

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTY-FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume LI FIRST SESSION Number 42

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Wednesday October 28, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 6, Bill 24.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands that Bill 24, An Act Respecting Resource Enforcement Officers, now be read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act Respecting Resource Enforcement Officers.” (Bill 24)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It’s good to stand here and bring in a bill respecting resource enforcement officers. One of the core mandates of the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands is the sustainable management of our natural resources.

Building on a long history of conservation law enforcement, in 2020, officers involved in forestry, inland fish and wildlife enforcement came together to establish a multi-function law enforcement division. The Resource Enforcement Division is a vital arm of government that ensures compliance with natural resource, environmental and animal protection legislation.

Resource enforcement officers are specially trained and equipped to enforce legislation within the forestry and agricultural lands mandate, but also to support resource enforcement activities across multiple government departments.

Today, I am pleased to introduce legislation to establish a *Resource Enforcement Act* that establishes a centralized, transparent authority in support of a clear and consistent resource enforcement framework for the province. The new act reflects the recent restructuring of the resource enforcement authorities under one umbrella. It will bring them under one umbrella.

It also supports our commitment to red tape reduction in all aspects of this operation. The streamlined act we are proposing is a perfect example of how government departments can work together and improve service delivery for our residents.

Currently our officers are responsible for enforcing the *Wild Life Act*, *Endangered Species Act*, *Forestry Act*, *Lands Act*, *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, *Water Resources Act*, *Animal Health and Protection Act*, *Environmental Protection Act*, *Off-Road Vehicles Act*, *Provincial Parks Act* and federal *Fisheries Act*, which is not included in the legislation.

For each piece of legislation they enforce, resource enforcement officers require a separate piece of designation. This is a cumbersome administrative process that requires letters from the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands as well as the ministers responsible, for example, Environment, Conservation and Climate Change; Government Services; Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

We have to get letters from all those people so that we can act on the resources that we have there from each department, which ends up to be long delays before proceeding with those instructions. It also requires new authorization letters each time

there are staffing changes. With approximately 100 positions and regular turnover, this creates a recurring administrative burden for departmental staff, senior executives and the ministers involved. The time required to obtain these approvals can also delay officers from becoming fully operational.

Various titles referenced within these acts such as forestry official, wildlife officer or inspector do not align with the current formal job titles. This can cause confusion for the public, staff and the departments with legislation that the officers enforce.

If passed, this proposed act will consolidate the designation of resource enforcement officers under 10 pieces of legislation together under a single legislative framework, streamlining the government departments.

If passed, the proposed act will significantly reduce this red tape required to maintain the strong complement of officers in the field and allow officers and their support staff to focus on protecting our natural heritage and resources. The act will clarify their roles and responsibilities, ensure accountability by enshrining a code of conduct into law and contribute to safe and responsible resource use throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

We believe this act will enhance conservation and protection of natural resources. It will ensure our resource enforcement officers have the support they need to enforce legislation efficiently. Most importantly, it will contribute to safe, responsible use throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

So bringing this under one umbrella – I listed them out there, the 10 acts that they are responsible for, our resource enforcement officers do most of that work now. So bringing that all together under one umbrella to streamline government's activity and resource officials so work is done more responsibly, more quickly and adequately is a good part.

We look forward to the other speakers and see what questions they may have in Committee but right now I'll take my seat, Speaker, and let some other speakers have their say.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, I just want to welcome back our two Pages, Karsen Best and Ella Niblock to our House of Assembly.

Welcome back to our House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank this hon. House for the opportunity, again, to stand here and have a few words about, I believe, a very important piece of, I wouldn't call it industry I guess, but the overall involvement of these officers in the rural parts of the province. I'm certainly pleased to rise to speak to some points. We'll have questions. I believe that there's not a lot that I need to say. I think a lot of what I need to say will be in the form of questions and I'll be doing that to the minister hopefully this morning.

I did make note of what the minister said in his opening that this began in 2020 and there were a lot of changes. I believe, in 2020, there was a really good minister responsible for this, at that time.

But in all fairness, we hear all the time that we should be listening to front-line workers in health care. It's not just listening to front-line workers in health care; it's front-line

workers in all sectors. I believe these changes are coming about because of that.

Anytime that I went across the province, I would go and speak to all of them and ask them, do you have what you need in order to do your job? If you don't, let us know so we can make those changes. This today, I believe, is a clean-up, for sure, and it's red tape reduction, which is always good. But there's always caution when there's red tape reduction as well.

Mr. Speaker, I began by recognizing the important work that the officers do. As I said, I spent time in the department and certainly had many discussions with them and what they do and their responsibilities they carry out throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. They play a vital role in protecting our wildlife, forest, waterways, provincial parks, protected areas and other natural areas.

I believe what we're doing here today will increase the value of what they do. I know that these resource officers appreciate the fact that we're doing this today for them because if they're equipped, then that betters the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We all know in this province we're challenged geographically with a province as large and environmentally diverse as ours, and because of that, the work of these REOs is essential. From rural communities on the Island to remote areas of Labrador, these officers help protect the natural environment that is essential to our province, economy, our way of life and our identity.

Mr. Speaker, we, on this side, recognize the value of streamlining the appointment process for resource officers. Bringing various classifications together under one legislative framework makes practical sense. Rather than appointing officers separately under different acts, this legislation is a good move and it establishes a more unified approach, reducing administrative duplication and simplifying the process.

For these reasons, we certainly will be supporting this bill. However, supporting it does not mean overlooking important questions about this legislation that will be implemented and what it will achieve. Our responsibility as the Opposition is to ensure that legislation delivers meaningful results for the people of our great province. We must ask whether this new framework will improve enforcement, strengthen accountability and provide better protection for our natural resources, and we believe it will.

This legislation brings together enforcement responsibilities under 10 provincial acts, covering areas including animal protection, endangered species, environmental protection, forestry, lands, off-road vehicles, provincial parks, water resources, wildlife and wilderness and ecological reserves. That is a significant range of responsibilities. We know that consolidating these roles under the designation of resource enforcement officer may create a clearer administrative structure, and I'll have questions around that to the minister during Committee stage.

So, Mr. Speaker, we certainly support efforts to modernize government processes. I think all administrations should try to achieve that, but it's important to understand how these changes will benefit the officers doing the work and the communities they serve. That's the most important piece of all.

In terms of staffing and enforcement capacity – and I'll ask the minister to confirm it once in Committee – I believe there are approximately 100 resource enforcement officers across the province, with 27 office locations and nine detachments. We also heard that these positions are pretty well filled. There are two vacancies as of right now; that's my understanding, so that's

encouraging. However, we must ask whether the existing staffing complement is sufficient to meet the demands of the enforcement across Newfoundland and Labrador. So, Minister, that's a question you'll need to answer.

As I said before, our province certainly presents unique challenges in terms of our geography. In my district, in Bay d'Espoir, we have an office and there are challenges because of the geography, but those workers do a good job. Again, seeing them properly resourced is certainly important. As I said before, streamlining appointments is a positive step, and we support that.

Mr. Speaker, there are reasonable questions and, again, I will certainly be asking them for clarification in the Committee stage. So I'm going to move on through a lot of my comments, because a lot of them are more question related than they are in terms of statements, but I just want to end in terms of a matter of particular importance is the relationship between this legislation and the *Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement Act*.

The bill recognizes that the agreement takes precedence in the event of a conflict or inconsistency. That is an important safeguard, but it must also be respected in practice. Resource enforcement officers may work in areas where provincial enforcement responsibilities intersect with Indigenous rights, land use, wildlife management and resource protection, and that relationship is key no matter if we're talking about resource or the Churchill Falls development, whatever the case may be, it's an important relationship, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to end there. I do have questions and I look forward to Committee stage to ask the minister for clarification and some answers on some important questions around this piece.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to rise in this House and have the opportunity to speak to the *Resource Enforcement Act*. It's an enforcement act that will bring resource enforcement officers under a single legislative framework.

Many residents of our province interact with resource enforcement officers while enjoying outdoor activities. Part of the role of resource enforcement officers is to ensure the public understands and complies with the laws that safeguard our natural resources.

Speaker, I'm one individual who spends a tremendous amount of time in the woods. I love it. As a matter of fact, just this morning with my colleague from Exploits, I showed him pictures of 10 years ago today, myself and a buddy of mine, Duane, were in cutting a bit of wood and having a boil up and cooking some bologna and eggs. It's important, but we always run into enforcement officers every day and they've been very cordial and very respectful to us. I guess it's the persona that we give them too is when they approach us, we're respectful to them and we give that respect and they give us respect. So it's important.

Officers follow a code of professional conduct that outlines the standards of behaviour expected of them. It ensures that officers carry out their duties with professionalism, integrity, fairness and – here's the one – respect, while maintaining the confidence and trust of the public. That's us crowd in the woods.

The act includes provisions to enshrine the code into legislation with key elements and including integrity and honesty. Officers are expected to act ethically, make impartial decisions and avoid any conduct that could compromise public trust, respect and professionalism. All members of the public,

colleagues and partner organizations must be treated with dignity, courtesy and respect. Respect works both ways.

Fair and lawful enforcement: Officers must enforce laws consistently, fairly and without discrimination or misuse of authority. Now, for those of us who have spent a fair bit of time in the woods, you always hear stories of people running into law enforcement officers and maybe the encounter wasn't that great. But I'm a firm believer that every encounter I've had has always been positive. They've always been full of knowledge. I've always had questions, especially as a young hunter.

I remember buying my first single-shot crack barrel gun from the old Co-op store in Corner Brook. I'm sure the Member for Corner Brook and Member for Bay of Islands remember the old Co-op store. Running into officers in the woods when I was 16 or 17 years old, in bird hunting, and having questions about the number of shots – because back then, we could buy a box of shells for $4.99; now they're more like $60. Having questions of what size bead I should use on different birds. Even the old skippers, they were always very helpful and having the discussion about what to use. If they're still out there listening, thank you for guiding me in my time in the woods.

Accountability: Officers are responsible for their actions and expected to report misconduct, co-operate with investigations and uphold standards – very important.

Confidentiality and stewardship: Sensitive information, government property, equipment and resources must be protected and used appropriately. Conflict of interest prevention: Officers must avoid situations where personal interests could influence or appear to influence professional responsibilities.

Fitness for duty – I don't think I'll ever be an enforcement officer. Officers must be physically and mentally fit to perform their duties safely and effectively and must not be impaired while at work.

Resource enforcement officers serve the public in a professional, ethical and accountable manner and maintain the highest standards of conduct and public trust.

I am pleased to support this bill that enshrines these standards into law.

I'll take my seat.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

Like the Member across the way, I, too, spent time in the woods and on the ocean, like the good baymen that we are, of course. Certainly this time of year, with moose hunting season – no, I have not gotten a moose yet, just to let you know. I've not been lucky enough yet.

With this bill in force now, we think about that during this time of year, especially hunting season. First off, I would like to say a special thank you to our resource enforcement officers for all that they do in the province to protect our environment, of course, our natural heritage and the work that they do to make sure that everyone is following the law.

We want people to enjoy those activities outdoors and the hunting seasons, but there are laws in place to follow and we want to make sure our officers have the tools and resources that they need to make sure that everyone is enjoying that in a safe manner.

I just want to take a couple of minutes to speak to this bill. Formalizing the Resource Enforcement Division and streamlining the appointment of resource enforcement officers, obviously, that's something that we support over here, making sure we streamline those services to make sure that we get those officers in place that we need.

It certainly is encouraging to hear, I think, two vacancies out of 100 and making sure we're getting all those roles filled and looking at if we need additional officers, too. There's more activity happening now, a lot of outfitters and other folks participating in hunting or whatever it may be, so we want to make sure that our officers have the resources they need and more if we need that as well.

That's something, I think, the minister should reflect on, too, when it comes to that. When we note that the officers take an oath, that speaks to the importance of their role and what they do. We know that they all take their role very seriously. I've also encountered them, as well, when out in the woods, especially, and they're always very professional.

They can be faced with any situation; we don't know how folks may react or what the situation may warrant for them to be there. I find they've always been professional in the way they carry out their duties as officers throughout the entire province. We certainly appreciate all the work that they do.

It speaks to also, Speaker, some of the acts here that is included. You look at the *Endangered Species Act*. We've had conversations in the House here before on those species that we need to protect. The officers are looking out for that as well. Our *Provincial Parks Act*, our *Off-Road Vehicles Act*, always making sure that folks who are out participating in the province in the outdoors are participating safely and making sure all the laws are followed.

I just wanted to take a moment to speak to this bill. I certainly support streamlining the service to make sure everything goes smoothly. When we look at also, the minister, I think it gives him the ability when the House is not open. So we don't have to wait for our session to start to make sure that we can move on some of the things that need to be done in the appointment process.

We certainly support that on this side of the House. I know the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune and myself over here, we do have some questions to ask. So we look forward to that during this process but I just wanted to take a couple of minutes to stand up in support of this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: I'm pleased to rise today to support this new *Resource Enforcement Act*. I, too, Speaker, spend a lot of time out in the woods and I do feel I'm in good enough shape to be an enforcement officer. Just throwing that out there, right?

AN HON. MEMBER: We agree.

J. POWER: Yes.

In Labrador, hunters, trappers and other outdoor resource users know very well that time spent on the land is not just recreational activity; it's part of a lifestyle and heritage that is unlike anywhere else.

Speaker, most of our natural resources are intertwined in Labrador with our lakes and the land that we hunt on. So it's a very important job that these conservation officers got to ensure that everything that's going on is safe for the general public. Most resource enforcement officers from Labrador know that they have a very difficult

job, especially when working on landscapes as vast as Labrador's landscape is.

This *Resource Enforcement Act* is designed to help officers do their jobs more efficiently and contribute to safe and responsible resources used throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, resource enforcement officers are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws that protect natural resources. They work in various capacities, including conservation officers. They are tasked with enforcing resource-based legislation under the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands. These officers are located throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to enhance public safety and compliance with environmental laws. They conduct inspections, gather intelligence and investigate illegal violations that could endanger or harm the environment or wildlife.

This act will ensure accountability and reduce red tape by establishing a legislative framework for resource enforcement officers, streamlining the administration design process, establishing the existing code of conduct in the law.

I will note that the Resource Enforcement Division has nearly 100 staff members and officers province wide, with many of them located in rural areas. The division is finalizing a competition to fill vacancies in Labrador and new officers will be starting there in the coming weeks. Recruitment for the Island is ongoing, with interviews for vacancies taking place in mid-November.

Sustainable management of the province's wildlife population is a core mandate of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands. I am pleased to support a new *Resource Enforcement Act* that will improve officers' day-to-day operations and allow them to focus on field work.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, I want to encourage two things. I would like to encourage the general public to report any suspected illegal activities that are going on throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to encourage, again, the general public to interact with our officers. When you see an officer coming, you don't have to run away, that makes you look guilty. It makes you look like you done something wrong.

Actually if you take the time – I know a lot of conservation officers in Labrador. I speak to them every day. They take a lot of pride, a lot of honour in the work they do. So just sit down and have a chat with them. You don't have to walk away from them.

