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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start, in the Speaker's gallery today, we have individuals from the SPCA St. John's who are the subject of a Member's statement – Karen Mahoney, director and Natasha Reddigan, fund development manager.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In our public gallery today, I'd like to welcome Reverend Oliver Dingwell from the Cowan Heights Church, which is also the subject of a Member's statement. Reverend Dingwell is accompanied by several members of his congregation.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Actually, I just want to make a correction. Karen Mahoney and Natasha Reddigan, from the SPCA, they're actually in the public gallery.

In the Speaker's gallery, today, I want to welcome Nikita Ryall, Margaret Connors and Michelle Hutchings, representing the Chalker Place Neighbourhood Centre. They are also the subject of a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery, I want to welcome Sharon White, Linda Snow and Margaret Rose Kavanagh from the Kilbride 50 Plus Club, also being recognized in a Member's Statement today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Finally, visiting our public gallery today, we have councillors, Wanita and Bob Stone, from Red Bay, Labrador.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we're going to hear Members' statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, St. John's West, Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Waterford Valley and Windsor Lake.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand to acknowledge the incredible work of the Chalker Place Neighbourhood Centre and its dedicated staff and volunteers, Nikita Ryall, Margaret Connors and Michelle Hutchings and, of course, her lovely baby.

Chalker Place Neighbourhood Centre is a community organization that enhances the lives of families living in social housing in my district, offering educational, social and recreational programs for special occasions. It doesn't just offer after-school programs, it provides a safe space to celebrate community success with deeply caring folks.

Nikita Ryall, program coordinator, spends countless hours ensuring residents have the resources they need to connect, thrive and succeed.

Margaret Connors, a volunteer of over 17 years, began tutoring in the home of a senior and continues to volunteer educational and recreational services for children and youth at the centre.

Michelle Hutchings, a dedicated employee, is not just staff but a dedicated community member and mom who gives of herself to

make the community a better place for everyone.

This centre is instrumental in inspiring young people to be engaged, volunteer, take on leadership roles and become successful adults.

Speaker, I ask this House to join me in recognizing the staff and volunteers at the Chalker Place Neighbourhood Centre for their continued community contributions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Cowan Heights United Church.

The Cowan Heights United Church is a vibrant, growing and inclusive community of faith that welcomes people of all ages, gender identities, ethnic backgrounds, abilities and sexual orientations.

The congregation is deeply engaged in community life, opening its doors as a de facto community centre. Its church grounds feature a thriving community garden with 12 plots for local residents. The church also operates a food pantry and, through its Home Harbour initiative, hosts a weekly community meal, bringing people together while addressing food insecurity.

Through these efforts, the church has become a vital hub for connection, compassion and support in the Cowan Heights neighbourhood.

The church is also a leader in advocacy and inclusion. It is committed to anti-racism, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and allyship with the LGBTQ+ community, while supporting initiatives focused on food security, gender-based violence and refugee support.

This important work is made possible by dedicated volunteers and the strong leadership from the Reverend Oliver Dingwell.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating Cowan Heights United Church for its outstanding contributions to our community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an exceptional young constituent of St. John's, Mr. Seth Hyde.

At just 17 years of age, Seth was named the play-by-play broadcaster for Newfoundland Regiment QMJHL team – an extraordinary accomplishment for anyone at any age. Yet, beyond his success in the broadcast booth, what truly sets Seth apart is his community commitment each and every day.

He is the founder of Seth Hyde Sport Side, a charitable initiative dedicated to give back through sports. Through this platform, Seth has used his voice and growing profile to support organizations like Easter Seals NL and to shine spotlight on individuals and families in our province.

Seth understands that sport is more than competition, it is connection, inclusion and opportunity. By combining his passion for sports with charitable outreach, he has created meaningful impact at a young age, helping raise awareness, foster community pride and inspire other young people to lead with purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Seth Hyde represents the very best of NL with talent, generosity and deep commitment to uplifting others. I congratulate him on his achievements and thank him for the positive difference he continues to make in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Speaker, today I recognize the Kilbride 50 Plus Club, an organization that's been bringing people together in the community for over 40 years. With more than 70 active members, the club meets every Tuesday, creating a welcoming space for connections, laughter and friendship.

Members gather to enjoy cards and a shared lunch, with contributions greatly brought by the players themselves. Under the leadership of the president who organizes weekly donations for the lunch table, the club continues to thrive through community kindness and spirit.

The support received through the provincial Aging Well at Home Grant helps provide essentials like water, tea, fruit and other healthy options, so that the club promotes healthy and physical well-being.

Speaker, what truly stands out is the joy that the club brings. I visited the club and seen first-hand the seniors come together, share stories, enjoy a game of cards and simply smiling in each other's company. It's something special and highlights the importance of connection and of community.

I would also like to acknowledge the dedication of the current president, Sharon White, who may or may not be the mother of a Member sitting on this side, coincidentally, who has served in this role for six years, and members, Linda Snow and Margaret Rose Kavanagh who joined us here today.

I ask all Members to join me in recognizing the Kilbride 50 Plus Club.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the outstanding work of the SPCA St. John's. We are honoured to have Karen Mahoney, director, and Natashia Reddigan, fund development manager, in attendance today.

The SPCA does far more than care for animals. It strengthens our communities. Its thrift stores in St. John's and Mount Pearl provide affordable essentials while diverting thousands of items from landfills. Through its pet safekeeping program, in partnership with the Iris Kirby House, the SPCA supports individuals leaving domestic violence, ensuring their pets remain safe.

Its volunteer and foster programs, along with meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, reflect an inclusive and compassionate approach. Additionally, partnerships with the College of the North Atlantic and Academy Canada provide students with hands-on experience, helping prepare the next generation of veterinary professionals.

The new Community Engagement Centre in St. John's marks a significant step forward. It will serve as a hub for humane education, volunteer training and community programs, expanding advocacy beyond sheltering and rescue.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing the SPCA for its vision, its compassion and unwavering dedication to strengthening communities and improving the lives of both people and animals across our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

It is my pleasure to rise today as the Minister of Seniors to recognize those who provide care to the seniors in our province.

Speaker, caregivers are the quiet heroes of our communities. They provide essential support to seniors, enabling them to age well and in the most appropriate place.

Many are unpaid – providing care to their spouses, parents and other family members. Others work in long-term care homes, personal care homes or provide home care in private homes offering compassion, strength and stability to seniors when it matters most.

As a government, it is our responsibility to ensure that seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador can age with dignity, security and respect, surrounded by the supports they need to live meaningful, connected lives.

We are making seniors a priority, and we are committed to investing in programs and services that will benefit both seniors and their caregivers.

Together, we extend our deepest gratitude to all caretakers in this province, whose compassion, dedication and unwavering commitment brighten the lives of the seniors they support and strengthen the very heart of our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, the Opposition acknowledges the important work from those who provide care to our seniors. We agree that they are the quiet heroes of our community.

Our population has changed significantly in the last number of years, which means we have less people able to properly support our seniors to age with dignity. The current government must prioritize proper support for our caregivers, as well as giving seniors the support they need to age well at home. These are the challenges we face and why we must continue to make seniors a priority.

Thank you to all who support our seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We also want to pay tribute to all the caregivers who provide care to our elders in this province – 25 per cent of our population.

The work of the caregivers often goes underpaid, if at all, and their contributions unrecognized. That is why we would like to take this opportunity to call on government to prioritize these compassionate home support workers. Please invest more in pay and benefits for them and work towards making the current framework a part of our public health care system where it belongs.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Last night, Speaker, every single Conservative MHA voted to support the use of MCP funds for political purposes. If they don't draw the line here and now, when will the line be drawn? The MCP budget is almost \$600 million.

How many more staff will the Premier have to hire for himself in his office on the MCP budget before his Conservative caucus says enough is enough?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me take this opportunity to talk about things that matter to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador: better access to health care, lowering their cost of living and safer communities. Let's talk about one of those measures that we've already announced and that is the idea of nobody will have to pay to see a nurse practitioner anymore.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Not only does that improve access to health care for them, but it also lowers their cost because they will no longer have to pay out of pocket.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I look forward to the implementation of the Liberal pilot plan to pay nurse practitioners.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Speaker, yesterday, when we revealed that a staffer in the Premier's office calendar showed that he has nothing to do with meetings that have to do with health care, the Premier first said that any subject under the sun can be related to health care, so that's why he's in the meetings. Then he went to the media and said that Mr. Whalen or Dr. Whalen never went to those, so it's more, again, don't believe the facts, just believe the Premier because he says so.

So I only have one question on this now: Can the Premier stop the coverup, pick a story and stick to it?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Let me be clear that nobody in the province will have to pay to see a nurse practitioner and it will not simply be a pilot project. That's the first thing.

The second thing is let's continue to talk about the things that matter to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to accessing health care. Let's talk about medical transportation which the Minister of Health talked about yesterday. I've heard from many people in my district over the years and I'm sure many other Members that live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador have heard about the cost of travel to make medical appointments and, in some cases, people have not met those appointments because they couldn't afford it. We're going to make sure they don't have to worry about that anymore.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, it's been three weeks and pretty soon this Premier's legacy is going to be having not answered one question in the House of Assembly.

On Tuesday, outside of the House, the Premier tried to blame me and the Liberal government for failing to sign on to a new national electricity grid agreement with other provinces. He claimed there was an agreement last July and that we didn't sign it, but that is categorically false. In fact, real negotiations didn't start until after the election and the agreement in question was only signed this month, all on this Premier's watch.

So why is the Premier and Newfoundland and Labrador left out and why did he spread misinformation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me assure the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that they are not being left out; that those on this side of the House, not the Liberal Opposition, we are standing up for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We're going to stand up and make sure we get the best deal possible for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to our resources and our energy –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: And then on another fact, Speaker, we are continuing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: I said order!

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: On another matter, Speaker, we are continuing to meet with federal representatives and next week we'll have a meeting with the Energy Minister to talk about such proposals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Here I asked why we're left out and it's very clear to me why we're left out, because the Premier has been left out of the negotiations. This deal is not with the federal government; it is with the other provinces.

So I ask the Premier: Have they not called you to invite you to agreements or are you just not participating?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me assure the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that this side, this party, this PC Party, will deliver on its commitments. One of those commitments is to make sure that when we develop resources of Newfoundland and Labrador, we put people first and they will be the benefit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to meet with anybody and everybody who's interested in helping us develop our resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: That rings a little bit hallow. He's prepared to meet with anybody and everybody except for the eight provinces that signed the agreement.

In May of 2025, the Premier said to pause the MOU negotiations in place of – wait for it – a national energy strategy. This week, of course, the Minister of Energy said he wouldn't sign on to that national energy strategy because of – wait for it – negotiations on the MOU. Once again, to no one's surprise, the Premier is completely all over the place depending on if he spoke before the election in Opposition or after the election while he was in government.

Will the Premier explain why he changed his mind on this issue?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me assure you, we're not changing our mind on anything. We said right from the beginning, that we are going to protect the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are going to work for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we will sign no deals unless the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are the principal beneficiaries of our natural resources. That's what we will continue to do, Speaker.

At the same time, we're going to now start focusing on the social determinants of health. One of those is housing, Speaker. Let's see, yesterday we got a report from the Auditor General, and let me quote from that quickly, when it said: In addition, the previous government was given \$36 million in 2024 to build 104 homes; 16 months later only four were done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, he's right, they won't sign an agreement. They haven't signed the agreement. That's the whole point. There are eight provinces looking for a national energy strategy and Newfoundland and Labrador said we don't want to be part of it. The worst part is, before they were in government, the Minister of Energy said –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: – that this agreement had to be signed before they start negotiations on the MOU. I don't know if there are any *Seinfeld* fans out there, but the minister and the Premier remind me of George Costanza; everything they said before the election, now they're doing the exact opposite.

So can they explain to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who should they believe, George Costanza before the election or George Costanza after the election?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It brings me back to the episode when Cosmo Kramer got voted out. They're not going to believe him, I can guarantee you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, the AG report came out yesterday, and extremely important questions.

