of different types of agriculture. There was a time, actually, in my previous life, I had an individual come to see me about ordering certain kinds of ceramics and plastics that I was able to get because he had a proposal in to raise cattle in Labrador West. As far fetched as we thought it was at first, then we stopped and thought about it. Well, they do it in Scotland. They do it in Norway. They do it in Sweden and Finland and Russia; we're about the same climate as that so it's possible.

Unfortunately, the gentleman didn't make it through the system; the project fell through at some point. He had some difficulty obtaining funding and land. It was very disappointing to see because the thought of they're going to raise cattle in Labrador, I stopped and thought about it for a bit. After hearing stories of other things, raising cattle in Labrador would actually be a huge benefit for obtaining proteins in Labrador

and the ability to ship it from Labrador West to other points in Labrador would have been some much more efficient, if you stopped and thought about it.

My colleague from Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, every weekend I see the majority of her residents over in Labrador West shopping, the same with my colleague from Lake Melville. So if people are going to travel 1,000 to go shopping in Labrador West and 500-and-something from Lake Melville, just to save some money, you know there's a problem with food security and the cost of things around this province.

We go back to transportation. It's all an interconnected system. We talk about transportation of goods and we talk about obtaining goods and growing goods, so it all works in an instance. If we're going to talk about food security and food insecurity, we also need to talk about the ability to transport those goods at a meaningful cost that people can afford by any means. So we look at this.

Obviously, transporting goods by boat has its hindrances, especially on the Labrador Sea where the weather can be very nasty for extended periods of time and also ice conditions are prohibitive, especially on the North Coast where the costs skyrocket when the harbours freeze and the boats can't get through. Where we talk about food security, we also need to talk about security, community security and network security. By those means we need to add more infrastructure that way.

I know we see a gallon of apple juice or orange juice for \$30-something. These are means that people require and, also, the health of individuals, because you look at the cheaper foods, the more processed foods, these are things we try to encourage people to stay away from as much as possible and to buy more food that is actually healthy, grown local, has more nutrients in it. Unfortunately, for communities that are cut off or the cost of obtaining those goods is so expensive, we find that they're eating less fresh produce, fresh meats and going more towards the processed foods. This all affects our health. It's a web; it's all connected at the end of the day. We all need to untangle and find out what

are the best means to get the best, nutritious foods to those who need it the most.

Poor transportation is a big part of the problem. You can even go back to the individuals on the Island here. If you have a good storm on the Cabot Strait and the boat doesn't cross for a number of days, it's very quick to see the grocery shelves here empty pretty fast. Transportation, transportation of goods and the cost of transportation of goods all need to be added into the equation of food security and those means.

Yes, we can upgrade production in this province by 20 per cent. That is great. That is a great advantage. We have to get fresher, more nutritious food into the hands of individuals. But if we have no way to transport that food from point A to point B efficiently, it's lost on another group of this province.

I'm encouraged that the talk about improving transportation and bringing down the cost of food is important. I know that the Nunatsiavut Government in the past has called for changes to Nutrition North and changes that way, so that in the interim, while we try to find transportation solutions, their residents could obtain healthy food at affordable cost in a reasonable amount of time. I agree with it, too, that some changes need to be made.

Infrastructure in the North is costly. It does require extra engineering, extra work, but it's something that we really need to look at, really need to push forward so that we can see where things are going. I've asked multiple times; we need a plan to build highways in the North Coast and improve our connections between the Mainland and the Island. That way, we can have a network that our goods can be shipped around our own province. We're in the 21st century. The engineering is there; the technology is there. We can address these issues and we should address them expediently.

Climate change, we're going to see more storms; we're going to see more things. Goods being shipped by sea will be delayed if we see more hostile weather at sea. We have to address these things on top of addressing the shrinking demographic of farmers.