I would encourage the general public just to have a chat with these folks and let them know what they do on a day-to-day basis.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, like my colleague here have a moose licence this year, but I would say that there's a very good chance that it's the best way to preserve the life of that moose. I'll keep you updated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. DINN: I will say this, if anything else with regard to enforcement officers, is that they give life to the legislation we pass here. We debate and we put the words to paper, but they are the ones who give life to that legislation. They are the boots on the ground. They are the ones who basically are tasked with enforcing the legislation that we pass in this House of Assembly.

Now, I know the value of these enforcement officers. We have a large area, and the

Member for Labrador West certainly highlighted that. We've heard it from a few of importance here. We have a large area. Labrador is even larger. It's a huge area in which to cover, so it's not an insignificant task.

The Member for Labrador West talked about not running away. Well, I would agree that it's about relationships. Most of my encounters have been with river guardians, enforcement officers on the river. For the most part, yes, they're going to come up. I know they're going to check the licence. So if nothing else, it keeps us honest, but the important thing is that you can often have a conversation. They'll sit and talk and you'll learn about conditions on the river, about the trends and so on and so forth. They're a source of information. Many of them are outdoors people and enjoy the outdoors as well.

It comes down to not just about enforcing legislation, but it's about establishing relationships with the people who use the wilderness, who use our woods, who use the resources of this province.

I know, over the past number of years, I've certainly had conversations with numerous wildlife officers, enforcement officers, with regard to one of their frustrations about having the necessary resources to carry out their jobs. They are in a unique position because, think about this, you're in the middle of nowhere in many cases. Maybe cell reception is spotty. But you are there, kilometres from any sort of backup or anything else and you're on your own. It depends on your ability then to have those interactions with people in a firm, fair and friendly way. It's important to resource them.

We will support this bill. Anything that streamlines, that makes it easier with authorizing these people to do their jobs effectively, it works, I think. Our questions we'll have with you during the Committee of the Whole with regard to the whole idea of training and how this is going to work. It's great to talk about efficiency and reducing red tape if it makes life better and more efficient, but it's also making sure that people still have the resources that they need to carry out their jobs in an effective and safe way.

With that, I'll take my seat and I'll have my questions during Committee.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand and have a few minutes to thank the wildlife enforcement officers. I know them all well. Not all, but I know the vast majority on the West Coast very well. I know the work they have done, and we must remember a few years back when a few, over time, gave the ultimate sacrifice by doing their job. So it is a job that, at times, do cause a lot of tragedy for our province and for the forest itself. We must recognize the great work that they do all throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I know back in Corner Brook they have an outing day when they bring everyone together, all the different enforcement officers and all the wildlife officers and all the groups around and brings all the schools from the Humber - Bay of Islands and Corner Brook here together to give them education on the wildlife; give them education of what they can look forward to; show them the forest; give them some insight on what work they do and then the work that they do to promote the wildlife here in Newfoundland and Labrador in a very respectful and educational way.

So I just want to thank them. I know, at times, they're out in some very stressful situations. They find themselves in some

tough situations. Not all the laws are followed the way they should be. They do, at times, come into a situation where it's very uncomfortable for them, but they do their job. I just want to thank them all for all the work they've done.

To the government now, we must make sure they have the resources, they have all the equipment they need and they have the support of all people in this House of Assembly when we come up and approve this bill, that we give them everything that we feel and they feel is needed, (a), to do their job; (b) to ensure that they're safe and that they're going to return home that night; and (c) they know that we got their backs and that we will support them no matter what situation they find themselves in at times, that we're there with them to support them.

It can be very difficult at times for the officers, and those officers are just like us. They're just people going out and doing their job. They're going out and trying to make sure that the wildlife is safe, make sure the people are safe, make sure the laws are followed. We are the ones that have to ensure and make sure that they know that we are with them. Thank you very much for all the work that they do and keep up with that great day because, last year, we had hundreds – I'm talking hundreds – of children that went through that day in the park. It was at Margaret Bowater Park, and they had everything there.

They had the search and rescue there, they had the firefighters there, all the different groups that the kids could learn and ask questions. I'm looking forward to coming back next year for the educational part for our youth. Sometimes we forget our youth will soon be the ones that are out hunting, soon be the ones out on the ATV, soon be the ones out trapping, soon be the ones out fishing. The education part, they do.

So thank you all for what you do. I thank the government for ensuring – and the previous government. I know the previous government supported the wildlife officers well also. Every time a new government comes in, there are always new things we can add to give them the tools that they need, and this act here is a part of it. Congratulations to everybody who is making their lives better, making their workplace much better and ensuring that they're going to make it home at night, and putting them in less confrontational situations that they can through the enforcement that we give.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's my privilege and honour to be able to stand and speak, as my colleagues have, on Bill 24, An Act Respecting Resource Enforcement Officers.

Obviously, there has been lots of great discussion about people's personal attachment to this incredible, great expanse, an environment that we need to protect, and this is all about how we can continue to better support our workers in this environment.

While my people are hunters, fishers, farmers from the West Coast, I'm very, very proud of that history and the tie to the enforcement officers that have to do the work out in the field. Myself, as representative here in the great City of St. John's and the District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, I've been very tied to environmental stewardship, so this is something very near and dear to my heart and how we continue to protect our resources, the full gamut of them, and creating advocacy and policy.

In my former role as deputy mayor for the City of St. John's, I was the lead for

environment and sustainability. I've seen in action and in collaboration the incredible work that some of these folks and these workers do. Officers who came and gave us information in Airport Heights, for example, when we were starting to see proliferation of coyotes and things like that, they were there right on the spot to help us educate ourselves and the public.

So the kind of work is not necessarily just out in the field, not necessarily out where people don't see them. They actually have a lot of public interfacing and I think it's really incredible the work that they do. I agree with my colleagues, and certainly my colleague here, about the importance of supporting those workers.

This bill officially unifies the mandate of all of the various officers and inspector roles across government departments and, of course, making them more efficient certainly is a priority.

For the information of the public, we're dealing with inspectors in the *Animal Health and Protection Act*; conservation officers under the *Endangered Species Act*; inspectors under the *Environmental Protection Act*; forestry officials under the *Forestry Act*; inspectors under the *Lands Act*; peace officers under *Off-Road Vehicles Act*; officers with the *Provincial Parks Act*; the *Water Resources Act*, again, inspectors there; wildlife officers under the *Wild Life Act*; and officers under the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*.

A lot of sustainability, a lot of stewardship involved in there and protection for our environment, the resources that we have and, of course, for the workers who are doing that hard work out there in the community on our behalf.

I'm very pleased to see any kind of streamlining that can happen in this realm to better support the workers in those roles. We know it's a really tough job and, despite the unified responsibility, the letter of the law requires that they be individually designated for each of these roles in the act so this is a cleaning up that can happen.

One other thing I just would like to mention is we know that this legislation happens in other jurisdictions, of course, in Manitoba, *The Conservation Officers Act*.

Like my colleague, we will certainly have some questions, but very happy to support any of this streamlining and support for the workers, support for the incredible resources that we have.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, if the minister speaks, he will end the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I certainly value the comments that Members put forward. Of course, we do value the work of our enforcement officers and I certainly would like to thank them for the job that they do for our province. Thank you very, very much for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, I'm glad to see he's supporting this bill. I didn't think he'd have any question with it. I don't know who the minister was in 2020, but we'd have to check that out to make sure. But we appreciate your comments. I know he was the former minister of this department and he values the work that this department does, like myself, of course, he does.

He was speaking of the front-line workers and how we need to protect them and have the tools that they need. We value that and we understand that. We're certainly going to

work towards that and make sure that those individuals have those tools and equipment and supports that they do need to carry out those jobs.

He also said that the cleanup of procedure in this bill was good to bring in under one act. That's the main focus of the act right now is to bring it under one umbrella so that we can streamline the focus of this act. That makes practical sense, so it's good that we can do that.

Again, he values the workers and we all do, of course. I know he will have some questions in Committee. He did bring up one regarding the resources and the vacancies.

The resources we have right now, we have 50 trucks active. We have off-road vehicles: 92 snowmobiles; 14 new purchased in 2025; we have 17 inoperable and out of service. We have 68 ATVs; four newly purchased in 2025; eight purchased in 2026; and there are 16 out of service, but we have 58 operational vehicles.

With regard to the jobs of the officers, this will have no impact on the positions of the officers location. Resource enforcement officers will maintain their official classification titles of conservation officers IIIB or IV or V's.

The division has 92 conservation officers, conservation of four staff and the division has offices province wide, especially in the rural areas. We have 92 officers and we have two vacancies. We're looking for positions on that. We've also had some vacancies in Labrador. We just recruited four more; we were down to six. We had vacancies of six; we have four recruited so that enhances the enforcement officers in Labrador. That's for the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

The Member for St. George's - Humber mentioned the enjoyment in our forest and hunting activities and the importance of the roles that officers do. They play an important role in public safety and trust in the public and keeping us safe. We're all aware of the work they do. Sometimes it's gruelling work, it's long-time work, it's hard work, but they do it with the best professional ability that they have. They do their job professionally.

It's great to see that the Member for St. George's - Humber mentioned that and values the work they do and values the activities and the importance that we all have to work together in this industry, especially in the forestry activities, hunting activities during this year and every year, of course, to make the public safe and the awareness that's there and make the jobs easy for the officers.

The Member for Burgeo - La Poile, I am sorry to hear you haven't got your moose yet, but I'm sure if you continue, it will happen. He thanked the enforcement officers for what they do. I'm sure he's probably going to need some guidance himself in the woods of where to go. Those fellows know where to go, so maybe you can keep in contact with those fellows.

On a lighter note, it's good to see that the officers are doing their jobs efficiently. He's concerned again about that the tools and equipment that they need to do their jobs. I think we all value that and we want them to have their tools and equipment and training and the supports they need to do their jobs. It is, like I say, sometimes dangerous work so we need to make sure that we are up to standards with all of that.

Of course, we are looking for two positions in the Port aux Basques area so if the Member from Burgeo - La Poile has anybody interested in that, maybe we can get some interest in those positions in Burgeo - La Poile.

Lab West: Making sure the safety of the public – again, the importance of the work of the enforcement officers through the work

that they do. Labrador has a vast range, as was mentioned, so we need our officers there. I mentioned we had six officer vacancies, but we hired four more in Labrador so we're filling those positions. It would be good to have everybody working up there and throughout the province. The department has done good with the vacancies and the positions. I must say, again, we support the work they do.

The Member for St. John's Centre, he elaborated on his moose-hunting skills. I can see his moose-hunting skills are the same as his angling skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: No success.

J. DINN: (Inaudible) the moose.

P. FORSEY: Very good.

The officers' enforcement of the legislation with the tools and equipment they need, he stressed those areas, which was great to see. Again, the importance of having those officers able to do their work in the way and the manner that they can with the tools and equipment that they need is a good piece.

I'm glad to see that they support this bill. I know everyone was in support of this bill, so I am glad to see that they are encouraged to see that the red tape reduction is coming down and streamlining government's procedures.

Humber - Bay of Islands mentioned the value of the workers again. We appreciate those comments. Everybody values the work and we understand the work that those officers do. He specified the dangers and he also specified the results of that work.

Unfortunately, that has happened. We certainly don't like to see that, but during the course of this season and last season we did see some injuries happen with our officers. We don't like to see that but we value what you do. If there are any injuries, we feel for you and we thank you for what you do. There is one now that recently got hurt, we wish her all the success in a speedy recovery.

He mentioned the education through our youth and that's very important. It's a very important factor, education of what are our activities regarding forest activities, hunting activities and what our enforcement officers do. That's a valued piece that we can portray within the schools, through education of the youth because they are our future. They are the ones coming in behind us and they want the valued resources that we have.

Through the work of the enforcement officers, certainly, they can value that. I know because I have a grandson who is 11 years old, he enjoys the woods more than I do. He's a great fisherman, probably I'll get him to take the Member for St. John's Centre fishing.

He's a great woodsman, he loves the woods and to see that activity – I'm talking about my own, but to see him off the computer sometime and off that media stuff and see him in the woods, he values that type of activity. It is certainly great for our young people.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi valued the supports for the officers and wanted the continued supports for our officers and the equipment and tools that they need. Of course, that is valued.

She also mentioned the interaction of the officers with the communities, how the officers come in and talk to them especially about coyotes. We've all heard coyotes coming into communities, bears coming into communities, different animals that we haven't seen, especially on the Avalon as of late with coyotes. People don't know how to approach them or what they can do or whatnot, so the interaction that those officers have with the communities and

training and supports that they give communities is a great value of work.

Other than that, I know there's going to be some questions in Committee. Again, thank you for all your comments and the support for this bill. Right now, I'll take my seat, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Now that we're all sharing, for the record, I haven't got my moose yet either, but the reason for it, I haven't been hunting yet. When I decide, all I need is one day and one bullet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

No, sorry, I'm off track here.

Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act Respecting Resource Enforcement Officers. (Bill 24)

SPEAKER: The 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 Resource Enforcement Officers," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole presently. (Bill 24)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 24.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 24.

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.

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 24, An Act Respecting Resource Enforcement Officers.

A bill, "An Act Respecting Resource Enforcement Officers." (Bill 24)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A lot of talk about moose and a lot of talk about bologna. Actually, you can get moose bologna. Maybe the minister should treat us to some moose bologna at some point, right?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

E. LOVELESS: Anyway, the minister, in his comments, gave a list of resources which are important to the operational piece of these REOs. So I'm just asking the minister if he could provide us with the copy of those resources and where they are in different parts of the provinces?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, we can certainly provide you with a copy of those resources and the numbers.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you for that.

Minister, in terms of what we are talking about here today that a lot of people certainly passionately spoke about, in terms of when these changes will occur. From an officer's lens, a day-to-day responsibility, how will their day-to-day operations change? Through their lens, can you tell us how it will look, if you're one of these officers today, how will these changes help them from a day-to-day perspective?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: It helps them to get their jobs done efficiently because the numbers of letters that they have to get through other departments to be able to do that work, especially in the departments that are not under this act right now, provincial parks or environmental acts, that they get their job done more efficiently.

There are no changes in the jobs that they do. Most of them now are doing it now, it's just streamlining the act.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Minister.

I guess today in terms of all these conversations and realizing how all of these acts are coming under the umbrella of these REOs shows the complexity, I guess, of the role and the responsibility of them.

My question is: Will it improve how enforcement resources are deployed across the province in what's happening here today?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: The deployment of officers come through with whatever act is involved here, if it's enforcement for wildlife or whatnot. We have our positions there. Again, we have 92 positions, the same amount of officers. It's just to change the act so that they can do their jobs more proficiently from each department.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Minister.

Will they require additional training?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: No, they won't need additional training because they already do those jobs anyway. It's just previously they'd have to get a letter to be able to do those jobs that they already do. It's just streamlining the act under one act.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Minister.

In terms of the resource officers, I know I alluded to it in my notes and I think you did as well, we have 100 resource enforcement officers across the province, 27 office locations, nine detachments. There are two vacancies. Where are they, Minister?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Actually, we have 20 vacancies throughout the province, that's what we have. We'll be filling those positions.