So the previous administration comes out with 750 homes built over two years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: Only a day later to find out that there was only 11 built. This government is misleading the entire public based on their history, and it's about time –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – for them to look at what they've done and what they've left for us to fix. Make no mistake about it, we will fix it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, yesterday the government was outraged that we would dare to ask them to stop using MCP money for Conservative political advice. They called us shameful, turned their backs on us in the House and claimed we were dragging a good doctor's name through the mud; but we didn't put Dr. Des Whalen in this position, the Premier did. This is about a misuse of funds by the Premier and his Cabinet.

Why won't you do the right thing, fix the mistake and stop the cover-up?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, what we're doing is fixing the mess they left in health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Seriously, they did not put any money in the budget for agency nurses, the travel nurses, but yet –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: – they racked up \$80 million – \$80 million that wasn't costed in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: I ask the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, do you want to test my resolve today?

Order!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'll go on.

Travel nurses – no plan to stop using them, but with no money in the budget – \$80 million, Speaker. Family Care Teams rushed out, not fully staffed, some buildings left vacant and \$20 million over budget.

Speaker, \$20 million over budget for what, for understaffing, setting the Health Accord up to fail? That's what's shameful.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I'll keep reminding this House that MCP is for Medical Care Plan, not money for Conservative politicians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: We already know that MCP funds are being used for political advice because the contract states political staff – not the bureaucracy, not the health administration – but yesterday, the Minister of Environment slipped up and further admitted the truth, saying this doctor has given this party advice.

Will the Minister of Environment explain why MCP should be paying for advice to the Conservative Party?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, we're relying on this physician, this doctor, as a special advisor to the Premier's office to advise us on health care.

When the Liberals announced the new St. Clare's, it was costed at between \$10 billion to \$14 billion. That's what we were told. They said it was going to be around \$10 billion but, they said, in actual fact, it would range between \$12 billion and \$14 billion, but they didn't put anything in the fiscal forecast. That's irresponsible, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: When you look at that, Speaker, the problem with acute-care beds is that there's 23 per cent of alternate care patients –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Speaker, yesterday, when the Premier was confronted with evidence that Des Whalen's calendar was full of meetings that had nothing to do with health care, the Premier suggested, "I think what we should have done and perhaps could do differently is make sure that we don't include the names of everyone on the lists of meetings that are being held that they probably aren't attending."

How does the Premier expect anyone to trust the access to information process when he talks openly about manipulating the information that he releases?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, when I stood here yesterday and responded to the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, he stood and he referenced MCP and NLHS, and he said funds should not come from there.

I have the OC for Dr. Greg Browne, who was hired as a special advisor to the premier, and guess who was the minister that authorized NLHS to pay these fees? It was the former premier, the Leader of the Opposition. It was his department and they're saying it's different; they're splitting hairs. They did the same thing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Speaker, rather than explaining why MCP should be used to give partisan political advice on things that have nothing to do with health care, the Premier is now complaining that he has done a bad job of running a cover-up.

Why is the Premier so afraid that the truth is starting to come out, and why won't the Premier stop the cover-up?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. EVANS: Speaker, in actual fact, they are talking about an advisor to the Premier's office who is providing advice on health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. EVANS: Speaker?

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

L. EVANS: The dollars being used to pay the person's salary is coming out of administrative dollars, Speaker. We are taking the advice of this doctor; this doctor has so much knowledge about rural Newfoundland and Labrador. In actual fact, there is a failure of the past Liberal government to actually roll out health care that meets the needs –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

We know through the \$275,000 political doctor's calendar that he has been working on things that have nothing to do with health care. Yesterday the Premier tried to say that this was okay, because everything could be related to health care.

Does the Premier really expect the people to believe that we should be using MCP for political advice about Bay du Nord and the fishery?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, it's not about what we believe; it's about what we know. We know that this government failed. We

know that the Leader of the Opposition was the minister of Health –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: He was the minister of Health for an extended period of time while health care continued to fail. We know that they utilized NLHS funding in the same manner, but now it's no good. We are in a crisis in our health care –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – because of the mismanagement that this former –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – government done, and they're frightened to death to look in the mirror and admit to their mistakes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Yesterday, the Deputy Premier said stay tuned, and there will come a day when – I quote – that man, Des Whalen, may very well be in a position to run and that we need people like him to sit in this hon. House.

Are the Conservatives using MCP funds to get Dr. Des Whalen ready to run? Is that why they're continuing to defend this immoral decision? Shameful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

What the PC Party are doing, they're following through on their platform they were elected on: lower taxes, better health care and safer communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: If that means we're going to take advice from a good person, a qualified person, a person who we all have a lot of respect for, we will take whatever advice is needed; and may we all be so hopeful and have the pleasure one day that he will sit in this House and make decisions to help every single one that's in this province.

No apologies – no apologies.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Speaker, the Member for CBS contradicts himself over and over and over. He did it on this side; now he's doing it on that side.

The Premier said Des Whalen is invited to a bunch of meetings that he doesn't attend. The fact that Des Whalen is invited to meetings and has access to all non-health care information is exactly the point.

Dr. Browne, Dr. Parfrey and Dr. Fitzgerald never had access to information in the Premier's office outside of health care.

So a simple question for the Premier: Who in the Premier's office kicks Des Whalen out of meetings that he is invited to but that he isn't supposed to attend?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I think the Premier answered the question yesterday about these invites to calendar events that we all experience in all our departments. There was a load of people invited; there were only several who went.

But I will tell you something, Mr. Whalen sat in on a meeting that I went to the Premier's office with, it was on infrastructure. It was about what do we do with the \$14-billion tower of power in Kenmount Crossing, what we do with renovating St. Clare's and what we do with the redevelopment of the Janeway's Children hospital.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: I will tell you now, I will take his advice any day, anywhere over any one Member opposite.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Well, I'm glad the minister admitted that this doctor gave him advice to cut the roads budget this year –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. LOVELESS: That's wonderful news.

I say to the minister, the industry seeks clarification, and so do we.

Can the Minister of TI give an answer on whether the federal contribution of a federal-provincial infrastructure program for the twinning projects is in the road plan budget he announced last week?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

That's in the roads program. I will not disclose the amount we have allotted, because then it's just as well for me to tell every contractor out there what to bid on the project.

But I'll ease his concerns – he knows the answer to this question. It's disingenuous, but what I'll do, I'll ease his concerns. There's not a big amount of money there this year because there's not a lot of work expected. That's all I'm willing to say right now. When the bids come in, he can see it himself.

What he's getting on with now is disrespectful to the staff that he used to be minister for and the department he used to so proudly stand and defend. Now he's gone in the gutter, like they've gone in the gutter this week and they continue to stay in the gutter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: And I've had enough of it. We've all had enough of it. It's time to get on and govern this province which we're willing to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: I think if you went and asked every staff member in that department, they had utmost respect for me because I had utmost respect for him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Don't go pointing that finger.

Obviously, you –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. LOVELESS: – do not know. All I'm asking for you – I'm not asking you for the amount to give out to contractors. The twinning project was a federal-provincial – you may not know that – agreed upon amount but you've now taken that and put it into roads program.

SPEAKER: Address the Chair, please.

E. LOVELESS: What happened to the federal contribution piece?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

What I will tell the Member opposite, his staff listens to the nonsense he gets on with in this House day in and day out and they hear it loud and clear. I don't have to tell them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: They hear it. What I will tell you, this government took it upon themselves to look after Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, whether that be contractors, whether that be workers. We cancelled the P3. We're doing the procurement the regular way. Industry are happy – not everyone, but even the ones that were interested in it, they understand why we did it and they've embraced it and they will be bidding on it and we will get work done –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – this year with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians doing that work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I understand leadership flows down and the answers we're getting are non-answers now from the Premier down to the Deputy Premier and all the ministers.

So we have a very simple question for the Deputy Premier. There was \$316 million that was allocated for twinning projects in this province, \$158 million which was from the federal government. Have you walked away from \$158-free million from the federal government or is it in the Roads Plan?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I don't really think it's that complicated. I think we've announced – I don't know why they keep asking this question; they know the answer. Of course, we never walked away from \$150 million, but they also know – they were governing for 10 years.

Better still, that's the scary point. They governed for 10 years and don't know the answer. You don't get it all the one time. It's out over 10 years. So we'll get it each year coming up. We've got a budget for that. We've got a budget placement. You'll see it when the budget comes out, I say to the Leader of the Opposition.

But God help us, this crowd governed us for 10 years and they're asking me silly questions like that in the House of Assembly – unbelievable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: This is why Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are frustrated. I couldn't agree more with the Deputy Premier. It's not that complicated, but we've asked four times and he can't give us an answer.

Is the money in the Roads Plan or not?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, there's \$250 million in the roads program – the second most ever announced. Last year we got \$276 million –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – out the door and that was the maximum; there was still some carryovers. The actual budget last year was \$316 million, even though they like to use \$340 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: The twining is there; there's a small portion of work going to get started this year. Work will get done; the \$150 million is there, rest assured.

But like I just said, God help us what we have suffered for the last 10 years. No wonder, October 14, this party was voted in, trying to save this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, we should have looked for the fine print in the Blue Book where the next slogan was: excuses, no solutions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: People across my District of Burgeo - La Poile are angry that while they have to drive hours to see a doctor at their own cost, the Premier is paying a Conservative political staffer \$275,000 from MCP to get partisan political advice.

How can the Minister of Health explain and defend this outrageous appointment and the Premier's attempt to cover up, to the constituents in my district?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I would just like to address the Member talking about his constituents having to travel to access medical care. We've committed, in the Blue Book, that for specialized MCP insurance requirements. Under MTAP, we're going to actually increase that to 100 per cent – 100 per cent coverage under MTAP so that patients can actually access health care without having to pay out of pocket for these specialized MCP insured care.

That's something that the previous government in 10 years, they failed to do, Speaker. So we are taking action. You are seeing real –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, on January 22 at 10 in the morning, Des Whalen was invited to a meeting with the Premier and Cenovus Energy.

Can the Minister of Energy please explain why Des Whalen, a so-called health care adviser, was invited to a meeting with Cenovus Energy?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, after the AG report came out yesterday, you would think that the people that are here right now would be concerned about their failure, their absolute utter, disgraceful failure –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: They're afraid to ask a question about something important. Instead, they come in here and they waste the people's time asking questions with nothing to do with what they should be addressing here today.

The housing issues that we face that they brought on, the former minister from Burin - Grand Bank, 752 houses we built. The Premier stood up, 750 new houses we built. There was 11 – 11. Don't forget about the hotel – the Member over there gave his own buddies a hotel.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this week a senior walked into the ambulatory health hub and asked a worker if he could sit for a while to warm up and eat his lunch: crackers and peanut butter. He revealed that he could afford to eat, but he didn't have the money to heat his home.

I ask the Premier – since the worker also sent him the letter – will he do what the Liberals refused to do and remove the HST off all forms of home heating as one measure to help seniors stay warm in their homes?

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

C. PARDY: Thank you.

I think the Leader of the Third Party would be well aware that we've said numerous times that we are going to concentrate on affordability measures to make sure that we help out those that would be in our population that would be in need of assistance, and I would think in the upcoming budget he will see some of those measures.

I know that the learned Member has read our platform, of which there are many affordability measures that would be included. Will we help those who need help in our population? We certainly will, and that will come in the upcoming budget, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Auditor General's report on the NLHC is shocking and confirms what I've been saying for the past 6½ years. This was a failure on the previous Liberal government and explains why they were reluctant to enshrine housing as a human right in legislation.

I ask the Premier: Will he do what his predecessors refused to do and enshrine housing as a human right in legislation?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

First of all, I'd like to say on behalf of our government that we welcome the AG report on the Housing Corporation. As minister responsible, I will ensure that everything that was in that report will be done with the Housing Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I realize the issues that we're dealing with. For years, the Housing Corporation, as we knew, while we were in Opposition, was left not supported properly by the former government, but I can certainly tell you, figuratively and literally, my shoulders are big, and I'll carry it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

From a 71 per cent increase in wait-lists to a decrease of housing stock to a failure to forecast demand, plan and maintain housing units, the AG report lays bare the

failure of the previous Liberal government to provide affordable housing and explains why homelessness has exploded.