The Pye farm from the Labrador Institute, a part of Memorial University that is now operating in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, I wish them great success in that project because that facility is now the research of growing in northern climates. This is going to change how we see farming in Labrador, but also in other parts of the Island as well. The research there and the data that's going to be collected is going to be worth triple, quadruple the investment that they actually put into that thing because it's going to put healthy, nutritious food on the plates of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and it's going to give us that data. It's going to be precious data that we're going to (inaudible) there.

I encourage people to keep researching Labrador West and Lake Melville and the North Coast and the South Coast for potential there because unless we dig in and find what's there, we don't know what we can grow until we do the research. I encourage more research in northern farming and northern cattle raising and poultry and pork and all those industries because if we put them closer to where the food insecurity is, it shortens the transportation and also helps people understand where everything is.

I'll conclude my talking here now, Madam Speaker, but I really encourage residents of this province to have a look at community gardening.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'll just take a few minutes here today to weigh in on the PMR that's on the floor. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Lake Melville for bringing forward this PMR. We're supporting the continued growth of the agricultural sector and supporting the initiatives of government to meet the goal of increasing provincial food self-sufficiency by 20 per cent by 2022.

I'm not going to be particularly on a script here, Madam Speaker. Increasing food self-sufficiency in our province has been a priority for our government, and it was in the very early days of this administration that we committed to doubling our food self-sufficiency.

Madam Speaker, as an individual who grew up in Labrador, we talk about urban and rural in this province, but I actually break rural down into about three different categories. I believe we have rural Newfoundland and Labrador; we have rural remote – there might be some communities far out there around Burgeo - La Poile that you would call rural remote – and then we have rural isolated. I grew up rural isolated in Southeastern Labrador, in the little community started by my grandfather called Charlottetown, 350 people. We had no road. During the winter, our access in and out was either by snowmobile or by plane, and during the summer it was boat. It would not be until December 2001, on my daughter's fifth birthday, that we would actually have a connection to the outside world.

Our life, Madam Speaker, was the coastal boats would come. They would come all throughout the summer, but we had a family business and what would happen, when the last boats came later into the fall, we would stock a winter supply. I can tell you, we were no stranger to hard work, because as soon as you were big enough to walk, once the boats came in the fall you could lift a carton of chips or something and we would stock all of the storage places that we had. Madam Speaker, that happened in my community, not just my community, but all of the coastal communities up and down the Coast of Labrador. In Torngat they're still doing that today. I do believe they have more of an abundance of flights now throughout the winter than we had.

We knew what it was like. There were seven boys in my family and over time six of them became pilots. My grandfather was always a bit frustrated: how do we get the fresh fruit and a few vegetables in here during the winter? Then my uncles would have little Cessna 180s or a Beaver or whatever, and once a week they'd make the trip. We were really fortunate, Madam Speaker, that in my community we had that access to fly across the Straits to St. Anthony,

and the store would fill up with local people looking for an orange or something that you didn't have.

I'm speaking to people in this Legislature today that probably don't know anything about that life. Just take for granted that you could go down the road to a store and you could have your food. There were times, Madam Speaker, when the ice came very late into the spring and we'd be waiting for Coast Guard to come and break that channel so that boats could get in and we'd have those first supplies in the spring.

I, myself, I didn't know hunger. I heard lots of stories in my house of people who were hungry because of food insufficiency. What I can tell you is eating things that are past the expiration date and cans that are broken up and things like that will never kill you, because everything that was too bad to go on the shelf in the store to sell, that came home and that's what we were raised on and that's what we ate.

Madam Speaker, I had that experience of growing up without a road and without the trucks coming. In 2013 I ran to be the representative of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, and what I can tell you, even today, I represent two communities: the little community of Norman Bay, which was the last community in North America to receive electricity in 1992. They have no airport; they have no road. I reach out to Norman Bay. I visit them on my snowmobile during the winter and we go down by boat in the summer, or sometimes there's a chopper. Black Tickle, I doubt there's anyone in this House that hasn't heard about Black Tickle and their challenges, when you have people inhabiting an island off an island. There are lots of transportation challenges.