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

E. LOVELESS: So 20 vacancies – can we get a breakdown of where those vacancies are in terms of locations in the province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: We'll certainly provide you with a list, yes.

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

E. LOVELESS: I know we have 20 vacancies, but I don't know in terms of where the vacancies are in terms of operational and location, so I really can't comment until I see that information. Will there be new hires in terms of field or administrator?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, definitely. I mean, we just hired four in Labrador. We're looking for two more, of course, like I mentioned in Burgeo - La Poile. We're looking for those positions to be filled throughout the province.

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

E. LOVELESS: And they are all field related?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Twenty field officers and one of those is clerical.

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

E. LOVELESS: Can I ask where that clerical position is?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: I'll get that information for you.

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

E. LOVELESS: Minister, in terms of my district, in the Bay d'Espoir office, are there any vacancies there right now and what are the complement of staff currently?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: The complement in the Bay d'Espoir one, I'll have to get you the exact number on that but the one for the clerical is in Corner Brook.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Minister.

In terms of local hiring – which, as MHAs, that's always of interest of all of us. In my district, I believe it's a success story, where a young gentleman went away to train in the

enforcement area and came back and is now working in the Bay d'Espoir area and his partner went away to be a paramedic and she is back in the area. That's the good news story. That's a success story and I think we need more of them and should have more of them.

So in terms of any new hires, is that done under that flavour in terms of enticing them? Because we offer benefits to health care workers to get them to hard areas to work. Rural Newfoundland, we all know, is challenging. But I believe we can do more, even though rural Newfoundland is a challenge in getting workers there, but I believe we can overcome that challenge.

In terms of the new hires, is there anything under your hiring practices that will focus on the youth in terms of enticing them to come back to the rural parts of the province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Certainly a good point, and I know myself and the Members have had those discussions. Those hires are done through experience and their education and that sort of stuff. So the specifications that come under those hirings.

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

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Chair, I'll pause there right now to allow others to ask some questions. But I do have more that I'll come back to.

Thank you.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to training, is there any training that would be specific to the various roles? So I would assume that someone under the *Animal Health and Protection Act* may have, let's say, different responsibilities or different expectations than someone who's in the *Wild Life Act*. Whether it's the use of firearms and so on and so forth.

So is there any training that's specific to one group that wouldn't be expected by others?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, it's the same answer that the previous Member asked with regard to training. They're doing those jobs now. The biggest thing with this now is that we need letters from different departments because they have to act, so they engage our officers in doing those jobs. There are no changes in their jobs. They do this. They do the work now.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I only remember a few years ago, I guess some years ago, there was some concern when forestry enforcement officers and wildlife enforcement officers were brought under one umbrella as to the expectations and training. So right now, all new officers and all officers, they're interchangeable; is that what's being said?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Under this act, yes, it would. They know their jobs on that end.

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

J. DINN: If I understand it correctly, that any one of these positions, any one person would have to have a good working knowledge of the *Animal Health and Protection Act*, the *Endangered Species Act*, the *Environmental Protection Act*, the

Forestry Act, *Lands Act* and so on. They would be responsible for enforcing all of the regulations in all of these acts, correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, all the officers do all the acts. That's just going to be under one act right now.

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

J. DINN: If I may, overall, how many resource enforcement officers do we have in total?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, we have 92 officers on staff.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

If I understood, we have 20 vacancies across the province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, we have 92 officers, 27 offices throughout the province and we have, again, 20 field and one clerical.

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

J. DINN: I guess the question would be, in streamlining this, are these enough people to this – it's a pretty big province geographically, but it's also, I would say, a tremendous amount of responsibility for these officers.

If I may, Chair, I was a classroom teacher, high school, but in the system, I wouldn't be qualified to be a school counsellor or some of the other specific jobs that are germane.

I guess what I'm looking at here is, do we have enough officers at this point to carry out this? We might be streamlining the legislation, but in streamlining, there is also an attempt maybe we don't need as many officers, because we've got roughly about 112, I think?

I'm just wondering would that be enough?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, it's the same answer I gave to the last Member.

Those officers are doing the jobs as they've always done. We're just streamlining the act so that we don't have to get the letters from different departments to get the job done. We're still using the same amount of positions, the same amount of officers and there will certainly be no shortage.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have a couple of questions as well.

Minister, you said there were 20 vacancies. Just to get this correct, are all those positions being recruited for in those vacancies?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, we are looking for those officers.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the Member for St. John's Centre was just talking about some of this as well. Our resource enforcement officers have to take on a lot of responsibilities. I do understand that there were some changes to the department a number of years ago and a lot of extra responsibilities were put on our enforcement officers; so, to the point of the Member for St. John's Centre, making sure they have the resources and tools and fairly compensated as well for their role.

With those extra responsibilities, were there any changes to how those positions are classified? Were they given any financial compensation for that? I'm just curious on that from the minister.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, those officers do the roles under all those acts anyway. We're putting them into one act. In regard to the compensation, there are other means for the conversations in regard to the individuals.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to be clear again, the resource enforcement officers would have taken on extra responsibilities with these changes in the departments a number of years ago. Obviously that would have been before the minister's time, but would that be reflected then in their classification as officers and their profiles, how they are in the system. Would they receive a reclassification or be appropriately financially compensated for those positions with the extra duties involved?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: No, their duties are the same and there's no compensation directly linked to the legislation they enforce. Government employees, of course, have the right to request re-evaluation of their pay scales under the Job Evaluation System. While a recent request was declined, officers have the option to appeal.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do appreciate the minister clarifying that as well because I do believe it has been a long time that they haven't been reclassified and we want to make sure our officers get financially compensated appropriately and because of the excessive work that they do, as the Member for St. John's Centre mentioned. We have so many officers, the number of vacancies of course and vast geography, whether in Labrador or on the Island portion of the province that those officers have to enforce these acts.

I certainly appreciate the minister speaking publicly about that and, hopefully, we can make sure they get the financial compensations especially for the work that they do. Because, obviously, every Member here mentioned that in respect to that.

That'll be all for me, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the time.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 21 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 21 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 21 carried.

CLERK: Schedule A.

CHAIR: Shall Schedule A carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, Schedule A carried.

CLERK: Schedule B.

CHAIR: Shall Schedule B carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, Schedule B 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 Resource Enforcement Officers. (Bill 24)

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee now rise and report the bill without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report the bill without amendment.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that the Committee recommends Bill 24 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 24 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the House do resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to Consider Bill 25.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 25.

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 25, An Act to Amend the Social Workers Act.

A bill, “An Act to Amend the Social Workers Act.” (Bill 25)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Cartwright - L’Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair.

I thanked the minister yesterday for giving a good overview at the beginning and at the end as we discussed the amendments to the *Social Workers Act*.

I've got a few questions for the minister here. I'll start with the college's '25-'26 annual report that indicates that it has been working with government representatives on legislative changes to establish a clinical social worker designation.

Can the minister tell us what is the status of this work and will Bill 25 provide the necessary authority to establish this designation? I guess what we're wondering is will further legislative amendments be required?

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

J. WALL: No, Health and Community Services.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I know that my colleague from the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being would certainly stand and pinch-hit if needed. I'm certainly thankful for that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the Member opposite for the question with respect to the establishment of – was it registration categories?

L. DEMPSTER: The designation.

J. WALL: The designation.

I need a new ear piece.

L. DEMPSTER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: We'll just do a take two that's fine, Chair, on this Wednesday morning.

In the college's '25-'26 annual report it indicated that it had been working with government representatives on legislative changes to establish a clinical social worker designation and we were just wondering what is the status of that. Will that be addressed here in this particular amendment or will we need additional amendments to come before the House?

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Members opposite for that clarification.

The bill does not set up requirements for registration as a clinical social worker. Those requirements will be outlined in the regs, as they come through, with the board's new regulation-making authority which is outlined in the bill.

That will need further discussion, no doubt, but that, again, has been proposed by the college and will certainly work its way through in that process.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the minister for that answer.

Would you know, Minister, if the college has developed a timeline for introducing new registration categories? I guess, equally as important, is what consultation will take place with social workers, employers, other stakeholders, before those regulations are established?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

The timeline has not been established yet. Again, that will work through with the process, with the college and the officials in the department.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, and I thank the minister for that answer.

The college's most recent annual report indicates that allegations received through its Professional Conduct Review Process – and I referenced this yesterday in Question Period, actually – has reached their highest level in five years, with the college anticipating continued increases in the volume and the complexity of the allegations.

I'm just wondering, does the government anticipate any changes to the legislative framework governing professional conduct or discipline, and does the college have the tools that it needs right now to manage this workload?

I know I gave you a lot to unpack. I also know that we often refer to it across different sectors, we're working in different times in today's society, so it is concerning when the number of allegations around conduct is at an all-time high.

I know you're not very long into that portfolio, but has there been any dialogue yet as to kind of the direction we're going to take to combat some of that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question and thank you for the recognition of being in the department a short period of time.

Mr. Chair, that has not come up in discussion with respect to my department, but I can say we are certainly anticipating at this time that it will apply to this new category as any other category.

I am happy to take that back for continued discussion to have with the college and just to firm up that answer, but good question and I'll certainly take that away.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Yes, just wondered if some new legislative framework would be required to kind of combat that issue, given the volume, given the complexity.

I have no further questions for the minister.

Thank you, Chair.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Were there other groups, other than the College of Social Workers, who were consulted when considering amendments for the act?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

Yes, there was consultation with members in my department, with NLHS and if I remember correctly, there were consultations with Indigenous governments as well.

I can certainly get a full list of that for the Member opposite, but I do know there was extensive consultation done, from the

college, as I said, with my department, with NLHS and with Indigenous governments.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

This is a tough job; there's no doubt about it. You're rarely brought into a happy situation. There is usually conflict, stress, you name it. I'm just wondering here – and I would assume we have shortages in this area of social workers – how many social workers are we short? How many vacancies remain unfilled?

Going back over the years, it always seems to hover around 100 or so. I thought the last time I heard the number of 120. I'm just looking at the number of social workers that we need to fill.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

Your statement first with respect to the job that they do, yes, it is very difficult. We, as a government, are supporting our social workers where and when we can. Currently within NLHS, we have 684 social workers. In my colleague's Department of Social Supports and Well-Being, we have 480 social workers.

With respect to a vacancy rate, Mr. Chair, I say to the Member opposite we have a 5 per cent vacancy rate within NLHS and currently, in my colleague's Department of Social Supports and Well-Being, we have a vacancy rate of 20 per cent.

That vacancy rate has gone down over the last year. I know when I first went into the department, in October of last year, it was approximately near 30 per cent at that time, which is down to about 20 per cent currently.

So we are making an impact with respect to the amount of social workers we have in the province. We are going to the school, to the graduating classes and offering employment to the social workers, that is currently ongoing as well.

To the Member's question, 684 within NLHS and 480 within Social Supports and Well-Being, for social workers, with a vacancy rate of 5 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I think the minister would agree that's a large vacancy rate, especially where, I would assume then, other social workers left behind are picking up the slack. Their caseloads have increased.

I guess I'll ask the minister, Chair, is he hearing anything as regards these particular stressors that they're facing, or maybe suggestions, either from them or from the college for that matter, or from the union representing them, the issues that they're facing as a result of this shortage and ways that we can improve recruitment and retention of social workers?

I know the minister just said he is going into the schools, but I'm just looking at here if they've come up with other suggestions, for example, even paid work terms, which is a small step.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I do thank the Member opposite for the question and the point that he raised with respect to what we're hearing.

Yes, I am engaging and speaking with those on the front lines, with our social workers. They do carry a heavy workload and,

depending on where the social worker is working, the caseload does vary, the number of cases on each caseload, but it is heavy.

We are certainly doing what we can with respect to, not only speaking with the new graduates and those at the college, but having the conversations with respect to employment and financial incentives for different areas of the province. We are certainly working with the students, not only to offer employment, but to make sure that it is tailored to what they are looking for and where in the province are they interested in.

As you can appreciate, and we've heard it here before, most graduates in any profession are looking to stay in the St. John's metro area. We have, of course, vacancies throughout the province. We have workloads that vary throughout the province with respect to the regions that they're in.

We're cognizant of that. We're very mindful of the workload and the work that the social workers do. We are doing what we can with respect to, not only recruiting new social workers, but financial incentives for different areas of the province.

With respect to the paid work terms, that is another avenue that we can certainly look towards and work for. I know we had money allocated in *Budget 2026* for paid work terms; however, we're still working through that process.

We're very cognizant, my team at NLHS, former team at Social Supports and Well-Being, another great team in that department as well, with respect to recognizing the impact the social workers, not only have on the province, but the vacancy rates currently and how we need to support them and, of course, their related workloads.

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

J. DINN: Thank you.

If I remember correctly, the minister does have a background in this area and certainly group homes and so on. He well knows the challenges. We're dealing with vulnerable youth, vulnerable people in many cases.

I just want to make sure I heard it correctly that the majority of vacancies are in around St. John's? If so, I wouldn't mind knowing, I would assume in the more rural and remote areas would be the problem.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

No, just to be clear, the majority of vacancies are not within St. John's Metro. That's where the majority of the students wish to work.

The vacancies that we have across the province are in rural and remote but not all rural and remote. We do have vacancies in the Whitbourne area that we're working through. We have vacancies in Central and Western, in Labrador especially, we're having difficulties with filling positions. That's why we're looking at the financial incentives.

Right now, I'm speaking as Minister of Health and Community Services, my colleague from Social Supports and Well-Being, my former role, Social Supports and Well-Being do have paid work terms for their social workers. I didn't mention that earlier in the current role, but SSWB certainly does.

Just to be clear, the majority of students – and we're seeing this with social workers, we're seeing this with other groups as well – they prefer to work in the Metro area, but we are certainly working daily to fulfill the vacancies in other parts of the province, especially in Labrador.

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

J. DINN: A question I could ask is, why is it easier to get people working in St. John's than the rural areas?

I will say this, my first teaching job, Chair – if I can have some leeway on this – was down on the Burin Peninsula, down in St. Lawrence actually. I do remember going over into St. Lawrence that foggy day wondering what the hell I got myself into because it was pretty bleak.

P. PIKE: No fog there.

J. DINN: No, no fog there.

But I have to say, that first term there, Chair, I think I changed houses three times. I was with the priest for the first few weeks. There was no housing; that was back in 1981.

I'm looking at here, I'm assuming that part of the issue right now that still has not been resolved is just having affordable housing. I guess I was looking to get that job, but I'd say a lot of people are not interested in going down there without the prospect of finding accommodations.

I know when I taught up the shore, up in Ferryland, it was with a Ms. Condon; I boarded with her. I stayed in a place on Sunny Hill. I boarded with Kitty Larry. All these pieces, but it was all an adventure. If you're looking for people, especially to set down roots, I guess it comes down to housing.

I'm just wondering then, what are the factors that you need, other than paid work terms? Have you looked at what would be a disincentive for people going to rural areas? I would assume it's the, if you are the only social worker there or one of two, you're carrying a load yourself. It might also have to do with housing.