I ask the Premier: Will his government declare a housing emergency and present a plan in this House outlining the steps his government will take to clear up this mess so people will not have to spend another winter unsheltered?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker, and I do thank the Member opposite for the question.

We are in a crisis, no doubt, and we have a plan with respect to supporting those vulnerable in our community. We have a plan, of course, 10,000 homes over five years. My team and I at the Housing Corporation are certainly active on that plan. We will have projects roll out right across this province, not just in metro because this is not a metro issue; this is a provincial issue.

Speaker, with the help of the Premier, of course, of government and with respect to the budget that's going to be coming out soon, we will certainly have a plan to support those in our province who need it, and they will not be left behind.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, unfortunately, the mess left is way beyond a five-year plan. Unfortunately, people are sleeping in the rough, and more money is being spent on emergency shelters to house more people. We need immediate action to clean up this mess.

What actions will the minister take to reduce the number of people in emergency shelters and ensure people will not have to spend another winter outdoors?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

I couldn't agree more. This is a mess. We saw it while we sat in Opposition, and we pointed out what was going on with respect to housing and, of course, those who are homeless.

Speaker, we will have a plan to increase our housing stock. It is a top priority for me to make sure that our housing units that we have now are refurbished and repaired, that we can get people out of shelters and back into homes. Speaker, that's what they require to have good health, not only physical, but mental health as well, get them back into a home.

We will ensure that's being done. Just give me the time and I'll do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Time for Question Period has now expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House not adjourn at – is this right?

SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

L. PARROTT: Okay, sorry. Notices of Motion?

SPEAKER: You've already given notice for that.

L. PARROTT: I did, yes.

SPEAKER: So there are no notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

Access to justice is a fundamental right of all Canadians. The closure of the Provincial Court in Port aux Basques has created a significant barrier to justice for residents of the southwest coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Community members involved in civil and criminal matters are now required to travel long distances to attend proceedings, creating hardship for individuals, families, witnesses and legal professionals.

The courthouse also served as a local point of access for a range of justice-related and government-supported services, including matters involving family law, fines administration, peace bonds, legal aid interactions and other processes that rely

on in-person attendance. Its closure has reduced the availability of these services in the region, resulting in delays, increased costs and disproportionate impacts on vulnerable residents.

Therefore, we petition the Honourable House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to re-open the Provincial Court in Port aux Basques to restore accessible, timely and locally delivered justice services for residents of the southwest coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I'll note in the petition, again, I have multiple different communities here in Port aux Basques, Burnt Islands, Cape Ray and different streets here in Port aux Basques as well. This petition continues to come to me from residents, as they're concerned about what is going to happen to the court in Port aux Basques with the hopeful opening of that court, again.

I know we've been waiting for the working report. It's been a little while now. Time is passed that I think the minister had said, almost two weeks ago, actually that the report was coming very soon. So it would be great to hear from the minister about an update on where the report is.

I will sit down on that point and see what the minister has to say.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety for a response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

First, I'd like to thank the Member from Burgeo - La Poile for the petition and I know that he has stood in this hon. House on this

same petition and I am happy to provide an update to the hon. Member and to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I can say that we are expecting the findings from the working group next week, so I'm looking forward to that. The working group has been working and meeting regularly. They've put in a lot of time. I appreciate the work that they have done as volunteers from the judiciary, from lawyers, legal aid lawyers, private lawyers, labour as well, in addition to Crown prosecutors and, as I stated, the judiciary.

So we're really looking forward to their findings. I am feeling very optimistic and I'm thankful that we will have some news to report on that. They've been very successful, given the short period of time that they've had to work on this and I will provide an update next week as soon as I have their findings.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this has to do with the Cabot Academy.

During the Kingston wildfire of 2025, the North Shore community lost a vital and irreplaceable asset, Cabot Academy, the local K-to-6 school. In the aftermath of the fire, families and children faced not only fear and uncertainty, but ongoing disruption to their daily lives and a sense of stability.

Students were dispersed among multiple schools outside the community, resulting in the loss of a safe, familiar learning environment and the strong community connections the school provided. Many young children are now required to travel 40

to 50 minutes each way to attend school, with commute times further affected by weather and hazardous road conditions.

These extended travel times have also limited students' ability to participate in after-school programs and extracurricular activities, many of which are based in Carbonear. As a result, children are missing valuable opportunities for social development, physical activity and enrichment.

Parents and guardians have likewise been impacted. Employment obligations and transportation constraints now significantly hinder, limit families' ability to engage with their children's schools, participate in school activities and contribute meaningfully to the school community.

Therefore we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to commit to the timely rebuilding of Cabot Academy as a critical step in supporting the recovery and future of the North Shore community.

Now, I understand that that commitment has been made which is positive. However the group still wish to have the petition presented.

The proponents were happy to learn about the government's announcement this morning and making a solid commitment to rebuild the school as early as 2027 and they're thankful to the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde for his support and advocacy on this matter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: I'm not trying to steal his thunder.

However, they do have some concerns about the process and are disappointed with government's response in some areas. They are concerned that the Minister of

Education is waiting until the end of the school year to start consulting with parents in the area. In addition to the delay, they are concerned that all necessary staff may not be available over the summer. They are disappointed in the mental health supports that were present in the school for displaced children, that vanished after two weeks.

During that time, the reality of the situation had not sunk in with the children. They were caught up in the strangeness and excitement of their new school environment and now that that reality has sunk in, they do need support. Residents feel that two weeks of support was a token gesture, meant to tick a box.

Local schools are a cornerstone of community stability and a centre for long-term growth, sustainability and vitality. An accessible school is important to attract, retain families in the region. It's not just a piece of infrastructure; it's vital to restoring hope, stability and opportunity to the community.

As a teacher, I taught on the Southern Shore for a good 16 years and I tell you the impact of losing the school has, and I'll leave it at that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education for a response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I don't know how I would feel if I were in a community such as Conception Bay North where I lost my home, you lost your school and you had nowhere to go. It's a traumatic experience, no doubt. For these parents and families, the temporary set-up for them is also strenuous, but it's unavoidable in this particular instance.

We recognize that a school is central to any community. It's core to a lot of communities. Many communities do not grow because they don't have a school. They want to go to a school and have kids there that they can put in there. Without a school, you're not attracting families.

We've been quite adamant, our Premier has been quite adamant that the school for Conception Bay North will be rebuilt, but we're also cognizant that it's a K-to-12 school. We know that kids will age out. We're trying to figure out, the kids that are coming in, there's a bit of work to that, to try and rightsize a school for the district, for the community. Whether it be a larger school or a smaller school, we need to have that work done and we will also be discussing this with the parents and working with the committee that's already in place as well as infrastructure and transportation.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a petition here today on Red Bay dock and these are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS in the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, the World Heritage UNESCO site, Red Bay, continues to grow year over year; and

WHEREAS in 2027, Red Bay is poised to have a major event as the *Nao San Juan* will be arriving from Pasaia, Spain; and

WHEREAS infrastructure is inadequate as we prepare for the arrival of the *Nao San Juan* and currently it's a huge safety concern;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to give attention to this matter, as 2027 is

coming quickly and there needs to be a focus on making the necessary repairs to the dock infrastructures in Red Bay so that the Nao *San Juan* can make a safe arrival.

I'm pleased today to have Councillor Stone in the gallery today from Red Bay. She was long-time mayor there and back now serving on council. I would hope that a number of people on the other side already is familiar with the arrival of the Nao *San Juan* that's coming in 2027.

Speaker, Red Bay is a community, as I mentioned earlier in a Member's statement, of only 140 people. World Heritage UNESCO site and the tourism numbers are up around 10,000 people a season and growing, incredible really. They had 12 cruise ships last year. I believe there's at least 12 cruise ships that are booked this year. So something really, really exciting is happening in 2027.

Red Bay has an incredibly beautiful story, a strong connection with the Basque Country over in Spain. People would come from Spain in the 1500s and they would harvest the whales and oil from those whales would go back to Europe and light the homes and heat the homes in Europe.

There is a foundation over there Albaola Foundation. They've been fundraising, raising money and they built a replica of the Nao *San Juan*, which sank in 1565; it's on the floor of the ocean in Red Bay. After many, many years of fundraising, now the ship is coming, has every bit as big a potential as the *Matthew* when she came to places like Bonavista back in '97, I think, it was. I know my children were very small and we lined up for a long time on a rainy day, and it was very exciting.

There are issues with the wharf in Red Bay. Something has to be done. A portion has to be taken down if they can maintain the structure inside and the building, or there has to be something new put back. We have a consultant. We have reports. I've

been told it's a very serious issue. Something is waiting to happen.

The liability rests with the provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and I'm going to continue to petition until I can get some attention to keep this really urgent file going. It was moving in the right direction when we were there.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs for a response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

We, too, are very supportive of that visit. It's going to increase tourism. We recognize that. Labrador Affairs and TCAR, Tourism, we're working together to make sure that when the *San Juan* comes over, it will be a success, Speaker.

When you look at the dock infrastructure in Red Bay, 10 years of Liberal government, they didn't think to do any upgrades. We've struggled in the North Coast of Labrador as well, as well as the South Coast of Labrador with lack of infrastructure supports.

Also, I want to mention, Speaker, that the minister and a lot of people over on that side, when they were in government, they actually took a trip over to Spain at a great cost to the taxpayers. In actual fact, they could have had meetings virtually like we're doing, Speaker. We're meeting virtually.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: The money could have been invested in docks and infrastructures.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: At the end of the day, we look at 10 years of Liberal government. We look at Northern Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: – and coastal Labrador had lacked infrastructure development. I want to draw attention to that.

Speaker, when we're engaging, we will engage virtually.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, Motion 1, introduction and first reading of Bill 11.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 11, and I further move that that said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act, now be read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

The motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act," carried. (Bill 11)

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act. (Bill 11)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 11 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, Motion 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 19.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do not adjourn, today, Thursday, March 19 at 5:30 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Order 4, Bill 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand and talk about the *Disability Advocate Act*. I know our colleagues, on our side, we will be supporting the act.

I want to chat about three things today. First, it is just some accessibility things and, second, would be the *Buildings Accessibility Act 2023* and then the disability benefits that we brought in.

The first thing, I do also want to thank the disability community for their advocacy. They do incredible work. They represent a significant percentage of our population. We know that, in Canada, 27 per cent of adults identify as having a disability and once you turn 75, we know that 43 per cent of those have a disability. So it's a significant percentage of our population, Speaker.

I'd also like to make note that I couldn't find the number for Newfoundland and Labrador, but 5.2 million Canadians report difficulties with print materials, and I want to

make that clear for my next point. In terms of visual difficulties with print material, I want us to think about the Speech from the Throne, the government's priority document, the first thing that happened, the Lieutenant Governor came in and read the Speech from the Throne.

I'm not going to hold it up. I have it on my desk. We're not allowed to have props. But it was a beautiful document – I thank the King's Printer, I'm sure, who did an excellent job printing that document. I believe the background was Labradorite with white print overlay on that document. Speaker, that document, the Speech from the Throne from this government did not pass any visual accessibility checks.

In Ontario, this document would have been illegal from the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, AODA. I'd encourage anyone to go and check. This is not my opinion; this is objective. There are online accessibility checkers. When you take this – which the government also posted on their social media, so it is online. When you run that through an online accessibility checker, when you say WCAG, which is one level of online accessibility for AA compliance, it failed that, Speaker.

In Ontario that would have been illegal for a public sector body to have posted something that did not meet AA compliance. If you try AAA compliance, that failed as well. When you put in the checker for contrast ratio, it got a number of 2.54, very poor.