I've actually travelled to Ottawa on a couple of different occasions to meet with the deputy minister responsible for the Nutrition North program. Most recently in February I sat down with the director, Wayne Walsh, of the Nutrition North program. Those programs, Madam Speaker, are very important to our remote communities because they subsidize what we can fly in to those communities during the winter months in particular. We've been successful in having some items added to what will now be subsidized that had not been in the

past. We're still not quite where we need to be. I'm straying a little bit, but it's all relevant; it's all related to food security.

I sat down with the Member for Torngat early this morning, despite the late night we had in the Legislature, and we talked about some of the food security issues and the price that they're paying on the North Coast right now, and certainly we're experiencing it in my unconnected communities.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to take it – someone's going to say, you're playing politics again. I will say when this government, despite the tough fiscal climate we were in, invested heavily into a road link into districts like mine in particular, it was a game changer. We have a very difficult situation with ice that comes into the Strait of Belle Isle every winter and it disrupts our ferry service for days. Despite the fact that we did put on two new ferries, we did increase capacity for moving passengers and freight, sometimes that ferry doesn't go. I believe last year there was maybe nine days or so it didn't go.

We now have the option, Madam Speaker, when the store shelves went bare they could pick up the phone and call and trucks could come in through Quebec and in through Labrador West. We have an option. Folks there, babies that were running out of milk and very important things they needed, we now have options that we didn't have before and it's because of the road link. That's what a road does into these areas.

I also want to say that my colleague – I don't want to repeat anything that my colleague said who is now the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, but I will say when it comes to gardening, there are smaller programs there in the Community Healthy Living Fund. I have seen first-hand the benefit of programs in the Community Healthy Living Fund –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'd like to respectfully remind Members to keep their conversations at a respectable level. The Member is speaking and I'm having trouble hearing her and she deserves –

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is very difficult to hear in the Legislature today.

The Community Healthy Living Fund – and I'm going to use the example of Norman Bay, the isolated community, no road, no airport. They applied for a grant – I don't know it might have been \$5,000 or \$10,000 – and we gave it. Myself and it was actually the assistant deputy minister for marine and transportation, we went into Norman Bay for meetings because they were losing their ferry and things a couple of years ago.

They said we want you to come over near the school and show you all of the things we've grown this summer. I was so impressed with all of the potatoes and the things and I said who here had experience before in gardening? No one had experience in gardening. They ordered some things from the hardware store up in the southern part of my district. They put it together; they filled it up with ground, planted everything and said we watered it heavily all summer.

The end result of that, a handful of communities in the little Town of Norman Bay, they ended up with all of these potatoes, divided them among the families. That's worth talking about. It's not big scale. It's not commercial. It's not needed for big scale in those smaller communities but certainly made a difference. Potatoes is something that's heavy if you have to get it flown in or on the helicopters and so they've now started growing their own. I believe that's a success story. We've done many little stories like that, Madam Speaker, under our Community Healthy Living programs.

There's a little bit of my rural, remote, isolated experience of growing up and some of the challenges that we faced around food security, but what a difference that the road has made. That's why we have to continue to build that network, when we recognize the impact that transportation challenges have on food security, Madam Speaker. I got to grow up experiencing that, but also now still representing communities who still have some challenges in that area.

Poverty reduction, I mentioned earlier, was in my portfolio when I was in Children, Seniors and Social Development. COVID certainly

exasperated some of the food security issues. We were really pleased; there was some fantastic work. I need to throw a bouquet, Madam Speaker, as I clue up here, to groups like Food First NL. I believe it was 120 organizations that they helped provide food hampers to. A far reach.