I'm just wondering has there been an assessment as to what are the things that need to be fixed, because we've seen it already in education, housing is an issue in attracting people to some of the rural areas, affordable housing especially.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

Housing is certainly a part of what we're looking at with respect to social workers placed throughout the province, but, to your question, with respect to why is it frowned upon to be outside of metro? No disrespect to the metro area, but I'd sooner be outside of metro working.

These individuals that we're speaking with and working towards trying to find employment, we have to find what they are interested in. I go back to conversations I had with social workers in Deer Lake and with social workers in Harbour Grace, it has to fit their lives. Of course, if it's the right fit, then they put down roots and they raise a family and they become invested in the community. These are the individual conversations that we are having with respect to the college graduates for social workers. It all has to come down to how it fits their lifestyle.

That's why we're thinking outside the box, not just a financial incentive, we're looking at having these conversations with the graduates for positions across the province and see what entices them, what's part of their work-life balance that they're looking towards. Those are the conversations we're having, Mr. Chair, and to the Member opposite.

To your former comment and question with respect to my previous background, yes, it's 30 years as a group home counsellor, we worked with many social workers over that

period of time and saw the important, valuable work that they do in supporting our vulnerable society. I just want to say thank you for recognizing that.

Mr. Chair, we will, certainly, have these conversations going forward with our new graduates and not only new graduates and to the Member opposite, with recruitment across the country and around the world. Those are the important, individualized conversations that, I think, are necessary when we have the right fit for any social worker in any position.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the minister.

Look, I loved my time outside of teaching up the shore. It was probably the best experience – even on the Burin Peninsula, it was fantastic. I got to pick up a few new skills and met a lot of great friends that have been friends since that time. I guess, too, I know when I was a teacher at Holy Heart and president of the Teachers' Association, I would talk to young teachers who were from small communities and they had no intention, a lot of them, of going back to their community. They were looking for elsewhere.

I guess we've got to find what incentivizes them to get people to go back. I know that I talked to teachers who were sole-charge teachers. They were the only person in the school. So there's a lot of weight on the individual, and I would assume then it is same for social workers in that if you're the only person there, there's a lot of weight on you and you do need that support.

I think there is looking at the other incentives as to how you do that. I have retired teacher friends of mine who went teaching up North. The only qualification that they would have to make sure if they were going to teach, like past their career, was that they had to be able to drive in and drive out. So that they had that ability to get out.

It comes down to the transportation in and out, like affordable airfare. In Labrador, I think it's cheaper to go on a cruise somewhere than it is to pay for a return trip to Labrador. It's got to be a little bit more affordable if they're going to get people there.

One of the things during our briefing, it was noted that the purpose of this act was to authorize the board of the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers with approval from the minister to establish by regulation different categories of registration and requirements, terms, conditions and restrictions that apply to registration and renewal of registration in each category.

At that time, it was noted that a lot of this is as a result of trends that were identified, especially with clinical social work in private practice. Here's my question and it's going to recruitment and retention.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I want to be able to hear the speaker, please.

J. DINN: Is part of this shortage and why there are changes are being made, that we're probably seeing more social workers entering into the private practice, and there are benefits there that they are getting in private practice that they would not get in the public sector – and from the college, because I would assume the college asked for this, is recognizing a trend that they're already seeing.

We've seen, for example, in the nursing, we had to move the agency nurses more or less into the private field. I'm just wondering here in this trend – and this is what I was

looking at, the trend. Is there a greater trend towards the private practice and we're losing people from the public sector, or we're not getting as many people into the public sector?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

This was driven and is being driven by the college, no doubt. Of course, they are looking at it more of being a blend, as some of the public sector are doing private work, but in the private sector they can't say for sure who is actually working in the private sector because there are no parameters around that.

Of course, the college has shared with us that the private practice does carry inherent risk –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I would ask the Members to take their conversations outside. It's being disruptive at this point.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go back to my comments with respect to the college driving this change. They have shared with us that the private practice does carry inherent risk. We do have social workers in private practice, at times have little guidance or supervision or oversight with respect to the work that they do. There also may be fewer practice supports than social workers in the public sector. This combined with the inherent risks associated with clinical social work, the results in the need for greater public protection, and that's why this is coming forward.

This public protection can be best served through the registration category. This, again, being driven by the College of Social Workers, and this is what they're seeing each day. They want to, of course, protect the public, protect the social workers, and without any registration of social workers in private practice, therein lies the risk. So they foresee this and they want to get ahead of it with respect to these amendments.

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

J. DINN: I'll try to keep one last question.

I would assume then that in the last year, certainly since you've assumed government, we have had probably resignations or people leaving, social workers who've resigned, who have stepped away or who have retired for that matter.

I've asked this in previous administrations about have there been exit interviews done. I don't know if that's a practice. Is this something that the current government would consider to at least have an idea, okay, to get a handle on why people are leaving, maybe they enjoyed the career and maybe they're just ready to move on or maybe they had their frustrations here is what we need.

So it's one thing to try to recruit people into it. It's always worthwhile to talk to the people who are leaving it and are free to speak their mind as to what exactly is the issue here. But I often think there's a value, certainly in an area where we have vacancies, where people are not clamouring to get at the job, but to find out why people are leaving the profession because social workers, one, it's once very rewarding and can be very emotionally traumatizing at times.

But I'm just curious, is this something you do or would the minister consider doing?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

It's a great question. I've had this discussion outside of my public life as well as within.

I'll have to take that one away with respect to does Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services do these exit interviews with respect to social workers or any profession. I'm not privy to that working knowledge, but I'll certainly reach out and have that conversation with the team and NLHS.

I'm very happy to say that my department and the team at Health Services have a great relationship. I can certainly take that away, ask the question and get back to the Member on that. But a very good question, indeed, with respect to exit interviews.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Chair, just a few questions regarding something the Member for St. John's Centre brought up about the classifications. I did hear some concerns in the press release, it's not mentioned specifically in the act, but it does mention the idea that for this new designation that's being considered by the college, it would require a Master of Social Work. Is that imminent or is that just something proposed right now?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

This is what's going to be imminent with respect to that classification of master. That came from the college for registered clinical social workers. That was proposed to be done in the regulations with respect to the Master of Social Work. Yes, proposed in the regulations.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Yeah, and I think in this case here, the regulations we're talking about are the ones established by the college, right?

J. WALL: Yes.

J. PARSONS: I understand there's some oversight by government on those regulations. Can you tell me the process by which, when the college proposes new regulations, the government will review and approve or not approve those changes?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

It's important for us to remember with respect to those changes, also the transition plan for the current practitioners that are there. If they're going to be looking for this designation or work towards it, that's part of it as well.

The discussion will be ongoing with respect to the college and officials in my department to make sure that is all done correctly, and as to fit the legislation and what the college is actually looking for to protect the social workers currently and, of course, the public that they serve.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I have received concern from social workers on this, specifically in private practice that don't have master's but have many years' experience. So there is a risk, of course, that we are going to lose social workers in that type of practice if there's a hard and fast rule for a master's degree. That comes at great cost and time.

How will the department work with the college to ensure that there is some kind of either grandfathering type process or certification process so that we don't disrupt our already taxed resource there?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

If they have concerns first and foremost, and those who are reaching out to you, to the hon. Member, they should contact the college as these regs are now being developed. If they do have concerns, please forward them on to the college for that clarification. That's the easiest and fastest, simplest and cleanest way for them instead of going through their Member, reach out to the college directly and have that conversation.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I guess that's why it's important that we are giving more power to the college in this act. That is very understandable.

Yesterday, we did an act where we talk about fair registration for other professional groups. We do rely on professional groups to govern themselves to a large extent. Of course, social workers do perform, as we've heard, a very wide variety of important roles in our system, so any disruption like this could be very damaging, not just to the individuals who are practising, but to the system itself.

I'll mention this as well for the minister's benefit, we have other groups that do rely on social workers like Qalipu First Nation and others who employ social workers this way or use social workers this way. I am very leery I guess about providing the necessary oversight so that we do not create unnecessary red tape or a barrier here where we have experienced social workers. A master's degree does not give someone that experience of a long-time clinical social worker.

Again, can we figure out a mechanism to do that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Member opposite, a very good point.

Just to be clear any social workers who are currently in the public sector and that includes NLHS, Social Supports and Well-Being, any Indigenous governments, any community agencies, they will not be required to meet the requirements for registration as a registered clinical social worker. They will not be required to do so. They may, however, choose to seek out that title. It is anticipated that many social workers in the public system would already be eligible.

So, again, having those social workers reach out to the college to have that discussion first-hand is the way to go. But as of right now, any social workers in the public sector, SSWB, NLHS, Indigenous governments or community organizations, not required.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Minister.

That's understood, I guess, but remember, of course, that some of these groups do utilize private clinicians as well. So that is important to consider in this.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Seeing no more speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 23 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 23 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 23 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 to Amend the Social Workers Act. (Bill 25)

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 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Deputy Government House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Chair, I move the Committee rise and report Bill 25 without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is to rise and report the bill without amendment.

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 and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that the Committee recommends Bill 25, An Act to Amend the Social Workers Act, without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 25 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

B. PETTEN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

B. PETTEN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I call Orders of the Day, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: Motion 1.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Section 7 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* stipulates that the permanent appointment of certain House Officers including the Law –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Just as a matter of procedure, I need you to read the motion and move it and second it, and then you can go ahead and speak to it.

B. PETTEN: This is uncharted waters for me. The only thing in here that is.

SPEAKER: It should be there on the Order Paper or the Clerk can give you a copy.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture:

WHEREAS section 7 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* prescribes that, upon nomination by the House of Assembly, the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall be appointed by Lieutenant-Governor in Council by Commission under the Great Seal;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by this hon. House that Ian Tucker be nominated for appointment as Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.

SPEAKER: Now you can speak to it, if you want to.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, section 7 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act,* better known as HOAAIAA, stipulates permanent appointments of certain House Officers, including the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.

Section 7(1): “Upon nomination by the House of Assembly, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council shall, by Commission under the Great Seal, appoint the following officers: (a) the Clerk of the House of Assembly … (c) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel; and (d) the Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Assembly.

“(2) Before a nomination is made under subsection (1), the speaker shall consult with the commission, the Clerk of the Executive Council and the chairperson of the Public Service Commission to determine an appropriate process for recruitment of suitable candidates for appointment.

“(3) Where an officer referred to in paragraphs (1)(a) to (d) is unable to act by reason of absence, incapacity or other cause or the office is vacant, the Speaker, upon recommendation of the commission,

may appoint a person to act as that officer in a temporary capacity for a period that shall not exceed 12 consecutive months."

A vacancy occurred in this position because of the resignation of the previous acting Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel on October 2025. There was an expression of interest process to fill the position on an acting basis in November 2025. Ian Tucker was the successful incumbent, followed by expression of interest and was appointed acting Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel by the Management Commission effective December 15, 2025.

The Speaker determined the following consultations as required under subsection 7(2) of the HOAAIA with the Commission, the clerk of the Executive Council and the chair of the Public Service Commission that a publicly advertised, merit-based internal recruitment process be conducted in accordance with the practices of the Public Service Commission to fill the position of Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel permanently.

The position was advertised starting on August 3, with a closing date of August 17, 2026. Following receipt of applications, applicants were screened in per the screening criteria and interviewed. The first ranked candidate following the competition was Ian Tucker.

Mr. Tucker has over 20 years of legal practice within the public sector, including extensive experience in legislative policy and development during his time with the Department of Justice and Public Safety, including experience with the Office of Legislative Counsel where he was responsible for drafting bills for introduction in the House of Assembly and preparing subordinate legislation, regulations and orders and other notices upon various legal authorities.

He has significant involvement in the development of the legislative policy proposals and in providing legal advice on complex issues, including jurisdictional and constitutional matters during his time as departmental solicitor, manager of the civil division, acting director of the civil division and Cabinet officer.

He has diverse experience on procurement, employment, leasing and other corporate counsel matters through general counsel support to departments; a strong understanding of the legal and policy implications associated with the legislative process, as well as the complex legislative drafting, statutory interpretation, constitutional implications and parliamentary procedures that are foundational to the legislative processes.

The House of Assembly Management Commission met on October 6, 2026 and, further to the results of the merit-based process, directed that a resolution be brought to the House of Assembly nominating Ian Tucker as Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Are there any further speakers to the motion?

Seeing none, are the Members ready for the question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for St. George's - Humber, that we do now recess for lunch.

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

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 is now in recess until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Today in the Speaker's gallery, I would like to welcome Sandra Gosse, Rose MacDougall, Darlene Reelis, Doug MacLellan and Barb Hudson. They're family members of the late Emma Reelis who is the subject of a Ministerial Statement today.

Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery is Danny Pottle, a dear friend and confidante of Elder Reelis, who has held several positions with the Nunatsiavut Assembly, including the position of Speaker. He is joined by Patricia Ford, another former Speaker of the Nunatsiavut Assembly.

Welcome to our Chamber and please accept my sincere condolences on your loss.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: As well, joining us in our public gallery today to honour Elder Reelis is Stacey Howse, president and CEO of First Light, along with other colleagues and friends.

Welcome everyone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: We also have in our public gallery today, Robert Fleming, Manager of Area Control Center Operations with NAV Canada's Gander Flight Information Region, which is the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome to our gallery, Robert.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Finally, I want to welcome a former colleague and friend and former MHA, minister, former Leader of the Official Opposition, David Brazil, to our public gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Burgeo - La Poile, Burin -Grand Bank, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair and Gander.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to recognize and congratulate a remarkable lady from my district, Mrs. Evelyn Hatcher, who celebrated her 105th birthday on August 16.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: Born in Belleoram, Fortune Bay, Evelyn moved to Rose Blanche in 1941, where she married Thomas Hatcher. Together, they shared 61 wonderful years of marriage until his passing in 2003. They raised three children: Marion, Thomas and Bill. Evelyn is now blessed with three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, Evelyn has spent her life making a difference in the lives of others. Through her many years in home care, she offered compassion and comfort to those in need. She also volunteered with the ACW and with the Anglican church in Rose Blanche and welcomed teachers into her home, helping them feel part of the community.

Reaching 105 years is an extraordinary milestone and Evelyn's life is a testament to family, kindness, service and the enduring strength of our rural communities.

On behalf of my district and this hon. House, I wish Evelyn a very happy 105th birthday, surrounded by the love of family and friends.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

As per our tradition, all centenarians get a standing ovation on their birthdays.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and recognize the Toe of the Boot 50+ Club as they celebrate their 20th anniversary.

An event highlighting their accomplishments was held on October 17, with various levels of government and organizations in attendance.

This club was formed to give the 50-plus individuals the opportunity to have a space where they can socialize and take part in activities organized for seniors. We all know that many of our seniors experience loneliness, and this group is ensuring that seniors play a significant role in their community. They also work with SeniorsNL to voice the concerns facing seniors in the province.

Over the past 20 years, this group has participated in many gatherings, monthly meetings, special occasion meals and fall harvests showcasing products grown in their own community garden spaces. They enjoy weekly events, travel to visit other clubs and several other activities. The group also engages youth in intergenerational activities, including baking, cake decorating, making crafts and, recently, teaching students in the art of making toutons.