So the government's own Speech from the Throne document was not accessible. It could not be read by people with visual disabilities. If we had a disability advocate, I would hope that today they would be speaking out about the government's own Speech from the Throne document. When I ran this through the checker, the status that it gave, it said hard or impossible to read for users with low vision or colour blindness.

I think it is – I don't want to use shocking words – extremely disappointing that the Speech from the Throne document, the government's cornerstone policy objective after the election, the cover of that document does not meet visual accessibility standards – cannot be read by people with visual disabilities. So I hope this is a good moment for the government and their teams to go and educate themselves, receive training, whatever is needed so that this government doesn't publish any other documents in print or online which do not meet accessibility standards and, in Ontario, for example, would not have been allowed from the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

The second thing I just want to highlight then, is Bill 52 of 2023. We made significant changes to the *Building Accessibility Act*. When I was minister, this was, I guess, a three-year exercise. We did extensive consultations on the *Building Accessibility Act*. We made wholesome, substantial changes. We got rid of the 1981 exemption, where buildings built before 1981 did not have to comply with the building accessibility standards. We required full-service family washrooms in buildings with an occupancy over 300 people, and I would encourage the government to publish those regulations.

When I was minister, and then afterwards, I was continuously bugging the drafters and bugging the staff in the department to finish the regulations. I know that the regulations were very complicated. Essentially the experts in the government had to take the National Building Code and our current accessibility regulations and cross reference each one – there are thousands in the National Building Code – to make sure that in all instances we were moving up so things were more accessible for every single line item of the National Building Code.

That exercise had not yet been completed; those regulations are not yet completed. I

would plead with the government that they should get that done, because the building act and regulations that we passed, my understanding is, are still not in effect. The government should do that, Speaker.

Then the third thing I just want to highlight is the Disability Benefit. I was very pleased that our government last year introduced a Disability Benefit up to \$400 a month. When I knocked on doors this fall, there were many people that I knocked on and they said thank you. They said it made a significant difference to the people in their lives. I know we all have constituents that we can think of or family members that are low income, that are not able to do the same things as the rest of us for a variety of reasons. So I'm very, very, significantly proud that we were able to introduce up to \$400 a month for low-income individuals with disabilities.

Those are my points for a second reading today of this very important act. We will be supporting it. I, again, ask the government that they prioritize the regulations for the *Buildings Accessibility Act*, finishing and approving those or making changes as they see fit. As well, they should introduce training; they should have training for online accessibility, as well as ensure that the people working on such materials do as well so that this doesn't happen again.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to stand, and very excited, to be honest with you, about this day in the House of Assembly. Many of my colleagues have went before and many of my colleagues on the other side have went – first of all, I'd probably start by saying thank you to the many, many people, not just my constituents, but all of our constituents, that have come forward to bring their concerns,

to shed light on the things that we need to do in this piece of legislation and every piece of legislation, especially right now where one government is transitioned to another government. We always say you stand on the shoulder of those before.

What I'd like to say is I'm glad that this piece of legislation has continued on. It was nearing completion when we transitioned over and I'm very excited that the minister responsible for this department has moved quickly on this and has brought it forward.

So that's my thank yous right there but, most importantly, thank you to Mary, Nancy, Paul, Dennis, Renee and Joanne, who have all met with me in my brief stint there as the minister responsible for this. The ministers before had many, many meetings with stakeholders. Without those impactful meetings we wouldn't be in the situation we are today to bring forward a good piece of legislation.

I understand there is going to be some amendments made here today, which is how you develop good pieces of legislation in this House. I understand we may have an amendment on our side as well and hopefully it's viewed in the way in which its given, which is to improve this legislation for everyone going forward.

I would like to say it's very fitting that I get to speak after my colleague from Mount Scio, who highlighted a piece of advice that I thought was interesting. I never noticed that; I never knew that, but that's the reason why we talk to each other and we talk to individuals with lived experience. Just because I don't notice that is an issue, it is an issue for a large portion of our population. I think that establishment of a disability advocate in this nature, with a lens on this, would ensure that it doesn't happen anymore, which is a good thing. I think all of us can agree on that, because that wasn't an intention of anybody. It was just a fact of how it happened, so we need to be focused on those things.

Giving credit where credit is due is an important piece for me. I think everyone in this House, all 40 Members, would agree that the credit really lies at the feet of the people who have brought forward these concerns and the people up in the gallery who are here, and many more besides, that have brought forward the concerns and brought forward this piece of legislation.

It's a living document too; it's going to change over time. We're going to see things that will make improvements. The disability advocate, whoever he or she or them may be, will bring forward concerns and bring forward things that we may need to change in this piece of legislation over time. That's something that's really good about the House of Assembly. My colleagues have said many times, the House of Assembly is a time machine. I've said it many times myself. Any piece of legislation – you see it now. We talk about the *Highway Traffic Act* almost every sitting. We make changes to improve it based on feedback that we received to improve those things.

The number of calls that we receive from our constituents with issues, this is going to be a help. There's no doubt this is going to improve. Whenever you get the chance to get up in this hon. House and hear colleagues from Placentia - St. Mary's who brings up the concerns that she's living with, I think I get the opportunity to be a little bit more educated on some of things that are going on.

When the hon. Member stood up from Placentia West - Bellevue, I thank you for bringing forward those concerns. It's an important piece that we should all try to bring forward, that lived experience on whatever issues we have. That's why there are 40 different people elected in this hon. House, because they bring forward those concerns. We may argue about things back and forth but it's always with the intention of trying to make the system better.

The Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, I'd be lying if said to you, you didn't bring a tear to my eye on your speech when you got the opportunity to speak, but I think that's what it's all about. I think it's bringing forward those concerns that you faced as a parent and how you wrestled with them and how you fixed them as a family to improve. I think that deserves a round of applause for sure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Let there be no mistake that what we're doing here today is a big thing; it's a big deal. Any opportunity we have to make legislation that's going to make the lives of the people that we all represent better, is a good thing.

Everything that we're talking about today, when we get into the Committee stage of this, where we ask questions and we're trying to develop, figure out exactly what is happening with this piece of legislation, when the minister – and I'm sure the minister is going to be forthright in all his answers to us. If he doesn't know it, he'll tell us and he'll come back and get that answer for us.

I'm very hopeful today that we're going to be in a situation where the long and arduous task of the people who are up the gallery here today, and many more besides, come forward so long ago – we'd love to be able to deal with this faster and I think, in one of the meetings I had, one of the individuals said to me, but it's much more important to get it right than rush it.

I think she's in the gallery today. I can't thank her enough for the insight that she did give in the meetings that we have had, for not just me, the other colleagues who have met with her in the past. I'm sure the current minister would say the same thing. So we're in a good spot here today in the House of Assembly. I think we're all aligned, we're all supportive and, from our side of the House, we're very supportive of this.

I know that my constituents who have reached out over the past 10 years – 11 years for me – with issues that are concerns that they had and this is going to help them. There's no doubt, it's going to help us as legislators in this House to be better and bring forward concerns, bring forward ideas, bring forward things that we can put in this House in legislation on every topic. I think that's going to help us.

The statutory offices always provide, to me, insight. We heard someone talking about one earlier today. Some of the recommendations are going to be challenging, there's no doubt. As a province and as the government is going to find out, that it's challenging to implement everything that comes forward in those reports.

I wish them the greatest success in doing that. It's so important that the statutory offices, in particular, have the ability to do that and bring forward recommendations. I wish them the greatest success, and I truly do mean that, in achieving every one of the recommendations that come out. Because, at the end of the day, they're meant with a heart and a half and, sometimes, that's hard to operationalize in government, but that's something that we're going to do.

But without exception in this House, I think all of us are in agreement that this has to move. I'm excited that it's Bill 1. I'm very happy that it's here on the Order Paper today and hopefully cluing up and at least going into Committee today.

I said a quote, I think it was yesterday or the day before: good, better, best; never let your good be better than your best. So it's really, really important for us, as a people, to always look at ways we can improve legislation. This is going to be one way and, hopefully, the Advocate's office is going to help with other pieces of legislation that will come forward. Looking at those, bringing forward concerns of residents that we all face and, hopefully, finding solutions that we sometimes can't see because we're not

being impacted directly; but if it impacts one of us, it affects all of us.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very happy to be here today and supportive of this piece of legislation but I think the thank yous – we can stand here and thank ourselves for this, but I think it's more important to thank those that brought this forward, at the forefront. To the many people up in the gallery, thank you for what you've been able to do and what you've been able to accomplish here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise today in support of Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate. Just to give another – for our listeners on the broadcast, we're discussing: "This Bill would establish the Office of the Disability Advocate and establish a process to appoint a person to act as an advocate for the interests of persons with disabilities, both individually and collectively."

I know this has been said by many Members as well, but this bill is certainly a good part of what we do here in the House, to see all Members coming together for something that's so important to many members in our community and to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and recognizing how important that is and to work together for the people. That's exactly what this is about: people in the province. This is not just facts and figures on a page; this is creating change that will affect people's lives, which is something that is very important for us all to take into consideration when do a lot of business in the House of Assembly.

I also want to join in thanking and appreciating many of my colleagues here on both this side and the other side of the House for speaking very personal stories – very, very personal stories about themselves, their family members. That's really to be commended for them to share those stories openly, to show the difference that this can make and the realities that people in our community face. I definitely want to give an appreciation to many Members here for sharing their personal stories.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: Speaker, I think it's also important to highlight that we talk about the Advocate and the Office of the Disability Advocate. We have many other Officers of the House of Assembly who do similar kind of work in their roles as advocates. We have the Seniors' Advocate, Child and Youth Advocate and we see how important those offices are to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I know all of us here in the House get calls from people across the province with many issues, many concerns, but it's also nice to have those people in positions where they can call directly to get information that may not be readily available to them, or ask a question that they may not be able to get an answer to which are at the fingertips of these people. They are very experienced, the ones that are appointed to these positions. They have a lot of background in the work that they do.

I hear from seniors all the time about the Seniors' Advocate and how they go to those folks for, even applications, for example. A lot of applications can be very hard for seniors in the province to work through to get those done in a timely basis. So I know the important roles that the offices make in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Just to go over some of the clauses, as well, in the bill. It may seem very simple for a lot

of people, you know, small things that we're trying to do, but simple things like expenses – giving a Disability Advocate the expenses to travel. So having the ability to go across the province to meet people in their community is certainly something important, as well, because to have that opportunity to see in real life, in their homes or in their community what they're experiencing, so the Advocate can have a first-hand experience of those individuals who are reaching out to express concerns or questions, I think that's certainly important to provide.

Staffing, of course, as well – having the opportunity for the Advocate to put staff in place so they're supported as well in their role. I know any staff in any office provide a significant role to the person in charge, I guess, the Advocate in this case. There's a lot of work that needs to be done, obviously, so having those supports is important.

Even simple things as confidentiality of information. We know that a lot of this is very personal, very private to some people. So having those things included in this bill is certainly important to highlight the work that the Advocate would do.

Another clause that I would like to highlight is communication rights. I look at persons with disabilities living in facilities, long-term care homes, group homes, personal care homes, being able to communicate directly with the Advocate. I know that's certainly important, having that opportunity to be able to reach out because it can be very difficult for people. I know that other folks here, as well, but I have family that are in long-term care homes and I know how difficult it can be to reach out and to communicate with your family and your friends or whoever, but having that line to be able to communicate with the Advocate directly is certainly important to the people who will be most affected by it in this bill.

Speaker, I'd just like to take a bit more time to highlight, from my own district – as many

people may know, back in 2018, Port aux Basques was, by *Today's Parent* magazine, the most autism-friendly town in Canada, which was a significant milestone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: And I have to give a shout-out to AIM, which is Autism Involves Me. This was led by Joan Chaisson and April Billard at the time – two very strong advocates, both having personal struggles as well, that stood up and made sure that those supports were there for the people in the community. They have done incredible work. They still do incredible worker, Speaker, and advocate very hard for their families and those in the community affected. I certainly want to give a shout-out to them for the work that they've done and continue to do.