They reached up into places like Black Tickle off the Coast of Labrador. They reached into places like up on the North Coast. I heard many, many positive stories and feedback from the work they were doing and that was co-led by people over in the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, a program pulled together very quickly, responding to a need that was out there. It just speaks to the fact that we need to continue, as my colleague the Member for Corner Brook has already so eloquently outlined, to build upon our food self-sufficiency that we have in this province and keep it a priority.

I'm very happy to support this private Member's motion. I want to thank my colleague, the Member for Lake Melville, for bringing it forward and having this important conversation here this afternoon.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I will say Madam Speaker today.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed a privilege, like I always say, to get up here and speak and represent the District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful people in the District of Cape St. Francis. Cape St. Francis is a great place to grow some vegetables. I can speak first-hand at that.

I'm surprised with the hon. Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair that she didn't mention anything. She said she was so impressed with her class growing some vegetables. I sent her a few pictures only a few minutes ago of mine. She came back and she

said wow, so I can't believe that she didn't mention that.

I applaud this PMR today. I think it's a great PMR. I think that people of Newfoundland and Labrador are very resilient people. We just went through a major pandemic and we're still in it, but one thing I've noticed in Cape St. Francis that I've never seen before: so many greenhouses. I know it gave me an opportunity – I've done it once before in my life. I grew a little garden down by the side of my house and this white moth came along. I had some cabbage and he put holes in it and he killed all my vegetables. That was it for me. I wasn't going to grow any more vegetables anymore. I tried it once.

This year, I decided to do it. I'm very fortunate that one of my colleagues is such an expert, and it's not the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, I can assure you of that. We know the Lester name. It's a name we associate with anything that we do with farming and vegetables in this province.

I said I'm going to try it, and I really got into it. I dug up two little gardens. I grew a few potatoes a couple of years ago, so I had a potato garden already started, but this year I decided to plant a few vegetables. I planted, with the help of my good colleague, some zucchini, some pumpkins, some cauliflower, some broccoli, some beet, some onion, some green onion, some chard and I had three or four different types of lettuce. Apparently, according to the best farmer in Flatrock, I have the best cabbage in Flatrock and I grew some turnips.

Do you know what? I have to say, it's a great feeling to go in and watch it grow. I can really understand where people come from that are into growing their own farms. I know when I grew up, my dad, and I being the youngest in the family – and when you're the youngest I think you get the dirty jobs. I did a lot of weeding, when I was growing up, of our potatoes and turnip and stuff like that. We always grew vegetables and it seemed like most communities in – I know in my area everybody grew their own potatoes, grew their own turnip, cabbage and carrots and whatnot, but it seems like people got away from it.

What I've noticed in the last couple of months, since people got a little bit more time on their hands, is a lot of greenhouses. I'm in competition with a lot of people over the size of my turnip compared to the size of their turnip and I think it's really something we should encourage. I really believe it's something we can encourage people in this province to do, is get out and grow our own vegetables.

One of the speakers today, my former colleague mentioned, we were once – food security is a huge problem in this province. The premier of the province stated we have about a nine-day supply of produce in this province. That's a scary situation when you think about it. So I applaud anything we can do to encourage people to grow their own vegetables.

I can tell you I did some beet already and I have to say, I did a real good job. I think I put a little too much vinegar and I'll put a little bit more sugar in it the next time but I was pleased with the way my beet came out. I compared them to – when I gave out of a few bottles of it, people gave me back theirs to taste. It's something we all can get into. I tell you, it gives you great pride watching it grow. When it don't grow – now, my carrots didn't come that good. I'm okay with everything else, but you take great pride in it.

Farmers in this province – in my district, in Cape St. Francis, we have a couple of big farms. A couple of them are dairy farms. There's Rose's farm down in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. There's Connors farm in Torbay. Leo Ryan also has a farm there but he doesn't do as much dairy as what he used to one time.

I know these people. To be a farmer, it's like something different. I always talk to the Connors' and their job – they're dairy farmers. The cows don't realize if it's Sunday, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. Seven days a week those people are in the farm at 5 o'clock in the morning and most times don't come out until eight or nine or 10 o'clock in the nighttime, seven days a week.