The Lamaline Toe of the Boot 50+ Club certainly plays an important role in ensuring their seniors can live and thrive in their own community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize James Case, a talented author from Salmon Cove whose passion for storytelling is helping preserve the rich history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In October of 2020, James published his first novel, *Ananias*, a work of historical fiction rooted in the history of Carbonear, which he developed through extensive research. Earlier this year, James released his second novel, *Vicory*, which explores the Labrador fishery and the invention of the cod trap.

Drawing upon first-hand experience, James brings authenticity to his storytelling, capturing an important chapter of our province's history. His dedication to his writing had him shortlisted for the Guernica Prize for Canadian Literary Fiction for his novel, *Vicory*.

Beyond writing, Jim enjoyed a distinguished 40-year career in architecture, designing the

Fortis tower and serving as architect of record for the renowned Fogo Island Inn. He also serves as chair of the Salmon Cove Future Development Association, demonstrating his commitment to rural communities.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating James Case on his literary accomplishments and thanking him for his contributions to our province's heritage and communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, Captain Tony Powell was born in Charlottetown, Labrador, in 1955. His remarkable career began in the rich fishing grounds of Labrador at the age of 13, followed by guiding at his dad's fish camp. At just 20 years old, he became a commercial pilot, a job he was born to do.

After seven years with Labrador airways and three with the Labrador Grenfell Mission, Tony pursued his dream of establishing Labrador Travel Air, providing an essential service to our isolated region.

Tony carried out hundreds of mercy flights, helped people reach medical appointments and delivered goods. When the weather grounded other airlines, people would simply say: Call Tony.

Over his 50-year career, Tony accumulated more than 27,000 hours across 30 different aircraft.

At 48, he was diagnosed with stage-four cancer. For the next 23 years, he fought a courageous battle, always positive and determined to live life to the fullest. He continued with his bucket list, from participating in Cain's Quest to tenting beneath the wing of his Super Cub in the Nachvak Fjord and being crowned King of the Hill at Marble Mountain.

Whether flying the Labrador skies, sailing the Big Land's waters or racing his snowmobile across the frozen North, Tony lived life full throttle. A gifted aviator, a Labrador legend.

Ten days ago, Captain Powell filed his final flight plan and he was cleared for one last takeoff. Charlie, Foxtrot, Tango, Foxtrot, Papa, heading west into the sunset. You will forever fly alongside of us and your love will guide us.

Over and out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

October 20 recognized International Day of the Air Traffic Controller. Today, I rise to recognize the over 400 employees with NAV CANADA's Gander Flight Information Region, and the important contributions they make to our community and to international aviation.

Most every resident knows someone who works at NAV CANADA, and we appreciate the scale of the operation and the responsibility carried by these highly skilled employees. Their expertise and dedication help guide aircraft safely across the North Atlantic, supporting one of the world's busiest regions of airspace.

NAV CANADA is also a major contributor to our region, providing high-quality careers, training opportunities and significant economic benefits, in addition to their corporate generosity, donating $90,000 to local causes last year alone.

Beyond the workplace, employees contribute as volunteers, as community

leaders and improve the social fabric of the region.

NAV is attracting young families who settle in our growing towns. As a community with a proud aviation history, we are so fortunate to be home to this world-class operation and the remarkable people behind it.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in recognizing the employees of NAV CANADA in my District of Gander for their commitment, professionalism and service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs, and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Close enough, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today to join family, friends and Indigenous communities throughout our province in mourning the passing of Emma Reelis, a proud Inuk Elder, residential school survivor, community leader and advocate for Indigenous peoples.

A caring and kind woman who uplifted others through her wisdom, compassion and commitment to truth, Elder Emma, as she's known, will be remembered for her warmth, humour, honesty, generous spirit and a deep devotion to family and community. She was a true friend to many.

Elder Emma inspired people to embrace their identity, to share their stories and to take pride in who they were. Despite the hardships she endured as a residential school survivor, she transformed those experiences into a source of strength. Elder Emma spoke openly about healing, reconciliation and educating others. Her courage to speak out about heavy life experiences inspired and helped others to heal.

She never turned down an opportunity to bring prayers and to share her knowledge at gatherings. She considered it an honour to be invited to speak.

Elder Emma, the honour was all ours. Your quiet but powerful voice helped when we needed one. You have left a strong legacy.

On behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I extend sincere condolences to Emma's family, her friends, fellow Elders and all whose lives she touched. May they find comfort in her legacy and may her memory continue to guide us towards understanding, respect and true reconciliation.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement.

Speaker, it was such a sad day when I learned of Elder Emma's passing and I know countless others felt the same. I had the privilege of sharing space with Elder Emma on many occasions and I always came away wiser from the opportunity to learn from her about her culture, traditions and the importance of treating others with dignity and respect.

Elder Reelis didn't have an easy path but she chose not to let her circumstances make her a bitter person but allow it to make her a better person. She pushed forward to help create a smoother path for those of us who followed.

I'm so pleased that my daughter also had the opportunity to meet and learn from her. I'm grateful that she had the chance to experience first-hand the wisdom Elders like Emma have to share.

Speaker, my sincere condolences go to Emma's family and all of those who loved her. She was a fierce advocate and an extraordinary woman whose strength, wisdom and love touched countless lives. She was a true inspiration. She made a difference and she will be missed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: I thank the minister for the advanced copy of the statement.

On behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to extend my sincere condolences to her family, her friends and fellow Elders.

Elder Emma Reelis was a sacred gift to so many, especially the First Light community. I personally learned much from her and her strength, courage and character has spread a light of love and care throughout this province and beyond. Newfoundland and Labrador is all the better for her wisdom, leadership and her kind spirit. Her legacy lives on in those she loved and the lives forever changed by her presence.

Thank you.

Wela'lioq.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, I stand today to announce that we are launching stakeholder engagement on the Climate Change Action Plan through engageNL. The public can comment starting today until November 26, 2026.

This government is committed to supporting communities in adapting to climate change and recovering from its impacts.

We are also committed to working with stakeholders to create a new, more attainable Climate Change Action Plan with clear and achievable emissions reduction targets.

Our new action plan will prioritize disaster resilience, municipal preparedness and environmental awareness, and provide a pathway to reduce emissions that is realistic and actionable.

Stakeholder engagement will be the foundation of this plan. We are seeking input from residents, municipalities, working groups and Indigenous governments and organizations to hear their perspectives and their ideas.

I encourage all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to take this opportunity to have their say about how the government can help our province prepare and adapt to our changing climate.

Speaker, we understand that addressing climate change is crucial to the well-being and prosperity of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Climate change action is a priority for this government, and together we will build a more resilient and sustainable province for generations to come.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

We welcome the minister's announcement of stakeholder engagement on a new Climate Change Action Plan. Newfoundland and Labrador communities are already dealing with the impacts of a changing climate and meaningful action cannot wait. However, consultation must lead to concrete commitments, not simply another plan.

The minister speaks of obtainable emission reduction targets, disaster resilience and municipal preparedness, but Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need to know what those commitments will look like in practice. Will this government establish clear timelines, measurable targets and dedicated funding to help municipalities prepare for extreme weather and protect vulnerable communities?

Our province needs a climate action plan that is ambitious, transparent and backed by resources. The Official Opposition supports meaningful engagement, but we will be watching to ensure that the voices of rural communities, Indigenous governments and municipalities are heard, and that their concerns translate into real action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

While we, at the NDP caucus, support public engagement, once again, we're back to the drawing board on fighting climate change. Given that the department already had a plan, I have to wonder whether the minister's emphasis on achievable emissions and more attainable and realistic targets are mere window dressing to conceal a plan to cut current standards.

What is truly unrealistic is to pretend that we have no impact on climate change and that we can carry on, business as usual, while the costs and consequences mount all around us.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Just give me one second here to do the math.

J. WALL: Speaker, another minister's statement?

SPEAKER: Oh, I have to do the math all over again. I didn't realize we had three.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the remarkable career of Chief Justice Raymond P. Whalen. Chief Justice Whalen retired yesterday, following 18 years of distinguished service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador as a Supreme Court Justice, which includes nearly 12 years as Chief Justice.

Chief Justice Whalen was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2008 and throughout his career, he has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the rule of law, judicial independence and the administration of justice.

Before joining the bench, Chief Justice Whalen built an accomplished legal career in private practice and corporate leadership,

bringing a wealth of experience to the judiciary.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Chief Justice Whalen for the strong and constructive relationship we have developed during my time as the Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General.

Chief Justice Whalen has been an inspiration to so many in the legal community and he will be missed.

I invite all hon. Members to join me in extending sincere thanks to Chief Justice Whalen for his many years of service and wishing him and his family every happiness and good health in the years ahead.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I join the minister in recognizing Chief Justice Raymond P. Whalen on his retirement after 18 years of service to the people of this province.

As the MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, I am very proud to recognize that Chief Justice Whalen was born in Spaniard's Bay. It is always special to see people from our own communities rise to such esteemed positions and make significant contributions to our province.

Serving as chief justice carries tremendous responsibility. Our justice system depends on the independence of the courts, the fair application of the law and the confidence of the public in those entrusted with administering justice. Chief Justice Whalen has served in a position central to upholding these principles throughout his tenure.

On behalf of our caucus and the residents of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, I thank Chief Justice Whalen for his years of service and dedication to our province. I wish him and his family all the very, very best in his retirement.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

On behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to thank Chief Justice Whalen for his many years of devotion to public service and for his commitment to making the province a more just place. We wish him a peaceful retirement spent in the company of family and friends, and we hope that in one way or another he will find a way to continue to serve the community and the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier has just confirmed that he will not bring the final 50-year agreements on Churchill Falls back to the House until after they're signed and finalized.

This is an insult to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The debate last month was about a single non-binding framework. They are negotiating now, with a brand new

negotiator apparently, 17 new agreements that are binding for 50 years.

Does the Premier not understand Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should see these agreements before they are signed off on by the Premier for 50 years?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, what we have said we are going to do is to make sure that the binding agreements reflect what was voted on here in the House of Assembly, and that's exactly what we're going to do. We're going to bring them back to the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We're going to turn around and make sure the technical briefings are done and make sure that there's a special debate around it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The Premier needs better legal advice, because once they are finalized and signed, there is absolutely no reason to come back here because they won't be able to be changed.

During the election, the Premier promised he would not sign any Churchill Falls without a referendum. He broke that promise. He said he would bring the final agreements back to the House and now he is refusing to do that until it is too late and they are signed and our future has been sold to Quebec.

How can the public possibly trust anything this Premier says when they can't trust the process and they can't trust him on the biggest decision in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: (Inaudible) to bringing the final agreements back. I made sure that what we have negotiated, what we have voted on in this House of Assembly, that agreement will be held up by those definitive agreements. They will make sure those definitive agreements outline exactly what has been voted on in the House of Assembly.

But let me remind the Member opposite, almost a year ago he stood out there and asked the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to vote for less. He asked them to vote for less power, less transmission, less value and less jobs –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – and in the House of Assembly he voted yes to less and no to more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: What I told Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is I wanted a mandate to negotiate a deal that I could bring to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This Premier promised a referendum and didn't

do it and now he's trying to shove a deal down the throats without them seeing it.

Again, we've heard so many flip-flops from the PCs about all kinds of things, including Churchill Falls, but now there's another one. The Deputy Premier said, this week, that they don't announce when someone leaves a negotiating team but, today, they announced that Barry Perry is leaving the negotiating team. That's the one thing they can announce but they want to hide why Mr. Coffey left.

So can the Premier explain why this is different today and, again, why we get the different story from the Deputy Premier and a different story from the Premier?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, for clarification for everyone, Mr. Perry has not left the team.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: No, he will be leaving the team. So they actually saw fit to announce in advance that he will be leaving the team but, of course, they don't tell us that Bern Coffey has left the team.

The Premier confirmed today that the same three oversight panellists, who he hand-picked, will remain as well.

For such a consequential 50-year deal, why won't the Premier agree to an oversight panel selected by parties of this House instead, again, of hand-picking them from his own office?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, what we have agreed to is exactly what I said before the previous House closed. The three members of the Oversight Committee agreed to stay on and we are now getting recommendations from the chair of the Public Utilities Board, which was asked for, to bring forward recommendations for others to join that Oversight Committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, while the Premier and his ministers continue to tell the House that there's nothing to see here with regard to Mr. Coffey, we know they're saying that because, in fact, there's lots to see here and the more questions we ask, the more questions we continue to get, partly because the Premier and his ministers have different versions of the same events.

So I will ask the Premier for clarification: Was Mr. Coffey's work concluded pursuant to the mandate, or did Mr. Coffey terminate his contract?

I look forward to the answer from the Premier.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, here we go again, day three of trying to create a narrative. They're all over the place.

Mr. Coffey was asked to come in as an advisor to the negotiating committee to review the IRC report, to formalize a negotiating strategy. He done his work and he done a great job. When he was pretty much finalized, he decided he wanted to move on. He issued a letter.

You can play semantics with the words in the letter or email. He moved on. We wish

him well. We thank him for his service. Now we're moving to the next stage, the definitive agreements.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: We thank Mr. Coffey for his work and we look forward to seeing definitive agreements coming back to the House of Assembly at the end of this year, early in the new year, for final sign-off and implementation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The next person who speaks when it's not their time to speak is going to lose their speaking privileges for the day, I guarantee it.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I appreciate the Premier has clarified to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that the agreements will come back after they're signed. The Deputy Premier says they will come back to the House for sign-off. The reason there's a narrative being created is because the Premier and the Deputy Premier can't get on the same page with anything.

Speaker, I ask the Premier, why is he saying work was concluded – the Deputy Premier just said it was mostly concluded – even when the Clerk stated in her email reply to Mr. Coffey that she acknowledged – and I quote – notice of termination. If something is terminated, it is not completed.

Can the Deputy Premier try and clarify that?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I said the definitive agreements will come back to the House. The sign-off will happen and they'll come back to the House as we've committed. There's no playing with words. Every word we say, the Leader of the Opposition tries to jump on it.

But Mr. Coffey concluded his work with government. He moved on. We were his client. He's moved on to other clients. We've moved on as well and we wish him well. End of story, nothing more to say about it.

It's a narrative they're trying to generate. They're going on day three. I said yesterday this could go on for weeks. We've got four or five weeks. So we're looking forward to it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: It amazes me the Deputy Premier says they're just relying on the words that we say in the House of Assembly. Yeah, you're darn right we are. There are questions and we expect the answers and the words to matter. Maybe you need to get better legal advice than the fact that words do matter, Deputy Premier.

SPEAKER: Please address the Chair.

J. HOGAN: More clarification is needed.

Speaker, I ask the Premier: How did he know that Mr. Coffey's work was concluded given that he never spoke with Mr. Coffey? Who was the conduit that received the information that Mr. Coffey's work was, as he says, completed, and told the Premier?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, again, play on words. Mr. Coffey concluded his work, that was his choice to conclude, not mine. He concluded his work.