Speaker, with those changes with that announcement, we saw a significant increase of families moving to the area looking for those supports, because it was widely known and published across the country about this recognition. Those families were moving to the area to lean into those supports.

I just look at my notes here. It included training local businesses and that led to many practices such as quiet hour, sensory-friendly, non-judgment environments in our grocery stores. The community really bought into what they were trying to achieve and what they were expressing to the community, which was very important.

I know it's not just Port aux Basques, as I mentioned, there are communities all around the coast that rely on those bigger centres as I've mentioned numerous times here for services.

Those families recognize the work that they were doing in our community and they moved there. They moved from across the country. I'm pretty sure across the world, actually, in different parts of the world, they moved to Port aux Basques to get those

services that were available because of the work that the people in our community did.

I certainly just wanted to take a moment to commend them and the work that they do. I think of groups like InclusionNL from my own personal experience. I've had meetings with them in my previous career. Such important groups in our communities, in our province, that are very passionate, very experienced with their lives and the work that they do in the community, with other persons with disabilities and strong advocates for those in the community.

I certainly want to commend all the organizations, all the groups throughout Newfoundland and Labrador for the work they do. Speaker, as I mentioned, I'm very proud to stand here and join collectively with Members in this House because it seems to clear that it will be a very supportive bill. I'm very proud to stand in my support of that bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further speakers?

Seeing no further speakers, if the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being speaks now, he will end the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank everyone here today. Speaker, as we come to the end of our discussion regarding Bill 1, I want to take a moment to reflect upon the significance of the work that we have discussed here in this hon. House. This bill represents an important step forward for our province and the thoughtful engagement that we heard

here, speaks to the shared commitment of all Members of this House of Assembly.

On behalf of myself and my entire department, I want to say how much we appreciated everyone's feedback. And not only about the bill, Speaker, but specifically also the touching and personal insights that were shared here in this House about persons with disabilities, the challenges that they face and how we all work together to advance inclusion and accessibility in our province.

My colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands spoke about how the community of and for persons with disabilities provides such a rich contribution to our society. He said that this legislation encourages us to be better people, and I believe he is absolutely right.

My colleague from Placentia - St. Mary's spoke on her very personal experience as a mom and an advocate. My friend, thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: She spoke about the importance of an Advocate having lived experience and, of course, the focus on a disability lens, providing the Advocate also with appropriate resources. She also emphasized the importance of continuing to advance other issues to support persons with disabilities in our province, including pay rates for self-managed care and supportive decision-making. In her words, the journey of an advocate is one that never ends.

My colleague from Fogo Island - Cape Freels spoke about his daughter and my colleague from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville said it right, there wasn't a dry eye in the room.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Her challenges, her triumphs and her very full life. He also spoke about

building an inclusive province, removing barriers and protecting people's rights. I appreciate and thank him for sharing his perspective as a father and an advocate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: My colleague from Waterford Valley spoke about the great work of the Disability Policy Office. Speaker, I couldn't agree more. He also talked about how important it is to have an independent office that puts the needs of the disability community forward. It's heartwarming to see the House of Assembly coming together and show such support for this bill.

As I've said previously, while we were in Opposition, it was the Premier and the Justice and Public Safety Minister who introduced and secured the unanimous passage of a private Member's resolution calling for the creation of this Advocate, ensuring all parties in the House recognized the urgency of this need.

Last week, we heard once again from the Minister of Justice and Public Safety who spoke about the need for a strong voice and acknowledged all the advocates over the years who have spoken up in support of persons with disabilities. We now have an opportunity to witness change and, in her words, it is truly the dawn of a new day.

Speaker, I'd like to echo something that my colleague from Lake Melville mentioned last week and I feel it's very important. This bill transcends partisan politics. It shows us the importance of the democratic process in this House of Assembly, a dedicated resource without duplication of service, which affects every family in our province. He is 100 per cent correct.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I'd like to thank our Government House Leader for his personal reflection on this bill as part of our discussion. I, too, feel the significance of

this being the first bill from our government and how it reflects, not only our commitment, by removing physical barriers in the House of Assembly, but create long-lasting systemic change for persons with disabilities. As the Opposition House Leader said, barriers for person with disabilities are not just bricks and mortar. That is totally true, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue spoke about his son, Parker, and that he was the driving force in his decision to enter public service. For a long time, Mr. Speaker, he has seen the need for a dedicated Disability Advocate and he spoke about it regularly. I am so pleased that he's here in the House of Assembly to share this moment on this bill with all of us today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: The Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands spoke about the challenges that he saw in his own district for persons with disabilities and how the Lion Max Simms Camp has made such a monumental difference in the lives of so many people over the years, and I believe it's since 1982. So we thank Lions Max Simms Camp for all the work that they've done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: My colleague from Mount Pearl North also spoke about her involvement, over the years, with organizations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, she is one of many community advocates who have given so much of their lives to supporting others, including her daughter. Thank you for sharing some of your personal journey with us in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi said she was very thankful for this day, as we all are. She spoke about the fact

that barriers faced by the disability community are not always apparent, which is why it's so important that policymakers are engaged and fully aware.

The Member for Burin - Grand Bank called this an historic day, and it certainly is a historic day. He's absolutely right. The work we have ahead of us is significant and incredibly meaningful.

The Member for Corner Brook reminded us of the importance of taking this commitment seriously and I can assure you, as on both sides of the House, we certainly are. I thank him for that.

Our Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development mentioned our government is very serious about our commitment to supporting persons with disabilities and establishing the Office of the Disability Advocate.

In our lives, in our jobs, we meet a lot of people. Last week, the Leader of the Third Party made a very important point. Just because you cannot see a disability doesn't mean it doesn't exist. This bill will not only bring additional advocacy to the disability community but a much-needed awareness that benefits us all.

The Leader of the Official Opposition made a special point to thank the advocates and community organizations for their efforts in making today a reality. Speaker, we have some of those advocates that are here in the gallery with us today, it's wonderful that you're here. I thank you for being here and for your contributions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I'm going to point them out. I see one of my staff from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, Philip, is here today. Not sure if your guide dog Brian is with you or not.

AN HON. MEMBER: He is.

J. WALL: He is? Welcome to you both. Good to see you here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: The Member for Mount Scio commented on the visible accessibility check. Well, Speaker, I thank her for bringing that forward today. I'm very proud to say, I'll share with this House, that the officials in my department are currently working on refreshing the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador accessible community guidelines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: I'm also happy to say that they are bringing me a submission for my consideration later this month, but I thank her for raising that here today.

To my colleague from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, he again thanked the advocates that helped bring us to this point to where we are today. Speaker, in particular, those with lived experience because they have the knowledge that we were looking for. He also said that we debate this bill to make sure we have the best piece of legislation for the people of the province, and we will get it right. I thank him for that.

To the Member for Burgeo - La Poile recognizing the importance of working together for the people of the province, and I'm so happy that he mentioned that because we are certainly doing that, on both sides of this House. As colleague from Lake Melville said, it does transcend partisan politics. I thank him for that as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I'd like to echo all the sentiments by acknowledging and thanking our community partners and our stakeholders who joined us in the development of this bill. Many of these individuals are from the network of disability

organizations, also joined us in the House of Assembly when the bill was introduced and back again today.

As I said, your presence means a lot. It certainly means a great deal and having your continued expertise flowing into this bill certainly has made a difference to us in this Legislature.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Your presence means a great deal. You have contributed much expertise, lived experience and perspectives from over the years, and that was certainly essential in shaping this bill. We value your partnership and we are certainly grateful that you are here again today to share this moment with us.

Speaker, leading up to this day, we have seen tremendous collaboration, openness and dedication. I want to sincerely thank all those who contributed their insights, who raised thoughtful questions and helped deepen our understanding of both the opportunities and the responsibilities ahead of us when it comes to supporting persons with disabilities. That particular engagement has certainly strengthened the work that has gone into this bill.

Behind the scenes, a great deal of effort has gone into bringing this bill to where it is today. I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to all those who had a part and played in this role.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I can certainly say, and it was brought up by one of the colleagues in debate, about the Disability Policy Office and the incredible team that I have behind me. From my heart to all of those over in the office, I want to thank them for their engagement, because their professionalism and commitment was evident in every piece of this bill and I want to thank them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: As our Premier said in his opening remarks, we are developing a plan through action. We have a responsibility to listen and to act. We have brought forward this piece of legislation that is credible and independent. It is accountable and transparent. It provides dignity and removes barriers to allow persons with disabilities to participate fully in our society.

Speaker, what we doing here is truly meaningful. It reflects our values as a government. It reflects our values as 40 Members of the House of Assembly. It also reflects our responsibility to the people we serve and to one another. We not only engage but, as a government, we listen.

That is one thing, Mr. Speaker, that from each and every group and individual that I met with – and since I came into office, I've met with 64 groups and individuals. Because I want to get this right. We want to serve the community in the best way we can.

Every meeting that I went into, it ended with saying, thank you for listening, because we listened and we learned and we are educated. Each and every time we had a conversation, we listened.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, in the effort of getting the bill right, and proper engagement was done since I first introduced the bill into this House – so we had about eight or nine days to look it over and to read it. I'm bringing forward five amendments today to this bill. Not something that's normally done with a bill introduced by government but, Speaker, we listened to the disability community. We engaged and we're going to get it right.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: So, in that spirit, I certainly hope that we have unanimous support for this bill.

I look forward to the continued debate while we move into Committee. I do know that my colleagues across the House had the same level of engagement and I look forward to that as well, as we sit in Committee and go forward.

To each and every Member here, to you, Speaker, and to the people in our gallery, I want to thank you for your time, your engagement and your commitment. I certainly look forward to continuing this discussion in Committee.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are all Members ready for the question?

It has been moved and seconded that An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, Bill 1, be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate. (Bill 1)

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

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

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate," read a second time,

ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole presently. (Bill 1)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Order 4, I move, seconded by the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 1.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate.

A bill, "An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate." (Bill 1)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

I do have some questions for the minister. We'll start out with how will the government ensure the Office of the Disability Advocate operates independently from departments responsible for delivering disability services?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

The advocate will certainly work independently – so not to have any involvement from the department, is that the point you're trying to make?

Yes, the advocate, appointed through the IAC, will certainly work independently without any influence from the department. If the advocate does look or require any information from the Disability Policy Office or my department, they can certainly reach out. That's never an issue, but there won't be any direct involvement in his or her work from day to day.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

What budget and staffing levels are anticipated for the Office of the Disability Advocate once it is established?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

The annual budget for that particular office would be similar to that of the Office of the Citizens' Representative or the Child and Youth Advocate. That will be determined

and set by the Management Commission of the day, but it's going to be in that frame.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: How will individuals with disabilities access the Advocate's office if they wish to raise concerns or request an investigation? How exactly is that going to be done?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

If an individual or group does have to reach out to the Disability Advocate, that will be set up through their department to contact them directly. That will not go through my department. They are an independent officer of the House and it will be set up just like any other independent office. They can reach out directly to them through whatever various means that the advocate will have, whatever parameters, if it's a phone call or an email or what have you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

How does a non-verbal adult who does not have guardianship access the Advocate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: So an individual who is non-verbal and who does not have an advocate, is that correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, a non-verbal adult who does not have guardianship assigned to them. How can they access this? They're non-verbal and they do not have guardianship.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

The individual can have someone reach out on their behalf. Even if they don't have guardianship, someone else can still reach out on their behalf so that the Advocate can then investigate to see if or what is there. Anyone can reach out. The advocate will deem how that will go.

So even though the person doesn't have guardianship, an individual can certainly reach out on their behalf.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Sorry, Minister, to bounce around a little bit, but if we could just turn to the definitions.

The definition of disability services, just for the record, "means the programs, services or systems of support that are related to health care" – that's what I want to focus on – "personal care, housing, transportation, finances, education, training, legal or employment...."