Farmers are hard workers and they take great pride in what they do. Anything that we can do as a government to – like my colleague said, rather than give one person \$5 million, if we

could support all the farmers in our province to make sure they have the best possible equipment that they can have to get out and put the produce, put the dairy products and probably – I know we've done some investments in secondary processing, but it would be good to make sure that our investments are there for secondary processing also.

I speak a little bit about farming and stuff like that. I love Sunday dinner and you can tell by looking at me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: There's nothing better than having fresh vegetables on that plate on Sunday with your Sunday dinner. I don't care who you are, there's no better. The best meal is Sunday dinner; but, also it's a healthy meal. It's a very healthy meal. It's something that we should –

AN HON. MEMBER: Get rid of the salt meat.

MR. K. PARSONS: Get rid of the salt meat. Now, a little salt meat don't make – just a taste, right. You got to have a bit of salt meat. It is a healthy meal and it is something that people in this province, we can produce ourselves.

I know my colleague for Labrador West mentioned eating fresh eggs. Last year, my son decided to build a little chicken coop next door which I helped him with. I think we have 14 or 15 hens now running around the yard all over the place, but we do get a few fresh eggs. I have to agree with you, there's nothing better than fresh eggs. Those are the things that we can do as people in this province and it's something we can do as government and leaders in this province to encourage that stuff, to encourage people to get out and do their own farming, encourage people to support local farmers.

I know my colleague for Exploits mentioned about how he goes to the store and he looks for it. So do I. I want to see fresh, local vegetables. If it's there and if it's a dollar in the difference, I'm going to buy fresh local every time and so we should encourage everyone in this province to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Any time we can support our local farmers, we're supporting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we're supporting what's grown here. We know what it's grown with and we know we're eating something that's healthy.

I don't think I'm going to take up my full time today but while we're talking about food and everything else, I also encourage people in this province and I notice (inaudible) with our food fishery. It another means of people getting out and not only a great day on the bay – and I'm sure everyone that goes out on the water, unless you get seasick or something, you really, really enjoy your day on the water.

There are so many things we can do here in this province to grow our own, support our own. Our local fishermen – there are lots of ways to get local cod. There are lots of ways to get local crab, lobster, you name it. There are all kinds of different fisheries here in the province that we should be supporting our own. That's what I think this PMR is about today is to encourage investment from government, but it's also to encourage the people of this province to get out and support local farmers, local fishermen and local people.

As we all know, the moose hunting season has started now. That's another form of meat we can put on our tables. Any time we get the opportunity to grow our own or put our own stuff on the table, I think it's great. I don't know how long more I'm going to be in the House of Assembly but when I do leave the House of Assembly, my four little gardens that I built this year, I'm going to build them a little bit better. I don't have any way of storage or anything like that, so I think my neighbours will do okay because I will give them all my big turnips and big carrots.

I encourage everybody in this House to support our farmers. When you do go to the local store or the local grocery store, just have a look and see where the produce is coming from and support Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

It's inspiring to hear you talk about your traditional Sunday dinner, but I asked you how your pease pudding is. Thank you.

Any further speakers?

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

MR. TRIMPER: (Inaudible) to conclude. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Very interesting, very entertaining as always. I enjoy this role of the PMRs and I enjoy seeing what the different colleagues in the House all contribute to the discussion at the time. What I'd like to do is to go back through each of them because there are some good points. I'll just kind of highlight as a summary.

First of all, hi, Rosalie Belbin. I know you're watching up in Red Bay and it's great to have you tuning in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: The Member for Exploits started us off. He talked about the importance of food supplies, education, next generation. It was a great summary, Sir, and I thank you very much for that.