Let me tell you for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are watching this, here we are in day three and we're focused on Mr. Coffey, when we ought to be focused on better health care, lower taxes and safer communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: That's what we should be expecting questions about. I'm sure the Members opposite have real questions about those topics and we'd love to hear them and be able to address them, not simply stand here because the Leader of the Opposition voted yes to less and no to more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Again, we're getting different answers. So now Mr. Coffey determined that his work was concluded but the Premier said that it wasn't his decision the work that was concluded.

Was the Premier satisfied that the work was concluded or not, or did Mr. Coffey walk away and terminate his contract?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, the email was clear. Mr. Coffey has moved on, we've moved on. We congratulate him, we thank him for all the work he's done and we look forward to continuing to deliver for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, because that's what we're talking about here, Speaker.

We're talking about a new and better deal for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're talking about a deal that delivers more power, more transmission, more value, more jobs and that's exactly what we're going to continue to talk about and deliver for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: He said something that I actually agree with, the email was clear. The problem is the Premier is not clear, the Energy Minister is not clear and the Deputy Premier is not clear.

The Deputy Premier said that when Mr. Coffey left – and I quote – everyone was aware of it.

Can the Premier answer: Who is everyone? Because it wasn't the public, it wasn't the media, it wasn't Members in the House of Assembly who tried to debate it with all the information at their fingertips that now we know we didn't have.

If everyone is just the PC Cabinet, why did the Premier hide it from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I can be very clear on the fact that I know where I won't be getting my legal advice from, from the Member across the way.

Mr. Speaker, he sits in here and he talks about the integrity of people because Mr. Coffey left. While he was the premier, Michael Wilson left. When Michael Wilson left, he kept it completely silent. As a matter of fact, he brought back to Cabinet and appointed another Member and kept that silent. Until Michael Wilson's resignation letters got slipped out into the public, did he say one word about it?

He pretended he knew nothing about it and now he's going out on this line. It's absolutely ridiculous that he expects people to hold a different standard than he held as premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, yesterday, the Deputy Premier acknowledged he'd either spoken with or received information directly from Mr. Coffey about why Mr. Coffey left his role.

My question is: Did the Deputy Premier have this direct conversation with Mr. Coffey?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: No.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: If he didn't talk to Mr. Coffey, who did he get the information from that Mr. Coffey, in his words, had bigger and other files to deal with?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you.

Speaker, let's talk about what's important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Let's talk about what exactly we've done in the first year of government: secure the historic new Churchill Falls deal; advance Bay du Nord; secured an $8-billion commitment for 5 Wing Goose Bay; put money back in people's pockets; delivered record investments of $5.4 million in health care; tackled the housing challenge head-on; expanded access to child care; addressed the labour shortage by attracting skilled workers; made communities safer; restored 24-hour snow clearing; helped families lower their energy costs; modernized government services; drove economic diversification; delivered stronger supports for seniors, persons with disabilities, caregivers and vulnerable populations; and we're just getting started.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Premier tried to get up so I'll give him an opportunity.

If the Deputy Premier didn't talk directly to Mr. Coffey, who did he get the information from that, according to him, Mr. Coffey had bigger and other files to deal with?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, as the former premier of this province should know, there are more people in this government than the Deputy Premier; there are thousands of people in this government. Bern Coffey can talk to whoever he wants to. He's had lots of conversations, regardless of if they were

with me or with anyone else. We know he's talking; everyone is speaking to him. It's not a big issue. It's solicitor-client privilege. We were his client, he's moved on, like any other client he deals with, and he's moved on.

The former premier should know better than what he's at here. He's going down rabbit holes. He should be worried about the province and what we're talking about, safer communities, better health care, lower taxes, more jobs and affordability measures that they will not talk about because they can't defend.

They didn't do it; we did and we're proud of it. The people of the province are lucky we're here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I'm more worried about the province than any day that I've been around here, I can tell you that right now.

Just like health care, education issues across Newfoundland and Labrador are getting worse under this PC government. The NLTA says classroom complexity is increasing, while teachers are losing adequate supports and that the government's response to the crisis in Happy Valley-Goose Bay is a band-aid solution.

Why is the minister relying on temporary fixes instead of addressing the underlying problem?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

As everyone knows, I was up in Labrador this past week speaking with all schools up there in Lab West and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I said it the other day in speaking to the teachers at Peacock elementary, in particular, their statement – and I quote – over the last decade, we've been neglected and disrespected.

I wasn't there in the last decade, but I also said I'm going to try and fix that for them. They messed it up in 10 years; I can't fix it up in 11 months.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The minister is missing the point that they're asking him how he's going to fix it.

The NLTA says inadequate staffing, increasing classroom complexity and student safety concerns are taking a toll on educators and students.

The minister has been in charge for over a year. Why are teachers waiting for meaningful action?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: So the Member opposite mentioned safety. What we're doing now: 100 ADEs in the schools have been replaced; we've increased the naloxone kits in the schools; we've put additional funding in for Commit to Kids; we're updating the Safe and Caring Schools Policy; we're continuing to work with the School Safety Coalition; and we're creating a school safety division – it's never been done in the province before – that will focus on safety in our schools.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, these challenges extend beyond Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Lab West, coastal Labrador and rural Newfoundland according to the NLTA.

Does the minister have a plan to address the systemic problems across the province, or will the minister continue to react with band-aid solutions one school and one problem at a time?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We're working on a daily basis with the stakeholders here. We meet on a regular basis with the NLTA. In fact, we met with them on the 7th of this month, less than a week after the incident in Peacock elementary. We're continuing to work with them.

Our last meeting was talking about coming up with real solutions, working together on those solutions. They can't be solved by one department or one stakeholder. We know that the community plays into what happens in the schools.

This is a bigger picture than the previous government thought, but we're going to work to fix it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

You're going to work to fix it. The minister needs to provide Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and parents and students and teachers and everyone who works in the school system and the education system with his plan, rather than saying he's going to continue to work on it. They don't want solutions in the future; they want a plan now.

I think the minister said earlier this week he has a plan. Simply put, will the minister table this grand plan for the House of Assembly to see?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

When you're dealing with the schools and there are complex needs out there in the community in the schools, yes, you do need a plan. One of the first things I've done when I came to the department, when I was assigned, I looked at the previous plan. There was no plan – there was no plan. So we have to start from ground one to work on this.

I've been there. I've been delayed getting in my position, so I'm not quite here as long as the rest of you, but I'm going to continue to work on creating a plan that's going to work for long-term measures in our schools.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I remember June of 2025 when our former government put $44 million and 400 additional educational resources into the system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: The NLTA said now that education is at the bottom of the government's priority list. That is a shocking and disturbing statement. The education of our children, the future of our province, is the last on this government's mind.

So I ask the minister: Why is this the case and why isn't your department relevant at the Cabinet table?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd ask the Member to table the document where it's the last on the list. I'd like to see what he is talking about there. Because, I can tell you, it is not last on the list. It's a top priority for this government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: When you talk about safe and caring communities, schools are primary to that. That's why we are making these efforts making safer schools. We're going to continue to do that. We are going to continue to work in creating a safe and caring environment for our students, as well as our teachers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, the overcapacity issues –

SPEAKER: Corner Brook, sorry.

I was at the right church, wrong pew.

J. PARSONS: That's right.

Speaker, the overcapacity issues at Western Memorial Regional Hospital have grown over the past year, sometimes reaching over 125 per cent.

This is due to lack of beds, lack of home supports, lack of long-term care beds and lack of hospitalists, that's the physicians who are responsible for admitted patients. There are stretchers in many curious places and there is a large makeshift ward that people are describing as something you'd see on *M*A*S*H*, surgeries are being cancelled.

Can the Minister of Health please tell me what the department is doing to alleviate these concerns?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It wasn't too long back, just a few weeks ago, that we were in Corner Brook announcing 45 long-term care beds. We announced the expansion of Humberwood that's going to provide extra beds for mental health and addictions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: I'm very proud to do that, Mr. Speaker.

We were in consultation with doctors and nurses on the front lines and speaking with pharmacists who are moving into the area.

Mr. Speaker, this government is doing a lot for health care. We realize there are many challenges. We realize that, but I can certainly tell you we are doing what we can, working with whom we can, to have better health care for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, I thank the minister for that.

The 45 beds are certainly welcome but, remember, of course, 45 new beds were opened just a year ago and, yet, this overcapacity problem has only increased. These new beds won't be ready for some time and long-term care beds are certainly part of the puzzle but, evidently, not the only part.

What measures are being taken to address the other contributing factors to this overcapacity problem that's taxing human resources, delaying care and contributing to the negative outcomes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question; it is an important one.

We have to realize the work that's involved in order to make change, and it does take time. We are working with all the stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, those who are on the front lines, the unions who are involved and of course, the physicians, the nurses, all those in health care. It does take time. We are working on various solutions, especially for Corner Brook.

Mr. Speaker, it takes time. I ask the Member opposite just to bear with us. No doubt, we are on the same page of what we want within our hospitals, especially in Corner Brook. We have made improvements, we are having those conversations and we will make an impact on health care, especially in the Corner Brook area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, six months ago NL Housing CEO Mike Tizzard said that a trap house report hotline was being established.

Can the Minister of Housing please confirm whether this hotline is currently operational and, if not, when will it be and why is it taking so long?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As promised, that hotline will be up and running. We're still going through some agreements there, but like I say, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, I just want to thank the staff there. They do some great work.

We have a lot of vulnerable people in this province, Mr. Speaker, but like I always say, we can only be judged as a society by how we treat our most vulnerable. We're going to make sure that hotline is in place and any other supports that the people of this province need.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, this is a health and safety issue. Tenants have a right to know that their homes are safe, they're clean and

free from hazardous drug residue and other potentially harmful substances.

What protocols does NL Housing have in place to ensure properties are professionally inspected and decontaminated before tenants move in?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Underneath this government, this Premier has committed to restoring and repairing more Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units than we've ever seen before. We've already repaired 266 homes over the past six months.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: That's a record number, Mr. Speaker, and we're on track for about 350 for the year. We're going to keep continuing to repair homes and get people –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. TIBBS: – into homes as they need them, Mr. Speaker. We know the vulnerabilities that are out there and we're going to ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff and units are there to help those that are most vulnerable.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Speaker, Route 480, or commonly known as the Burgeo Highway, has been a serious concern for residents and visitors for months, with a slow pace and unacceptable response to addressing the concerns.

On October 6, I wrote the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to request a meeting on behalf of the working committee established to address the issues, including four communities along the Southwest Coast, even in Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. We've received no response to date.

So I ask the minister: Will he commit today to meeting with this working committee so we can come up with a proper solution to finally address the ongoing concerns with Route 480?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The hon. Member opposite should know I've responded to many letters to residents in his community on this road. We've been very open. My ADM and officials have talked to them. I met with the Member opposite. I gave him a one-on-one meeting with all our officials and we talked about it.

Bottom line is he wants that road paved, they all want that road paved, and I get it. I really do get it. As part of the roads program, we do assessments every year. The roads program will be coming out again in the new year. We haven't even got together. The officials are gathering that information. We'll get to that then.

If he wants to meet with me and our officials, we'll arrange something in the time being. He only sent the letter, he said two or three weeks ago. I haven't seen that yet, but it will make its way up and when we get time, we'll do it. I have no problem meeting, but this all takes time.

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, during the election, the PCs promised 10,000 affordable new homes over five years, roughly 2,000 homes per year. They're now over a year into their mandate.

I ask the Premier: How many of these new homes has government built, not housing initiatives started by the previous administration, but new ones they have started and completed themselves?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we have committed to it. It's a lofty commitment, but we need to start somewhere, Mr. Speaker. We recognize the housing crisis that's here in the province, right across the province, including Labrador, and this government is committed to making that commitment of building 10,000 new homes. We're hoping to get there.

It's a floating number. We have homes going up right across this province. We just had some down in Pleasantville. There are some going up in Grand Falls-Windsor. We're going to have some going up in Corner Brook. We want to make sure that people have homes to call their home, to raise their families in, start traditions and to make memories.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: It's a problem that needs to be solved.

The lack of affordable housing and homelessness affect all districts and crosses all party lines, so I ask the Minister of Housing, will he immediately strike an all-party committee, including independent MHAs, to develop and implement solutions to the housing and homelessness crisis facing Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government listens to everybody who speaks, including the Members from across the way. If any suggestions or anybody wants to have a meeting with myself or anybody from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, we're more than happy to meet with them, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. TIBBS: But I will say this, we hope to get some more respect from the NDP, from the party across the way, than they've shown Newfoundland and Labrador Housing people in the past.

We've had some disrespect shown to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, the people that do the work on the ground. I'm fed up with it, Mr. Speaker. If they want to truly work with this party, they're going to show the people that work for me the respect that they deserve.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: I think the minister should be careful of his words, because he knows bloody well what the issue is here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: It's not in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing; it has to do with this government itself.

So we just gave the minister a solution, which is an all-party committee. That's how you can hear from us.

Speaker, a person in receipt of a Canada Housing Benefit has three months to find a place to live or he or she loses the benefit and has to wait a year to reapply; when he or she does, that person is placed at the bottom of the wait-list.

How does this help a person seeking a home when there is no affordable housing to be found?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this government, under this Premier, has put a record amount of investment into housing and getting people into housing sooner than later.

As to do with an all-party committee, again, anybody can come and have a chat with me any time they wish. We know what the party did across the way with $38 million in Horizons at 106. We are going to do that at a quarter of the price and ensure those people have the supports that they need moving ahead, Mr. Speaker.

Again, if the NDP would like to talk to my staff – and I won't be careful of my words, I'll say to the Leader of the NDP. If the media would like to ask the NDP how they mistreated my staff, they're more than welcome to do so.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a sad day in Lake Melville. We've seen the protests. We've seen the resignation of a principal. We've seen school closures. We've seen a lack of busing.

With all that, Mr. Speaker, given the teacher and housing shortage in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, I ask the Minister of Education: Will the provincial government explore using existing and vacant NL Health Services housing for travel nurses to accommodate teachers recruited to fill critical vacancies?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: I thank the Member for his question. There's no doubt that in Labrador, especially in recent months, housing has become a real critical issue. Going forward, I've said it to the media, actually, this morning I spoke to the media and said the same thing, I said we're going to explore any options out there. There are some units there. I'm not sure where they are in terms of availability, in terms of renovations that may be needed there. That's one area to look at.

We need to increase more housing there. I had mentioned last week about potential for 5 Wing, but 5 Wing is not ours and that

would have to go through IGA to look at that.

But the fact of the matter is, we have developments coming, we have projects coming in Labrador. There's going to be a huge demand for housing and we're going to start to look at it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for his response.

I heard the Premier say earlier that we're delivering on safer communities. I'll tell you what, come to Happy Valley-Goose Bay and you'll see a different picture. We've had a pretty rough year and the last six months have been the worst it's ever been. I'll say the violence in those unsafe situations are now creeping into our schools, which is why, Mr. Speaker, we have a huge school and community safety protest and rally occurring there in the community at 4:30 today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll say with critical shortages of teacher, student assistants and support staff, we've heard the Minister of Education say today that we're a year in and now they're going to start a long-term plan and to talk about staffing and consider all options.