That's very broad. That's a lot of items, but it's still a defined list of items. I'm wondering if the department, or you, had thought to or would be open to saying that the definition includes things but not limited to; because, trust me, you do legislation and things come up down the road that you didn't think of at the time. I can't think of any specific examples right now, but I think it might be better to broaden the scope of what's

included in disability services rather than to narrow it.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the Member for the question; it's a great point.

This advocate can certainly, after he or she is in place, broaden the scope of what needs to be looked at or who needs to be spoken to with respect to an inquiry, if it's health or whatever. That can certainly be left to the advocate at the time and we can, if needed, certainly redefine in the regs if necessary, but that's where that will go.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I mean, the way I would look at it if I was the advocate and someone came to me and said, I have an issue that I'd like you to look at, and then the advocate will say: Let me see if its in my mandate as a disability service. My understanding is, the advocate wouldn't have the ability to go outside of what is listed in the legislation.

Unless I'm missing something else, it doesn't refer to any regulations, so again, my reading of it is that it's limited to those things, which, I said, is very broad, but who knows, if this passes today, what can arise tomorrow that you or me or anyone in the House or any of your staff hadn't thought of.

Certainly, if you want to take some time to think about that, I'd say we're going to be here for a little while going through some legislation. I know we have some amendments, but my point just being it's better to be more inclusive than restrictive.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and

Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite.

I'll certainly get a more detailed response for that one. Great point, you don't want to narrow it right from the onset, but, however, I'll certainly take that away and get it clarified.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you.

Just to continue with the definitions too, I think it's appropriate to have this in here. It does say that the disability services includes all these things with the exception of program, services or systems as prescribed in the regulations. So it does give the government of the day the ability to not include things in the definition. It's appropriate, I think, for government to have that ability, but could the minister give an example of what sort of exclusions could exist?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Right now, anything with respect to municipalities or Local Service Districts are not included in that, and that could be one that, as you said, could open up at any time. So that is something that the Advocate can certainly undertake at the time if the need arises.

With respect to municipalities and Local Service Districts, they are not included here because there was no consultation done

with those groups prior to this, but that's certainly one that could possibly be one, to the Member opposite.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I just have some additional questions. How will the Advocate's investigative role interact with existing oversight bodies and processes, including those responsible for accessibility and disability services?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

That's a great question.

We wanted to ensure, when we brought this legislation forward, that there wouldn't be any duplication of service with respect to the current advocates, independent officers of the House, that are already there. So if there is something that does come up that could be one or the other, for example, if it's the Disability Advocate or the Seniors' Advocate, if it's that area, they're going to speak to one another and see who is going to be best to look after it so we don't have two different advocates addressing the same issue.

So they'll have that open communication first and foremost to make sure who is best served to look after that particular issue that arose, and then they'll continue on with it from there.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, what mechanisms exist to ensure that departments or service providers act on

recommendations made by the Advocate following an investigation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and good question from my colleague opposite.

That is certainly one that we discussed. The advocate will, of course, an independent officer of this House, certainly have the authority that was listed in the bill to do the work that needs to be done, but I can certainly say that they operate the same as any other statutory office of the House. If information is requested and not given, well then there are certain parameters that would deal with that with respect to finding out that information. He or she will have the investigatory authority to do so.

Again, I can't foresee, but I'm not quite sure how that would unfold if they didn't. I can certainly take that one away for a further answer on that. Good question; but I don't think – once the advocate starts an investigation and requires information, the individual or the group or what have you has to give up that information.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

What steps will be taken to ensure that individuals with disabilities living in group homes or care facilities are aware of their rights and steps to contact the Advocate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member for the question.

As a former group home counsellor, 29 years, near and dear to my heart with respect to the care, welfare, safety and security of those in care, that would be the responsibility of whoever is leading or running that particular group home, or whatever entity.

I can certainly tell you that it's, first and foremost, when it comes to looking after those in care, and this bill is modelled after the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, where it includes additional places where a person may reside. If you go back to section 20, in the definitions it can certainly ensure that the person with disabilities in various facilities can certainly contact the advocate.

You're more on the line of if they have no voice, if they're unable to. Is that the point or where you're trying to go, if I could ask?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

I'm looking at my question again, yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: It would be, as I said, modelled after the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. That individual would have those who are their caregivers speak up for them at that time.

When we look at a person with a disability in care, or in a group home, as you said, if they don't have a voice – again, it's pretty broad, because I don't know if they're able to write a letter or if they're able to use any other form of contact to them – they can certainly just reach out directly to the Advocate, but those who are providing the care would respond on their behalf.

As I know, you know, being in the situation for 29 years, they would have that responsibility to do so.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, as you know, because you've worked in this environment, sometimes the homes operate in a little bit of a silos because, the individuals that you're caring for, some individuals don't have a voice outside the home. The point I'm trying to get to is – like, is it Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services' responsibility? Would it be a private agency's responsibility?

Because, now we have an Advocate, if someone identifies an individual as having an issue or concern, even if the individual is non-verbal, someone is responsible, someone is the caretaker and the onus needs to be on somebody. We can't just have individuals who are left, as you know, group homes. They have to have a voice. As people are aging also, they're getting older, their family members are passing away and they're no longer here to advocate for them.

So I just want to make sure that the policy around the Disability Advocate does include everybody and that all individuals have a mechanism to be recognized or to gain access to the Disability Advocate.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for that clarification.

I'll go back to the definitions, when it comes to section 20(3): A person with disability placed under any act in the province shall be given the information telling them about the Advocate. So, again, I'll go back to my 29 years, we had the responsibility of

providing whatever information was necessary to those that were in my care; many of those who were autistic and did not have a voice. Certainly, the onus was on me as the caregiver.

With respect to the board that I worked with, we had 14 group homes. It was a large board. There was much conversation back and forth between managers and staff and whatever. We all knew our roles and we all knew our responsibilities. Certainly, those who are providing the care have a responsibility to make sure to tell them about the Advocate. It is their responsibility to bring any matter to the Advocate that they see fit, and again, the Advocate will react in proper course. So the onus is on them.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister. That answers my question.

Are there plans to measure whether the creation of this office actually improves support and outcomes for persons with disabilities? We're going to create the office, but what is the mechanism to ensure that this office is going to work?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

This office will be set up and supported as any other statutory office of this House of Assembly, and that will be supported from the onset to make sure that the Advocate has the proper supports in place and, if needed, any direction that needs to be given, should he or she reach out.

Rest assured, as a statutory office of this House of Assembly, they will be given all

the same, as the others were, over the years in setting up their statutory offices to make sure that it is in good working order, that it serves the people of the province.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Has the government discussed or considered or even had any communication about conducting a review of this particular act, after the operation is implemented, to assess whether the Advocate's powers are sufficient for the needs?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister for Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair and thank the Member opposite.

That's a great point. That's certainly one that I will take away to make sure that it's further discussed. Because we want to make sure that this Advocate and the Office of the Disability Advocate does the work that it's intended to do. We want to make sure that they're successful in bringing forward all of the issues that will be brought forward.

The Advocate, as far as I can remember, if I remember correctly, also has to do an annual report and present it to the House. So then issues could be picked up at that time, when the House is updated. Again, that's the same as with the statutory officer that are already currently in place. So that's another mechanism that can be monitored through his/her reporting.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister. Their reporting.

I have another question. Are there plans to ensure the Advocate's office has regional accessibility so people outside St. John's can easily access its services? It's getting to the regional – all of Newfoundland and Labrador access to this particular office.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister for Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Certainly, the Advocate will be working, just not with inside metro because it's provincial – and that will be for the Advocate to establish when they are in that position with respect to if it comes to travel across the province, as the other statutory offices have and they currently do when they travel and meet with people across the province.

I'm just thinking of the Seniors' Advocate. The last time I met with the Seniors' Advocate regarding this bill, she did say about the travel that she had to engage across the province. I can imagine when they set up this office, that they will certainly establish those parameters for engagement with people right across Newfoundland and Labrador.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I thank the minister.

The rest of my questions are for specific clauses. We're in clause 1, so I'll leave them until we get those clauses, but I believe a colleague of mine has an additional question.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Chair.

I've got just a couple of questions. It deals with section 4, if we're going to questions throughout the whole act – I'm not sure what amendments that the minister is bringing forward. So if it's going to be covered in a future amendment, that's perfect.

I've had numerous constituents reach out to me with respect to section 4.(2)(a), (b), and (c) that's to deal with the actual person that would be put in place for the Disability Advocate. They expressed I wouldn't say concern, but just a question about the person that should be in this position should be a person with not only lived experience, but a disabled person. Because they would have a certain viewpoint on the activities that would be more challenging.

I think we've heard people talk about that in the House. That's not to say that any are less important but I just wanted to bring their concern forward and see if you have had that similar concern come to you, Minister, and how you're going to deal with that with respect to this act.

Let me very clear, I'm very supportive of this, as I said before. I think it's a great move in the right direction and I know it's a living document so we can make changes. I know when the Disability Advocate is in place, whoever they may be, will probably come forward with changes over time.

I just wanted to give you an opportunity to educate me on that section, please.

CHAIR: I just wanted to remind the House that I just learned from the Clerk that in clause 1, we can ask any questions. It doesn't have to be specific to clauses but when we get into the other clauses, you can ask questions there as well.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the Member opposite for the question and for the insight.

We certainly have heard and had much feedback since this bill was first introduced to the House. We heard from the disability community on the criteria of the Advocate. We have some members of the community who argued that the Advocate should require a person with a disability. Other advocates have emphasized the importance of lived experience and to ensure the Advocate can build the trust of the person with disabilities and employ a cross-disability lens to support all persons.

While the *Accessible Canada Act* establishes the roles of accessibility commissioner and chief accessibility officer, it doesn't legally mandate that office holders possess a specific lived or professional experience with disability.

This Disability Advocate bill sets a higher standard by acquiring the appointee to either identify as a person with a disability; be a parent, caregiver or guardian of a person with a disability; or have the experience of working with persons with disabilities or with organizations of and for persons with disabilities. So this ensures that the role is rooted in authentic expertise from day one, and this literally goes beyond the federal requirements of the Advocate that's going to be placed federally.

We've had much discussion and much engagement with the disability community, but limiting the eligibility so that the Disability Advocate must identify as having a disability could raise some concerns. It could create certain privacy issues by people having to be required to disclose their personal information, and it's certainly going to reduce the number of qualified applicants. So, in addition to that, no single person has the full range of all disability experiences.

I'm certainly confident, through the Independent Appointments Commission,

that they will find us great candidates that are going to apply for this and have lived experience with their role in applying for this position.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Context is important, thank you. I'd be remiss if I didn't raise the concern that several of them have raised when calling me that there is a difference between lived experience and living with a disability. There is a difference. I've heard it in this very House, it being explained from Members on your side as well as on ours that there is a difference.

I want to ensure that when the process is going through the Independent Appointments Commission, that that lens is valued very high. Because I do think that there's a significant amount of skill set that is required, of course, but there's also a significant amount of if you are not living in that situation, then it's very difficult for you to see it. Even if you have family members or have been involved in boards your whole life, it is hard; there is a difference. So I'm happy that you brought forward that, Minister.

The other question I had which was unrelated to that section but deals with the budget for the office, I know you highlighted that with a question earlier, I think. I was just saying that's going to be done in – because you mentioned Management Commission, which I know that's the process, is that going to be done in consultation with the Advocate when the Advocate is put in place?

Where you're building this as anew, you're going to have certain things that you're going to need to grow into. So would it be in consultation with the Advocate, because they're going to need to be able to provide to you, as the minister, as well as the

Management Commission, what the needs will be required and, obviously, I would suggest that that would be a very good starting point for sure.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Certainly, in the establishment first, setting it up, no, there won't be direct involvement from the Advocate themselves, but certainly after the first year, yes, with respect to submitting budgets and what have you. Going forward it certainly will be, but not for the initial setup. Once they get in and realize what their working with and, if needed, other supports, then they'll certainly come back and be dealt with at that time.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I do have some questions under specific clauses. Under clause 15, the advocate gets the ability to delegate another person to, essentially, act on their behalf if the advocate is in conflict.