There was an item in there. You were talking about some of the challenges farmers were having with accessing one of those 59 areas of interest. There is a website; there's an open request for proposals process. I did speak to the minister when you concluded your remarks. I would suggest if you're finding some of your constituents are having difficulties, reach out to the department and let's get them some help, because the idea is we want people to apply. We've identified these areas of potential. As the Member for Mount Peal North said, we can't create the land, but we can make arable land available. We only want to do that. If they're encountering challenges, let's get that addressed.

My colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay, an interesting approach, he talked a lot about the joint initiatives between Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador, spoke a lot about the history of the commitment and how we are

on track to get to 2022 by doubling that food self-sufficiency target that we had identified. I thank you very much for that.

It's interesting, you started right away, and in leading up to this, I have to tell you, food security was also a lot on my mind. I think that we've all come to realize in these two hours that you cannot separate out clearly because of the inequity, because of the unequal aspects of what so many of us are facing in our districts. Some, certainly, as you say, you're blessed in a lot of riches: mineral, agriculture, aquaculture, fishery and so on. Others, our colleague from Torngat Mountains, we need to connect that region with the rest of the province. This needs to be a priority not just for her, but for the entire House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: I think it's important. You started the theme and I found all the other speakers picked up on that.

To my colleague from Mount Pearl North and his long family history, it's always interesting to listen to the farming stories. I think it's really helpful in this job of politics because I find when you come into it as a new MHA and so on it's helpful to be able to draw on your technical background. So when we get on to an agriculture topic, I listen and I pay attention to what the man has to say; he knows what he's talking about.

I did want to address a couple of the points. He was talking about the challenges – and yes, farming is a challenging industry. My family has a lot of these issues, that's for sure. But I would highlight some of the information that I do have before me. For example, as I said in my opening remarks, some 67 new farmers have been identified and gotten into this industry over the last few years alone.

There's an example of between the federal and provincial governments the feds have kicked in some \$22.2 million. Our provincial government – and that's all of us here – have contributed an additional \$14.8 million. These combined monies are over a five-year period. So there's significant investment in that.

The minister just passed me a nice little summary. It's a \$28.7-million summary,

financial breakdown, of COVID-19 economic recovery initiatives within his department. So this is Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture. Most of what I see here is agriculture and there is a substantial amount of monies.

I'm just going to identify a couple of the programs. The access road construction for priority agriculture areas of interest; a large-scale potato program – we all like our spuds – secondary dairy processing; beef industry development; regional agriculture equipment banks; greenhouse expansion; vegetable cold-storage request.

I must say there's a farmer in my area who's just received substantial monies to set up that. Finally, we have that facility. Thank you, very much, Minister. He was very happy for that announcement the other day.

Agricultural virtual marketing; a food hub; farm equipment for the Wooddale Centre for Agriculture and Forestry Development – these are just some of the programs. This is over the last six months. So there is a tremendous lot happening and it's challenging. I take your point that – and I think others have raised it – we need to help every single one of these farmers, and not always with investment, but with support and buying local, as so many have identified.

I always find it amazing. I've known the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour – I think I introduced him one time at a conference probably close to 20 years ago. Anyway, he always speaks without notes. It just seems to come out of him. But he certainly has spent a significant amount of time in his previous portfolio with the program and was able to explain further in detail much of what I was summarizing in terms of why the target was identified, what the target meant and the programs and the rationale for heading out to all of them.

Next topic, I want to go over now to my colleague from Labrador West and yes, he was over touring my garden a little while ago and –

AN HON. MEMBER: Did he see the money tree?

MR. TRIMPER: The money tree is here in Confederation Building, by the way, and I'm thinking about bringing it into the House one day. I have to see if I can get leave of the House. Anyway, there's a special fiscal story there to talk about, but I digress.

The Member did mention something that's very important in terms of Labrador and the importance of highways and giving us those options. My colleague from Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair also spoke about growing up in – I liked her definitions of isolated-rural, remote-rural and rural. She's absolutely right. I can remember going into those communities on the southeast Coast and telling them that there was a highway coming. I was there working on the environmental assessment. They thought we were crazy. That's very vivid for me, those memories, some 20 years ago and what a difference it's made. Again, we need to get it, to our colleague in Torngat Mountains. We need to work on that highway; there's no question.