SPEAKER: I will ask the Member to get your question, please.

K. RUSSELL: I'm asking the Minister of Education: Will he include and consider all options such as partial school closures, reduced school days or classroom closures to ensure schools operate safely and provide the best possible learning environment for students?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: I thank the Member again for a good question.

Safety is paramount in our schools, no doubt. I've been up there. The NLTA president was up there two weeks before. We've had discussions; we're going to continue to have those discussions. I've already reached out to the NLTA president to have further discussions on specifically what we heard when we were in Goose Bay, and I was in Lab West.

So, really, when it comes to safety and issues of the school and keeping our children safe, keeping our teachers safe, all options are on the table for consideration. We have to look at all options and we're going to.

That's why, as I listened earlier to a question, we're going to have a school safety division established that will focus solely on school safety.

Hopefully – not hopefully, the whole goal of that is to create a safer environment.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: I rise on a point of order.

SPEAKER: A point of order?

J. DINN: Yes.

Standing Order 49, "No Member shall speak disrespectfully of Her Majesty, nor of any of

the Royal Family … nor use offensive words against any Member of this House."

The Minister of Housing just made some rather serious accusations against us and blanketed us with regard to our disrespect for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I will challenge him on that. I will say that it's an insult that somehow we have cast aspersions. That's not the case, Speaker.

I will tell you this, any of the workers in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, we have had a good working relationship. What we have had a problem with is from the minister's office in this case and the management of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

I will tell you this example. When the people were being evicted from Brazil Street, I sent an email, not once, but twice, to the minister which I got one of our valued – that was it. We were looking for, at this stage, housing for the few people who couldn't find a place in which to live.

What I got back from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing was here's the phone number to call the emergency housing line. That's not what we're looking for.

My constituency assistant and I spent more time that day looking for housing than the management of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

For the minister to get up here and throw this out, when it wasn't even part of the question, is an insult.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I kind of find it funny that the party that talks about supporting workers and a safe work environment and harassment-free work environment will insinuate that my staff are entitled, because that's what they called my staff: entitled.

Those people on the ground do great work and I will stand up for my staff and the people who work for government because they do deserve a harassment-free workplace, Mr. Speaker. To insinuate that my staff are entitled is wrong, and I will not put up with it, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: I'd like to speak on this point of order as well, because I do know that the minister is pointing fingers and saying untruths. It is something that is really truly unacceptable.

The NDP have been working diligently with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff. There have been threats made. This is a larger issue. Of course, I don't know how we're going to unearth this conversation but I certainly hope that we can because what is being accused right now, by the minister, is false.

The NDP have been trying to support constituents who are in desperate need of housing, vulnerable people, and not getting answers, not being communicated with appropriately. When we try to get information, we're barred from meetings that the constituents actually want their representative to be at.

There is a larger picture here –

SPEAKER: I would say to the hon. Member, we're speaking to the point of order, not the issue of dealing with government. It's a point of order about what words were said.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, we are debating a point of order about respect and untruth.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I just stand on a point of order. In the previous ramble that we just heard there, the Member –

AN HON. MEMBER: Ramble?

L. PARROTT: Ramble is what I said, yes.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi accused the Member across the way of speaking untruths. It's unparliamentary language. It's no different than calling someone a liar or saying that they lied. An untruth is the same and it's been ruled on in this House before.

SPEAKER: On the first point of order, we're hearing about inferences made as opposed to specific words said. I never really heard every word that was said. On that matter, I feel like we're talking about inferences and it's probably not a point of order; but, with that said, I will go back and review everything that was said and I will come back on a ruling on that.

On the point of order around untruths, you are not allowed to refer to someone as being untruthful or telling lies and so on. I would ask the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi to withdraw that remark, please.

AN HON. MEMBER: And make a complaint to the Commissioner.

SPEAKER: Specifically saying that the minister said untruths.

S. O'LEARY: There was an insinuation of something that was not true. If I have to retract that, there has to be a process, through the Commissioner or otherwise, in order to address this. I'm looking for an opportunity to clear my name through this process.

So, Speaker, I look for your –

SPEAKER: No, you cannot challenge the Chair.

You cannot refer to a Member and suggest that they are telling lies, being untruthful and so on. That has already been ruled on numerous times in this House of Assembly. So I'm just asking you to retract the statement, that you specifically said that the minister just spoke untruths. That's what I heard you say.

S. O'LEARY: I will not retract the statement.

SPEAKER: I'm going to ask you, again, to withdraw that statement.

S. O'LEARY: I will not retract that statement.

Thank you, Speaker, with respect.

SPEAKER: I'm going to ask you for a third and final time to withdraw that statement.

S. O'LEARY: I will not retract that statement.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Well, unfortunately, I have no choice but to name you, Sheilagh O'Leary, and ask you to leave the Chamber.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Given the hour of the day, I will now call upon the Leader of the Official Opposition to read in his private Member's motion.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville:

WHEREAS the Churchill Falls Definitive Cooperation and Implementation Agreement, the DCIA, is intended to form the basis for significant and long-term final agreements that will have lasting implications for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador now and for generations to come; and

WHEREAS the final agreements would commit Newfoundland and Labrador to a 50-year deal, making it essential that the terms, risks and long-term benefits be fully understood by the public before any such final agreement is finalized and signed; and

WHEREAS the PC government broke its promise to hold a referendum before any such final agreement is finalized and signed; and

WHEREAS decisions of any government require transparency, meaningful legislative scrutiny and an opportunity for elected representatives to examine the terms of the final agreement before Newfoundland and Labrador is bound by its provisions; and

WHEREAS an extraordinary sitting of the House of Assembly was held regarding the DCIA, but the final agreements were not yet negotiated and therefore not subject to questions or debate; and

WHEREAS significant negotiations remain before the final and binding agreements are finalized and signed; and

WHEREAS the Premier has failed to specify that the final agreements will be debated in the House of Assembly before they are finalized and signed;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly calls on the PC government to bring any proposed final agreements related to the DCIA or the Churchill River to the House of Assembly for debate and a vote before they are signed and/or binding.

Speaker, this is already a little bit out of date, even though we read this into the House on Monday and now it is Wednesday. It says: "… **WHEREAS** the Premier has failed to specify that the final agreements will be debated in the House of Assembly before they are finalized and signed." Of course, I asked the Premier to commit to bringing them to the House of Assembly before they were signed, during the course of the debate last month and he didn't commit to that. But, today, what he did was he committing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to this 50-year deal and making sure, he said to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that these agreements will not come back to the House of Assembly before they are signed.

So even though we know how the government is going to vote on this PMR, I do think and I do welcome this opportunity this afternoon to still have a debate and, from our perspective, to tell and explain our side of the story and make sure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians understand what this Premier and what this government has decided to do with regard to the Churchill River.

We always talk about a government being open and transparent and not only do we not have an open and transparent government, we have a government that is willing to lock Newfoundlanders and Labradorians into a 50-year deal on the Churchill River, our most important and valued resource without Newfoundlanders and Labradorians even knowing what the Premier is willing to sign.

That is unbelievable, that is undemocratic and that is a real, real issue that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I think, are going to hear about today and continue to have concern about.

We know that today's vote, while I said we probably know how the vote is going to go, about whether the government would bring these final agreements back to the House, it's important for scrutiny and debate for everyone. We know the Churchill River represents one, if not the greatest economic opportunity for our province. We all understand the significance and we all, I thought, understood the importance to get it right.

This is precisely why the public deserves to know what this province and what this Premier is agreeing to, what the potential risks are that we're taking on as a province and potentially what we have given up in negotiations.

The Premier's DCIA, which was a non-binding agreement, only established a framework for a series of final agreements that will govern these projects for decades to come. We know the DCIA came before this House for what the Finance Minister called an information session. We asked questions and we scrutinized the agreement. We raised concerns about how this government gave Quebec all the upsides, our province lost market-based pricing and they also incorrectly claimed that they could sell power to external markets when the agreement clearly says it can sell power to Quebec.

There is an important distinction here that people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve to understand, because the DCIA is not the same as final agreement. In fact, there's a huge leap from one to the other; from a non-binding framework agreement to 17 detailed contracts that are binding for our province for 50 years.

Now when we debated the DCIA, none of these final agreements had been negotiated. Significant details remain to be determined. How can the government say that this House has done its job when the very documents that will ultimately bind our province have not been negotiated, presented, debated or voted on? How can the Premier say that we have, as a House, approved an agreement which doesn't even exist yet?

The answer is quite simple. It cannot. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve the opportunity to understand what's being signed, not just the framework that precedes it. Members of this House deserve the opportunity to ask questions about the final terms to help the government identify potential problems and to vote before these terms become binding.

Mr. Speaker, this is also a matter of trust, not just legal documents. The PC government promised a referendum before the final agreements were signed. That government broke that promise. The government can simply make a promise about public engagement when it's politically convenient and abandon it for their own self-serving purposes. When the government takes away the referendum, it has an even greater responsibility to ensure there's meaningful scrutiny through the democratic institutions we do have, like the House of Assembly.

The trust concerns do not end there. The Premier did his review that he promised, which was supposed to be independent, which was a key argument in the 2025 debate but, of course, there was a flip-flop on that. The Premier hired three people directly from his office, no public notice, about how to apply or to get involved and there was zero independence.

Further, one of the panellists had already expressed his opinion on the MOU. That is not independence when a decision has already been made. That, Speaker, was like going to court and a judge says you're guilty before hearing the evidence.

The Premier's review then came out and the Premier said the panellists will speak to the public. Almost immediately there was another flip-flop when he said they would

not be available to the public. We find out afterwards that not only will they not speak, the public will not be told where the information came from to form the basis of the report. Even more worrisome, the Premier admitted he doesn't know where the information came from or who provided it.

So we find out the Premier is making decisions based on unconfirmed, unvetted information. We find out in May that Jerome Kennedy and Bern Coffey were retained back in January. The Premier decided he doesn't need to tell the public who was involved, except for one person today apparently, with the biggest deal in our history. It's probably worth knowing who is negotiating and who is providing advice on the Churchill Falls deal.

In August, the Premier announces his deal after just a couple of months of negotiations – another flip-flop. While in Opposition, the goal was to slow down and not rush, but in government, let's rush it and get it done, because we all know the Quebec election was in the view.

During the debate in the House, the Premier withheld documents and information from us. Specifically, he withheld the pricing on Gull Island. This is information we asked for two briefings before the debate started and yet we didn't get it until near the end of the debate.

During the debate, we heard different stories about why the Premier gave up market-based pricing. First, the Review Committee said it was too complicated so don't do it; second, the lead negotiator, who is now leaving the team, said it was initially on the table at first but it became clear they couldn't figure it out, so they dropped it and possibly not get anything in return; and third, the head of the Oversight Committee said it was dropped later in the negotiations – three different stories.

We now know, of course, that Bern Coffey, in his words, terminated his contract the day before the debate. This was not disclosed. Even more troubling, we get different stories from different government Members about why this happened. The Premier and the Deputy Premier say Mr. Coffey's work was completed and Mr. Coffey says his contract was terminated.

The Premier said he never spoke to him, which is odd in and of itself. Yet, the Deputy Premier said he received information from Mr. Coffey about why he terminated his contract. The Deputy Premier said Mr. Coffey had finished most of his work; the Premier said Mr. Coffey had completed his work. The Energy Minister said there's a non-disclosure agreement; the Deputy Premier said there's no non-disclosure agreement.

That brings us back to the referendum. The whole point –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: Pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: You know you strike a nerve when you say something that's true and it bothers them, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: That brings us back to the referendum. The whole point was to give Newfoundlanders and Labradorians a final say. It was a promise that people relied on when they voted, and they relied on it in relation to having comfort on a Churchill Falls deal. That was taken away.

Now, we have a situation where trust has been broken over the last year on so many occasions and where this deal, we now know, will be finalized without any public

knowledge, any scrutiny and any insight into what this province is getting in that deal. That isn't right. That is why this deal needs to come back to the House of Assembly before it is finalized behind closed doors –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: – with no input and no insight from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, only with a hand-picked group of individuals that we now know have the future of Newfoundland and Labrador in their hands behind closed doors for 50 years.

So, Speaker, for once, I ask the Premier to do what is right and change his mind and admit that it is better to debate the final agreements in this House of Assembly for his government, for everyone in the House of Assembly, for everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador today and for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the private Member's resolution that is before the House.

Speaker, there are a few issues more important to the future of Newfoundland and Labrador than the Churchill Falls, Gull Island and the future development of the Churchill River. These are discussions that will shape our province for generations to come. That is why debate should be rooted in facts and the facts are clear. Our government secured a new and better deal for Newfoundland and Labrador; a deal that delivers more value; a deal that delivers more power; a deal that delivers more opportunity for all of us. This is a new and better deal that finally ensures that the benefits of our resources are felt here at home.

Speaker, what I find most interesting about today's debate is not what our government has said about this deal, it's what Members opposite have said about the original MOU themselves.

Last fall, the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island described the original Churchill Falls MOU as transformational. Transformational, those were not our words, those were his. Yet, when our government came back with a new and better deal, one that delivers more value, more power, more opportunity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, he voted no.

Speaker, if the original MOU was transformational, what does that make this one because this new deal and a better deal delivers more? It delivers more power, more value, more opportunity, more jobs, more benefits to the people of this province. The Leader of the Opposition told Newfoundlanders and Labradorians last fall on social media, it's only fair that Newfoundland and Labradorians pay less for their electricity.

Speaker, we agree. Our government agrees. That is exactly why one of the benefits of our new and better deal is the Churchill Falls electricity rebate. For the first time ever, we have ensured that the benefits of our energy resources will be reflected directly on residential electricity bills throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, not years from now, not decades from now, much sooner. In fact, we've accelerated it. Yet, when given the opportunity to support it during the special debate, the Leader of the Opposition voted against it.

So I have to ask, what has changed?

Speaker, it wasn't just the Leader of the Opposition or the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island who voted against it. The Member for Gander posted on social media during her campaign: Who wants to save money on their electricity and gas bills? The people of the Gander District sure do.

Well, Speaker, our government has acted on delivering lower taxes for all of us. We acted through accelerating the Churchill Falls electricity rebate, and just this week we announced that the provincial gas tax will be reduced to zero beginning December 1 – zero cents per litre –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: – for the first time since Confederation.

These are real affordability measures. These are measures that put money back into people's pockets. These are measures that help families make ends meet. Yet, the Member for Gander could not bring herself to support our new and better deal that helps make this future possible.

Speaker, at the special sitting we held in the House for four days in September, we debated and voted on our new and better deal on Churchill Falls and Gull Island that secured 760 additional megawatts of power compared to the original MOU. The Liberals voted no. We debated a new and better deal that would deliver $273 billion in cash to Newfoundland and Labrador. That's almost $1 billion a year more than they had delivered over the life of the contract. The Liberals voted no to that, too.

The old Liberal MOU guaranteed no new transmission. We debated a new and better deal that provides Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with a full portfolio of 985 megawatts of guaranteed transmission options that Quebec cannot touch. I bet you all can guess how the Liberals voted. They voted no.