This is not in the *Seniors Advocate Act* or the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*; what made you include it here and will it be added to the other acts?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite.

My earpiece is cutting in and out, so just to confirm, was it section 15?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: It's under clause 15. It gives the Advocate the ability to delegate another person.

J. WALL: Thank you for the clarification.

Section 15 is actually similar to other statutory offices by enabling the Advocate to delegate powers under the act, except the power to make a report. So that's already in other statutory offices, and that's why it was included here.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: No, I believe this Member was next.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, just looking, there are a few references here, I note in section 13 which talks about the oath of office, every person employed in the Office of the Disability Advocate shall affirm an oath and not divulge information received, except as provided by the act.

Then, section 14 talks about confidentiality. It says: Notwithstanding certain sections, the Advocate may disclose, in a report made by the Advocate, under this act, those matters which the advocate considers necessary to disclose; which sounds fair and reasonable if things need to be disclosed to the public, of course openness and transparency, but I'm just wondering – and the answer might be in the legislation, but I couldn't see it – how the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act would fit in with the Advocate's ability to disclose or not disclose information.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and thank the Member opposite.

So under section 13, "Oath of office," that particular language is consistent with other statutory offices that require the Advocate to make an oath, and the Advocate will faithfully and impartially perform those duties and require the Advocate, and all staff, that they will not divulge any information. That is certainly consistent with other statutory offices of the House, and that's why we included it here.

CHAIR: I'm just going to pause for one second so that the minister can get his earpiece fixed, please.

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

Section 16(f) gives the Advocate the powers and duties to – it says, "meet with persons with disabilities."

I think that's probably obvious, and it should be in there. I don't seem – and, again, I don't like putting restrictions on the Advocate just in case people read legislation too narrowly, and maybe you're going to say that's what you're doing, but I would suggest it might help to say: To meet with persons with disabilities, and maybe add organizations and parents and/or guardians of persons with disabilities as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and thank the Member opposite for the question.

That will come up in an amendment that I'm putting forward, so we'll certainly deal with that at that time.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you.

In section 16(g), it says the Advocate can request information relating to a person with a disability.

I guess that's broad, but from who, I guess, would be my question.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

Requesting information from whom, with respect to the government offices, agencies and departments; is that what you're referring to there?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: No.

What it says is, "In carrying out the powers and duties of the office of the advocate, the advocate may (g) request information relating to a person with a disability, including personal information and personal health information."

I'm wondering if who they can request it from should be defined?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I believe that will in the amendment, as well, when I bring it forward.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I swear we didn't set this up, Chair.

If you look at section 18, it talks about the minister may restrict investigation. Then, section 18(2), "Where a certificate is given under subsection (1), the advocate shall include that fact and a brief description of the circumstances of the matter in the advocate's next annual report to the House of Assembly."

I'm just wondering if maybe an amendment should be there or maybe a thought should be given to tabling it sooner. I mean, we certainly never know when the House is going to sit. Sometimes it doesn't sit when it's scheduled to. I wonder if that would maybe be a possible thing to look at as to the public disclosure of that information rather than wait for the first day of the sitting of the House of Assembly.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite.

That language in section 18 is consistent with other statutory offices from the House of Assembly. It does provide authority to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to prohibit an advocate from investigating or discontinuing one. That is consistent with other offices, and its department agencies and service providers.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: No, and I assume, not having looked at all the legislation here recently, that a lot of this mirrors the other statutory offices, which I think is appropriate, but it doesn't mean that this one can't be fixed and it doesn't mean all of them maybe shouldn't be looked at some point in the future as well. I'll just leave it at that for now.

Section 21, Minister, it says, “The advocate, in the advocate’s discretion, may refuse to review or investigate, or may cease to review or investigate, a complaint where (a) it relates to a decision, recommendation, act or omission of which the complainant has had knowledge for more than one year before the complaint is received by the advocate.”

Just for anybody paying attention, there’s a limitation period that applies to all sort of things. In this case, essentially, it would put a one-year limitation period on an individual advising the Advocate of an issue. It would bar the Advocate then from investigating it for whatever reason. The person maybe didn’t want to come forward. One year doesn’t seem like a long time, just a general statutory limitation period.

The *Limitations Act* says two years. The House of Assembly all came together during the course of the last mandate, in our government, to lift the limitation period completely on physical abuse here in this province.

So one year just seems like not a lot of time. I’m wondering if the minister or your department has given any thought to making it two or three years.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite.

This particular language is consistent with the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* and that’s why that is there. It provides authority for the Advocate, in their discretion, to review or investigate, or cease to review or investigate. It would not bar them but they may do it. So it’s no time frame on it but the language is consistent.

With respect to the time frame, it’s not in the other act. As to your former comment, not saying that it probably shouldn’t be, but noted.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Yes, that’s an important clarification that it does say “may.” So it’s certainly not a flat-out ban if someone shows up at the Advocate’s office a year and a day late. I guess it would give the Advocate a bar on which to make those decisions. I don’t know how busy the Advocate is going to be, of course, so it’s certainly just something that you, as minister, should keep an eye on and see how this works out in terms of that – quote, unquote – I’ll call it limitation period.

Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John’s East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O’LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

One of the points of clarification for me is in section 2(f). It’s more on the financial side. It says there disability services means programs and, of course, it encompasses finances as well. One of the things that has come to my attention is that one of the big issues for people with disabilities, aside from the myriad of multiple things that are happening with housing being physically inaccessible, is certainly affordability.

I have a constituent who has come, who is a young woman, a wheelchair user, whose application for housing was denied because she was caught between a rock and a hard place. Her income exceeded the eligibility threshold, but due to her accessibility needs, her housing options are very limited to units that meet her mobility requirements. Of course, in St. John’s, it is significantly higher rents.

All this, again, in the advocacy of rent control and all the rest that we have been doing. So I'm just wondering, disabilities services and the finances, the Disability Advocate, would that be part of the role as well? If somebody is having financial issues and falling through the cracks in between that, would they be able to address those kinds of issues?

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Under that, an amendment is coming forward. So that will certainly deal with that. But with respect to the financial part of it, yes, that will certainly deal with that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I want to make sure I heard properly that the funding will be similar to the Child and Youth Advocate for this office?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite.

If I said Child and Youth Advocate, I probably should have said Seniors' Advocate at the time. If I did say Child and Youth Advocate, I'll certainly correct that. The Child and Youth Advocate is currently a larger office. When you're looking at statutory offices to the Seniors' Advocate or something of that nature, it would be on par

with that. If I did say Child and Youth, I'll certainly correct that if I did say that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party, and the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: I'd probably be more definite if I was sure I heard it either. So the minister is probably in the right on this one.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: No, no, I just wanted to make sure I was hearing what I was hearing.

So here's the base. Right now, I understand the Seniors' Advocate roughly has staff of six and about \$760,000 a year, I think. So questions related to this. I'm just wondering, how many calls are anticipated?

Obviously, there's been a need identified for this. Obviously, complaints and issues have come in. Obviously, it is more than one complaint or issue that have been brought forward because you would hardly say well, if it's only one per year, we don't really need an office for that. So it's probably a lot more than one.

The number of people with disabilities, I would say, includes people other than seniors. So I'm just trying to get an idea of how many calls are anticipated, like, a projection. I know this is introductory or started and it may need more. But I'm just wondering what the planning is or what are you expecting, roughly.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Certainly, the Advocate is going to be receiving – I can't say how many calls; I just have no idea. I'm sure numerous. I'm sure

that once the Advocate's office is in place and they are selected to be in that role, we will see, as they go along, how many calls they're getting. I can't even put a guess to a number right now but I do know that, in my engagement with the Seniors' Advocate, she was certainly receiving many calls from those in the disability community.

I can see it being significant but simply can't put a number on it. When the office is established and the Advocate is in place, we'll have consultation back and forth to see what numbers that he or she is dealing with.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party, and Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Okay, with regard to that, if I'm understanding this, the Seniors' Advocate, it doesn't deal with individual cases. People who have gone to the Seniors' Advocate assuming that they can have their individual case. It's usually more or less, I guess, with the policy of broad systemic issues.

So while the Seniors' Advocate receives many calls, I don't know if they, necessarily, investigate those specific instances. Obviously, you can see that with a staff of six, that's it's going to be a bit – if I understand it correctly, the Disability Advocate is also going to have the ability to investigate – and I would assume investigate individual cases and so on and so forth. Would I be correct in that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister for Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Yes, certainly, individual and systemic issues.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Is there going to be, then – because I'm anticipating then that the workload is going to be bit higher than what the Seniors' Advocate has in terms of it because they're probably going to find a lot more – not only dealing with systemic issues but also with investigating, probably, individual cases. So along the line of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Here's the other question, and it's two parts. Will the office be ready for the number of inquires it receives? That's the first question. If I understand correctly from the minister, his department is certainly open to reviewing the finances and the situation, depending on what the Disability Advocate comes back with.

In other words, it's not a fixed amount, the funding and the staffing could increase. If that's the case, do they have to wait until the next budget or can they say, look, in the first three months, we're overwhelmed. This is way beyond what we expected. We've unleashed the floodgates because now people have a – so I'm saying, will it be able to respond to it?

So there are three parts: Will it be ready; will they be able to go back for more supports, financial and staffing; and is there the ability for the government to respond to that need?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

The office will first have to be established and setup to be in operation, then we'll see, with respect to the number of calls, if they're inundated, if they don't have enough staff. This is a statutory office of the House, so it won't come back to my department. It will

come back here to the House of Assembly Management Commission.

That will have to be determined but, in all essence of the word, of having this disability advocate's office work properly and to be efficient, it will certainly be looked at as we go forward. We want to make sure that it has the proper supports in place to do the work for the people of the province. So once it's established, they get up and running to see what they're looking and what they're dealing with, how many calls and how many investigations, we'll certainly have that conversation at that time to make sure that they are properly supported to assist the people of the province.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Under clause 25, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety may certify that certain information cannot be disclosed, what safeguards exist to ensure this power is not used too broadly?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

On section 25 in this bill, this language is consistent with other statutory offices, and it protects Cabinet confidence and ongoing investigations. That's where you're talking about the broadness of it. It protects Cabinet confidence. It also protects ongoing investigations, that information is not out to the public.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

Under clause 30, departments may be asked to notify the Advocate of steps taken following a recommendation, what happens if a department chooses not to act on those recommendations?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I'll share with the Member opposite that clause 30 will be dealt with in an amendment.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: One more: under clause 37, the act gives the LGIC regulation-making authority; however, under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the House Management Commission has that authority. Why did you choose LGIC for this particular bill?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

This particular section in the bill is modelled after the *Seniors Advocate Act*. This section provides the regulation-making authority by the LGIC. Examples can include prescribing programs, services or systems of support or prescribing service providers in the regs. That's consistent with the Seniors.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I thank the minister for that answer.

That's all my questions. I will have two amendments as we move forward.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

For clause 2, I have an amendment proposed. I have copies here for everyone.

Under clause 2, this amendment would amend the bill to delete the definition of disability services and add the definition of services. I move, seconded by the Premier.

CHAIR: We're going to recess now, and we're going to consider the amendment and then return.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

We're now resuming debate on clause 2. The amendment is in order.

We are now debating the amendment to clause 2.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I'm pleased to hear that the amendment is in order. Simply, it's deleting the definition of "disability services" found in 2(f) and adding the definition of "services" in its place.

That makes that distinction. This proposed amendment follows a recommendation from representatives of an organization of and for persons with disabilities to remove the word "disability" from "disability services". This term was defined broadly to include a suite of programs and services that persons with disabilities avail of.

I will be proposing amendments on other sections to reflect the new defined term of "services" rather than "disability services" going forward in this bill.

CHAIR: Seeing no speakers, is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2, as amended, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2, as amended, carried.

CLERK: Clause 3.

CHAIR: Shall clause 3 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

For clause 3, I am proposing an amendment. This amendment would amend the proposed paragraphs (b) and (d) in clause 3 of the bill to replace the words "disability services" with the word "services."