I wanted to tell a little story while I got a couple of minutes. It's a good pandemic story that relates to my buddy from Cape St. Francis – the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. My wife and I, we started a garden last year. It's just a simple little plot. I don't know why we just got into this. We've been married 27 years now. Anyway, last year we thought we'd start growing a few things. We put some strawberry plants in. I built a little box structures out there.

Anyway this spring, the pandemic hit, boom, we lived at our kitchen table. She was at one end running a company; I was at the other end doing what I do as an MHA. That's where we were day in and day out, as you all know, and tuning into the broadcast. She decided let's get some seeds and let's expand our garden this year.

Well, I think we started that in late March, early April. If you understand the growing season, it makes it very challenging because our house just started getting overrun with potato plants, zucchini plants and so on. We actually had to move furniture out of some rooms to set in the plants and then when we could finally start with the greenhouse, which had to be built then to support the plants that were growing inside the house, it just spiralled off. It was like a

gardening arm's race. Next thing you know I'm out shovelling snow to create a greenhouse area.

I'm happy to report that we are harvesting away up there and in comes the crops. It is a good source of food, but I must say it's also very good from a mental health perspective. So many of us have talked this week that we just faced a lot of anxiety outside. Gardening is not going to help so many of the big problems that we're facing, but I can tell you on an individual basis it gives you a lot of good meditation, a lot of good therapy. For that reason alone I think that we're going to see some great things coming out of the gardening initiatives that we're all feeling. I mean, sales in some stores have gone through the roof. I know those in my district have done very well.

I wanted to talk a little bit about – and back over to my colleague for Mount Pearl North – the calculation of the 14.8 per cent, where that comes from. I think it's a very important question. What it's based on – and you are absolutely right, Sir, it does not include milk, eggs and chicken, because we're already very self-sufficient in these commodities. What we're really talking about here are vegetables and fruits and the production of that.

The number comes about from a 2017 farm survey that found that year we had 590 hectares in production. That represented at that time some 10 per cent of our consumed fruits and vegetables. That's what this number is that we're tracking, so that by the next year we had added an additional 184 hectares. At that time we were up to 13.8 per cent. Last year, 2019-2020, another 160 hectares in production of fruit and vegetables. That's how we've arrived at this 14.8 per cent.

As so many other colleagues – I think, again, for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, my colleague for Lab West and others – talked about the importance of things like the food fishery. In Labrador we talk constantly about the importance of country foods: the hunts, the fisheries, the food fishery – all these things – berry collecting and mushroom collecting. There is a lot of protein; there are a lot of food sources that we all enjoy collecting. We almost need some way, Minister, to figure out how to properly measure this and realize the

contribution that is making to the plate at that Sunday dinner table that we all enjoy so much.

I think that I've pretty well summarized what I've heard on the floor. I feel that we are certainly heading in the right direction. It's really important that as we strive for food self-sufficiency we need to make sure that our supply lines are also very secure. We need to encourage both production and attitudes. Buying local, these dinners that we have where we – they call them 100-mile radius. Everything you're going to eat in this meal will have been generated, produced, originated from 100 miles of the area where you're having that meal.

I think these are all really important initiatives. Minister, I know you have a great challenge in front of you but I think you're going to be able to carry on. With the support of the House, which I'm anticipating, I believe we all see the merits in doing this and moving forward. I wish you all the best in reaching this goal of doubling our food self-sufficiency to 20 per cent in terms of fruits and vegetables by 2022.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to stop for the day. Thank you very much for your attention.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Is the House ready for the question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

The motion is as presented by the Member for Lake Melville, item 10 on our Order Paper for today.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

It being Wednesday, in accordance with our Standing Order 9(3) the House of Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.