CHAIR: I ask the minister to move the amendment.

J. WALL: I move, seconded by the Government House Leader.

CHAIR: There has been an amendment brought to the floor. We will recess to discuss the amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The amendment to clause 3 is in order. We're now debating the amendment to clause 3.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

With respect to the amendment to clause 3, as I said, proposed paragraphs 3(b) and 3(d) of the bill will replace the words "disability services" with the word "services." This is straightforward, as it was with the previous amendment.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party, and Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In clause 3(d), it references, "make recommendations to a department, agency of the government, service providers, communities...."

That word, "communities," what is the intended group here? Are we referring to municipalities, Local Service Districts?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

It does not mean municipalities or Local Service Districts. That would be communities within an area, if it's a particular community group, for example, not communities related to Local Service Districts, municipalities, towns or cities.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party, and Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: So, again, it's the communities within an area or within a municipality; would that be correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: No, it does not refer to Local Service Districts, towns or cities. It's communities with respect to groups in the disability community.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: So then there appears to be a redundancy, because then it goes on to say, "...organizations of and for persons with disabilities and community-based organizations..." which I would assume would be community organizations within a community.

So both communities and community-based organizations are referring to the same thing?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Communities has a broad interpretation, no doubt. It could be – you know, take any interpretation.

I'm just referring back to the previous question with respect to towns and Local Service Districts, it is not. A community could be a collection of persons but not under a specific organization, if you understand what I'm trying to say.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Shall clause 3, as amended, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 3 carried.

CLERK: Clause 4.

CHAIR: Shall clause 4 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to move an amendment to clause 4 of the bill. This would be moved by myself, the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, seconded by the Member for Mount Pearl North.

I move that clause 4 of the bill be amended by adding immediately after subsection (2), the following: (3) The process of selecting a disability advocate under subsection (1) shall consider individuals eligible for appointment using a disability lens.

Chair, that is the amendment.

CHAIR: This Committee stands in recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The amendment is in order.

We are now debating the amendment to clause 4.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

I'm delighted that the amendment is in order and that we're going to put a disability lens on the appointment of the Advocate.

When the disability community talks about a disability lens, they're looking at the policies and the programs and the decisions and the environment, with a focus of how it affects people with disabilities before it's finalized, not after. This is about building inclusion from the start, rather than fixing the problem later.

I thank you very much.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt clause 4, as amended?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 4, as amended, carried.

CLERK: Clauses 5 to 15 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 5 to 15 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 5 through 15 carried.

CLERK: Clause 16.

CHAIR: Shall clause 16 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

With respect to clause 16, Powers and duties of advocate, I propose an amendment.

Chair, this amendment would amend proposed paragraph 16(1)(b), (e) and (i) of clause 16, to replace the words "disability services" with the word "services."

CHAIR: I ask the minister to move that.

J. WALL: I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier.

CHAIR: This Committee stands in recess to review the proposed –

J. WALL: My apologies, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance.

CHAIR: The Committee stands in recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The amendment is not in order. We are now resuming debate on clause 4.

The Chair recognizes the Minister for Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

With respect to the clause to that bill not being in order, I'll make a further amendment to clause 16 by deleting the words "disability services" in proposed paragraphs 16(1)(b), (e) and (i), and substituting the word "services".

Clause 16 of the Bill is amended by adding immediately after proposed subsection (2), the following:

(2.1) Notwithstanding subsection (2), the advocate may exercise a power under paragraph (2)(b) or (c) without the consent of the person with a disability or the parent or guardian of the person with a disability where (a) the advocate is of the opinion that (i) the person with a disability lacks the capacity to consent, and (ii) exercising the advocate's powers under paragraph (2)(b) or (c) is in the best interest of the person with a disability; or (b) the person with a disability is deceased and the advocate is of the opinion that exercising the advocate's powers under paragraph (2)(b) or (c) is in the public interest.

(2.2) Where the advocate exercises a power under paragraph (2)(b) or (c) without the consent of the person with a disability or the parent or guardian of the person with a disability in accordance with subsection (2.1), the advocate shall include that fact and a brief description of the circumstances of the matter in the advocate's next annual report to the House of Assembly.

So, Mr. Chair, I apologize if I wasn't clear earlier. This would amend proposed paragraphs 16(1)(b), (e) and (i) of clause 16 of the bill to replace the words "disability services" with the word "services."

This amendment would also amend clause 16 of the bill to allow the Disability Advocate

to investigate a matter relating to a person with a disability, or request the personal information or personal health information relating to a person with a disability, without the consent of the person with a disability, or the parent or guardian of the person with a disability, in the prescribed circumstances.

This amendment would further amend clause 16 of the bill to add a requirement that where the Disability Advocate investigates a matter relating to a person with a disability, or requests the personal information or personal health information relating to a person with a disability, without the consent of the person with a disability, or the parent or guardian of the person with a disability, the Disability Advocate shall include that fact and a brief description of the circumstances of the matter in the Disability Advocate's next annual report to the House of Assembly.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, this amendment.

CHAIR: This Committee stands in recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

After review of the amendment, the amendment is in order.

We are now debating the amendment to clause 16.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I'm pleased to hear that the amendment is in order.

I just wanted to share with the House and with those in the gallery, prior to introducing this bill, we heard from the disability community about the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us and the importance of the advocate receiving consent.

Since we introduced the bill, we've had further feedback from the disability community about the importance of ensuring that no one falls through the cracks, including situations where an individual lacks capacity to consent or there's no appropriate decision-maker to provide consent.

Thus, the amendment that's proposed amends clause 16 of the bill allowing the Disability Advocate to investigate a matter relating to a person with a disability, or request of personal information or health information related to a person with a disability, without consent of the person with the disability, or the parent or guardian, in the prescribed circumstances.

The amendment would further amend clause 16 to add the requirement that where the Disability Advocate investigates a matter relating to a person with a disability, or requests the personal information or personal health information relating to a person with a disability, without the consent shall include the fact and a brief description of the circumstances of the matter in the Disability Advocate's next annual report to the House of Assembly.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I appreciate that. Thanks for the further information on that question.

I'm all good.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I apologize.

Thank you, Chair.

I did have an amendment on clause 16. We're on clause, sorry about that. My apologies to the minister and the Chair.

CHAIR: The question to the floor is should the amendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Shall clause 16, as amended, carry?

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

Further to my comments and questions earlier to the minister in Committee, on section 16(f) specifically, I'd like to move an amendment to clause 16 of the bill. It will be moved by myself, the Member for Windsor Lake, seconded by the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

I move that clause 16 of the bill be amended by adding immediately after subsection 16(1)(f) the following: (f.1) meet with a parent, caregiver or guardian of a person with a disability.

Just on that, I guess I'd say that the Advocate is given duties under section 16, and one of them includes meeting with persons with disabilities. Earlier in the legislation, when it talks about who the

advocate could be, it could be a person with a disability and it could also be a person who is a parent, caregiver or guardian of a person with a disability.

I think it's important just to make sure that the Advocate has the authority to meet with a parent, caregiver or guardian of a person with a disability. I'd hate to be in a situation where the advocate is faced with a situation or a decision not to meet with someone because he or she doesn't have the authority under the legislation. That's the purpose of that amendment.

CHAIR: This Committee stands in recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

The amendment that we were reviewing is in order.

We are now debating the amendment to clause 16.

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

I'm pleased that it's in order. I think it's very self-explanatory. I hope I did a good enough job explaining it during the proposal of the amendment.

I look forward to the minister's comments.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the amendment.

We have no issues with it. It certainly makes perfect sense with respect to a parent,

caregiver or guardian of a person with disabilities. No issue on this side.

CHAIR: Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Shall clause 16, as amended, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 16, as amended, carried.

CLERK: Clauses 17 to 23 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 17 to 23 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 17 through 23 carried.

CLERK: Clause 24.

CHAIR: Shall clause 24 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

With respect to clause 24, I'd like to propose an amendment.

Clause 24 of the bill is amended by adding immediately after proposed subsection (3) the following:

(3.1) Notwithstanding paragraph (3)(b), the advocate has the right to information respecting a person with a disability without the consent of the person with a disability or the parent or guardian of the person with a disability where (a) the advocate is of the opinion that (i) the person with a disability lacks the capacity to consent, and (ii) obtaining the information is in the best interest of the person with a disability; or (b) the person with a disability is deceased and the advocate is of the opinion that obtaining information respecting the person with a disability is in public interest.

(3.2) Where the advocate obtains information respecting a person with a disability without the consent of the person with a disability or the parent or guardian of the person with a disability in accordance with subsection (3.1), the advocate shall include that fact and a brief description of the circumstances of the matter in the advocate's next annual report to the House of Assembly.

(2) Clause 24(4) of the bill is amended by deleting the reference "subsection (3)" and substituting the reference "subsection (3) or (3.1)."

Chair, that is the amendment I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

CHAIR: This Committee stands in recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The proposed amendment is in order.

We are now debating the amendment to clause 24.

The Chair recognizes the Minister for Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status for Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I'm pleased to hear that the amendment is in order.

As I said earlier, this amendment would give the Disability Advocate a right to information respecting a person with a disability without the consent of that person with a disability, or the parent or guardian of a person with a disability, in the circumstances.

I'm happy that it's in order, and I look forward to further comments.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers.

Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those in favour, 'aye.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt clause 24, as amended?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 24, as amended, carried.

CLERK: Clauses 25 to 29 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 25 to 29 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 25 through 29 carried.

CLERK: Clause 30.

CHAIR: Shall clause 30 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Minister for Social Supports and Well-Being, and Responsible for the Status for Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I have an amendment for clause 30(1).

Clause 30(1) of the Bill is amended by deleting the words "disability services" and substituting the word "services."

As the other ones we had earlier today, this is the fourth time in the legislation that it's here, so I'm just pleased to have this amendment presented. I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

CHAIR: This Committee stands in recess to review the proposed amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the Government House Leaders ready?

The amendment is in order.

We are now debating the amendment to clause 30.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, and Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

Glad to see that it's in order.

As I said, this amendment replaces the words "disability services" with the word "services," very straightforward but very important as we continue throughout the bill.

That's all for me, Chair.

CHAIR: Shall the amendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Shall clause 30, as amended, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 30, as amended, carried.

CLERK: Clauses 31 to 37 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 31 to 37 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 31 through 37 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 38 to 42 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 38 to 42 inclusive carry?

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

As we're at the end, I'd like to go back and start over at the beginning.

No, I'm just kidding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. HOGAN: I would just like to take a minute to say thank you to the minister for the work on the bill. Obviously, this was a long day, but thanks for the minister for hanging in there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: – and the patience with our amendments, and for the government recognizing that amendments proposed by this side of the House – thankfully, they were in order and they were all voted for.

I think it's important for the record to note that all the amendments, and I'm sure all of the bill, will eventually pass with the unanimous consent of the House. I know people hung in there, up in the gallery as well, and we're almost there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I will stop talking so we can get this bill passed and people can get home.

Thank you very much, Minister.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 38 to 42 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 38 through 42 carried.

CLERK: The Schedule.

CHAIR: Shall the Schedule carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Schedule carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, "An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate." (Bill 1)

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill with amendments?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill with amendments, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 1 with amendments.

CHAIR: It is the motion that the Committee rise and report Bill 1 carried with amendments.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, Chair of Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that the Committee recommends Bill 1 with amendments.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 1 with amendments.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

L. PARROTT: Now, with leave.

SPEAKER: Now, with leave.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: We need to do the amendments first.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, that the amendments be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the amendments be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: First reading of the amendments.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, that the amendments be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the amendments be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

CLERK: Second reading of the amendments.

On motion, amendments read a first and second time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, that Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time, with leave.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate. (Bill 1)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 1)

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I seek leave for a notice of motion.

SPEAKER: Does the hon. minister have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I give notice that pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 30.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I move that this House do stand in recess until 6:30 p.m.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House stand in recess until 6:30 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House do now stand in recess until
6:30 p.m.