We debated a new and better deal that requires Quebec to pay 150 per cent premium price for Churchill Falls power. The Liberals voted no. The Liberals voted no to an optionality clause that leaves Newfoundland and Labrador in the driver seat. They voted no to a deal that ensures Quebec assumes all of the risk associated with construction of Gull Island, with not a single Newfoundland and Labrador taxpayer or ratepayer dollar at stake. They voted no to a guarantee that 85 per cent of all the jobs will stay right here in Newfoundland and Labrador and they voted no to guaranteed escalation and inflation protection.

Speaker, the list goes on. They voted no to more power. They voted no to more revenue. They voted no to more transmission. They voted no to more jobs. They voted no to greater certainty and they voted no to a stronger future for Newfoundland and Labrador and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Now, Speaker, they propose a private Member's resolution that is fundamentally flawed. They propose that this hon. House debate and vote on something we already did in September. They're confused, Speaker. They think that our Definitive Cooperation and Implementation Agreement is the same as their old MOU, which left significant material items to be negotiated.

The old Liberal MOU was an articulation of principles with much left to be negotiated; a fact confirmed by expert testimony during our debate last month. That is not the case for our agreement. The material terms of our agreement are fully negotiated. We debated and voted on those terms already. In fact, our agreement specifically includes a section that ensures the definitive agreements do not stray from those material terms.

Accordingly, Speaker, we cannot support a PMR that is flawed.

So, Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that the private Member's resolution be amended as follows:

(1) In the first paragraph, by deleting the words "intended to form" and deleting the words "significant and long-term final," and substituting the words "the definitive;" and

(2) By adding immediately after the first paragraph, the following: WHEREAS section 2.2 of the DCIA states, "The Material Terms will serve as the basis for the drafting of the Definitive Agreements and the Parties acknowledge and agree that they will not modify the Material Terms substantively (or otherwise in a manner inconsistent with the substantive intent expressed in such Material Terms) in connection with the negotiation or drafting of the Definitive Agreements;" and

(3) In the second paragraph, by: deleting the word "final" and substituting the word "definitive;" and deleting the words "before any such final agreement is finalized and signed;" and

(4) By deleting the third paragraph; and

(5) By deleting the fourth paragraph and substituting the following: WHEREAS the special sitting of the House of Assembly that occurred in September 2026 provided for transparent, meaningful legislative scrutiny and an opportunity for elected representatives to examine the terms of the DCIA, and question the negotiating team, independent commercial advisers and financial experts, representatives of the Board of NL Hydro, the Oversight Committee and NRCan, and bring the views and questions of their constituents to the House of Assembly;" and

(6) By deleting the fifth paragraph; and

(7) By deleting the sixth paragraph and substituting the following: WHEREAS the negotiations remaining to reach the definitive agreements will be overseen by an Oversight Committee, who will ensure alignment with the DCIA which was already debated and endorsed by a vote in this House of Assembly; and

(8) By deleting the seventh paragraph and substituting the following: WHEREAS the Premier has publicly committed to tabling the definitive agreements in the House of Assembly and briefing the Members on their contents before that occurs, in addition to providing a format where the Members can speak to these agreements; and

(9) By deleting the eighth paragraph and substituting, the following: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly supports the government's proposed process with respect to the definitive agreements.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: We're going to take a recess now and consider the amendments.

Recess

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

After considering the amendment, I find that it is not in order as it changed the intent of the resolution.

The hon. the Government House Leader, you've got a little over a minute left.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to stand and conclude on this PMR here today. What I will say is that, obviously, I cannot support this PMR as it comes forward. Article 2.2 of the DCIA is pretty clear as to what the intent was and it's unfortunate certainly, that the Leader of the Opposition, who is a lawyer, hasn't read that or doesn't understand what it says, the contents of it, because it is very clear.

That is the spirit of what we're trying to do here this afternoon. We are trying to bring a

better future to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, to young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and to our seniors, to our persons with disabilities, to our Indigenous people. We are looking to bring more power, more value, more transmission and a brighter future for the province.

We're looking at areas like Labrador West that, right now, doesn't even have enough power to build a new house, basically; that are on the cusp of one of the largest projects that the province has ever seen with regard to the Labrador Trough that doesn't move forward. This is not just about the Gull Island and Churchill Falls deals. This is about the key that that is. It's about unlocking the future and giving us the ability to develop the resources that have sat stagnant for so long.

I'm proud to say that I support this deal. I'm proud to say that I was a part of the team that helped negotiate it. I'm proud of this Premier for standing to his guns and representing this province the way he said he would. I will be voting against this. I'm happy to say that the deal that we have for the province is a great deal.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I've spoken several times about this deal and the previous agreement – the MOU from 2024. It always goes back to, and I ultimately believe in my heart, that every Member in this House of Assembly wants what's best for Newfoundland and Labrador, for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. How we get there and the philosophical differences surrounding that has us at this point.

Up to about 1:30 today, I thought we still had an opportunity to salvage some small piece of democracy in this province. Because, Mr. Speaker, the importance of getting a new Churchill Falls agreement with Hydro-Québec and getting it right cannot be overstated. But after 1:30 today, my hope in that has been lost because the fix is in now. We know that. Once again, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will be left behind.

We've just lived through almost six decades of a lopsided deal, seeing the bulk of revenue and money from the mighty Churchill development go to Hydro-Québec while we got a pittance here in Newfoundland and Labrador. So it is impossible to remove emotion from this debate.

We've got several generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in this room alone, let alone out there, the 535,000 or 540,000 people, the people who are aware of this deal and have lived, some of them, their entire lives, and are angry about it. It's impossible, as well, to remove the politics from it.

I heard the Minister of Energy and Mines talk about this in a media interview a while back during our special session, saying this is an agreement between two hydro companies and the politics doesn't matter. It does matter. It matters because we wouldn't even have gotten to this point without political will. The political will is what got us here, and the fact that, yes, Quebec wants to get out of their agreement early, we want to get out of it early so we can get some more money. What framework is there in terms of the compensation this province and the revenue this province will get from Hydro-Québec is key.

The minister said in the beginning part of his statements earlier today he doesn't think it's the same as the MOU. It's not. The MOUs are different. Market-based pricing has been removed from Churchill Falls and there's no

escalator clause in Gull Island. That's as simple as you can put it. Is it a bigger agreement? Yes. It's a bigger agreement because the federal government which had been involved and started to get involved prior to the election result came to the table with more money.

Mr. Hodgson, the federal minister, said a week and a half ago – and I was there at the speech. There were no Members of government there, but I will tell you what he said. Their role as the federal government was to grow the pie. It was up to Quebec and it was up to Newfoundland and Labrador to do their part on growing whatever piece of pie we were getting. We are getting a smaller piece of pie. Quebec is getting the bulk of this.

Without the political will, I mean, we tried to change the old '69 agreement in the Supreme Court of Canada. It didn't work. Now we're getting ready to sign 17 definitive agreements and we have a Premier who has said today that we've already voted on an agreement that doesn't even exist. We voted on the DCIA back in early September. It's unbelievable.

Not only did he break his solemn word and promise with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to have a referendum, he is now telling us that the deal he will bring back will already be signed and you've already done it, and 21 people made that decision, not all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that the Premier promised would have their final say.

He said it on the night he launched his campaign, he said it multiple times during the campaign and he said it on the night he won the election that people would have their say. He has never once given an apology or an explanation or a reason as to why we can't have the referendum, but the day after he got elected, he stopped talking about it.

He stopped saying that it was going to be something that people would actually get to do, to vote on this. It is my opinion that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, many of them voted for the party opposite, the PC Party, because they thought they were going to get a final say on it.

Now, whether or not you think a referendum is the right thing to do on something as complicated as 17 definitive agreements, that will be probably about 1,000 pages long or who knows how long – it won't be 71 pages. Each contract will be long and complicated. We've seen that before with how Hydro-Québec deals with complicated contracts. You will end up in court any time you want to change anything, and good luck.

I want to say as well, we want to have a deal with Hydro-Québec. We have always said that, but it has to be the right deal. We don't believe that this is the right deal.

I will say to the minister opposite who said that we voted against this in the special session. At least we voted. We stayed and we stood our ground –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: – unlike the Opposition when they were over here and they walked out and shirked their duty and didn't vote and didn't stand on principle and to vote against what we had brought forward. They wouldn't even vote.

You know, I've been looking at Facebook and, like it or not, this is where a lot of the public have been venting their frustrations. I'm not sure if the Premier has seen any of the comments since his August announcement, but there are a lot of people out there who are very angry and who actually do want their voice heard and they don't know what to do. I know because I've been the brunt of it myself, but their commentary has been very uncomplimentary towards the Premier and

his broken promise. He broke his word. He said he was going to do this and he's not doing it. He brushed it aside and won't explain why – won't say why.

We were going to have this special debate. It wasn't a debate; it was an information session. They tried to limit their own speaking time to 45 minutes in how much time we could ask questions. Eleven of the 20 Members opposite didn't even speak or ask a single question, including the Environment Minister, including the Jobs Minister, including the Education Minister; all portfolios pretty key to a project that's going to have tens of thousands of jobs and probably a big impact on the environment. Not a single question, nothing, not a peep.

One Member crossed the floor the day we were supposed to start for the way things were going within his caucus and the lack of attention to it, I guess, and who knows.

People are angry. I'm angry at this. I'm angry at the fact that, today, we were told that we are not going to have an opportunity to debate this. So, basically, the DCIA is what it is. The Premier said in his news conference, when he was asked it again, he was wishy-washy in his answer, as he usually is, and in the House of Assembly today. It's not hard to tell Steve Outhouse is back in town, whatever it is, the slogans they've got: better deal, more power, more value, and all this stuff, safer communities, lower taxes. I haven't seen safer communities.

I can tell you, the people in my District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island do not feel any better off today than they did a year ago. They actually told me, and many of their supporters, that they're angry with this government because they went door to door, as did every Member sitting opposite, and promised the people that they were asking for their vote and for their trust, in my district, they were told that they campaigned saying they were going to have a referendum. No referendum though and no explanation as to why.

Now we're being told that what was voted for by 21 people back in September is what we're getting. We've been sold down the river again. Yes, Joey Smallwood signed a terrible deal in 1969. Muskrat Falls was also a terrible deal. It's costing us hundreds of millions of dollars a year –

AN HON. MEMBER: Five hundred.

F. HUTTON: – $500 million dollars a year to keep electricity rates from doubling. We're about to do something similar and we're not even being given a chance to have a say because this Premier has no problem breaking his word with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It's a sad day, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It is a pleasure to stand in this House and debate this private Member's resolution. I mean, first off, there's no doubt about it, I will not be supporting this resolution. Why would I?

September 17 –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. PETTEN: Members may find this funny, but we don't. We are taking this seriously. We have a serious job on our hands and we're acting that way. They can act whatever way they want. We're taking this job seriously. We have something big before us and we're working hard for the

people of Newfoundland and Labrador every day.

September 17, all these Members opposite, including the former Member that just stood up and complained – and I'm not sure what the proper term is, I'm not sure what substance is really going to help the people of the province, other than he listed his laundry list of complaints. They had an opportunity to vote with this government and for the future of our province, for future generations of this province, they had opportunity to vote yes for more and a better deal and a lot more. They voted no, yet two years ago they voted yes for less. That's something that people have to realize.

Their own former colleagues are telling me, I can't understand what they're doing. We've had former Liberal premiers and ministers says this is a good deal. We cannot deny this is a good deal; great the federal government came on board to help them out. I have to be honest, this is a good deal. Members that sat with them in the former MOU, they're acknowledging this is a good deal.

People out there that may not realize, politically, they're boxed in a corner. They're boxed in a political corner. They can't come out and accept it's a good deal because, politically, in the political world, that wouldn't be good. That would not be good. That would be the kiss of death. So they have to find a way to find their own narrative. The Leader of the Opposition is at it every day in the House – and we're looking forward to future days at it as well – creating a narrative that's not accurate. It's all about this narrative. I'm on to it. We're on to it. I think the public are on to this narrative.

The people of this province last October 14, they voted PC because they were sick and tired of the Liberal government: the scandalous land deals, the nursing scandals, the secret bonuses that they knew nothing about. Speaker, the list could go on for a long time, but I'll tell you right now, they voted for change because they were tired of the former government, and they're sitting in Opposition now. It's where they belong. They had 10 years to turn the province around. Instead, what did they do? They led us down a garden path.

I stood in this House yesterday and questioned about the Kenmount Road Taj Mahal, as I'm referring to it as. Good governance means you put money in the fiscal forecast. That's what good governance is. We have a lot of things all added now. The urgent care centre, there's money in the fiscal forecast. We had hostels. We had schools. We had domes. We lost $5 million on the dome that was bought. They never had the land but they had the dome bought.

Speaker, the list goes on, but we took over and we were faced, as a government – me, the Premier and all of us – with a challenge. They had the province literally ran into the ground. Then I have to sit in this House, and I've been here for a long time, and I'm listening day after day after day, all of a sudden, they've seen the light. The light is shining bright on them. Then, all of a sudden, they can do no wrong. They have all the answers.

That crowd over there, they're in there a little over a year and they've done nothing. I can't believe it. I'm shocked. The crime is worse than it was a year ago.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Sure, we're not even sworn in a year. When is a year up? I think the Cabinet was sworn a year, the caucus; we never got sworn in as MHAs until November. All of sudden, we're the problem for all that stuff. But that's not accurate.

I will tell you this, it takes courage to make tough decisions. People can sit here and

they can criticize every decision you make. I've always been a believer that it takes a lot of courage to make a tough decision; anyone can make the easy decisions. When you make tough decisions and you're faced with it, you're going to get criticism. That comes with this job. When you're out there and you're getting criticism, you're getting a lot of fear mongering by the other side that has caused probably unnecessary, I think, hardship on some Members of this side. For what reason?

It's about making tough decisions. They don't like decisions because, do you know why? Deep down in their heart and soul, they know this is a better deal. They know what we've worked on is a better deal, but they can't accept it because they won't survive as a party.

This Premier has led this government. I, along with all of my colleagues, happily follow this man. He has made good decisions, but he has made courageous decisions. Again, it's not always easy to make those tough decisions. I have full respect for him and all of our caucus does, too.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: We will lead this province in the right direction, and we're doing so now.

Speaker, the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island likes to talk about, a least we voted. Yes, at least you voted. Yes, you voted no to more and yes for less – you voted.

We walked out of this House because we abstained from voting. We took our vote that serious, we didn't feel we could vote against it or vote for it, because we wanted a proper independent review. *Hansard* will show. I stood in this House, and my colleagues, we stood in this House repeatedly and fought for that. I fought for that every day in the debate on the MOU.

At the end of the day, they filled it up with their political appointments and they wanted to drive it through – and blatant political appointees, they wanted to drive it through. We refused to accept that. We walked out.

We didn't want to do it but we walked out. But guess what? We did an independent review. We got the report back. We were told it wasn't in the best interests of the province. We got a new deal. We've come in the House of Assembly and we voted yes for it. Because it's yes to a better deal. It's yes to a better future and it's yes to future generations. We're going to look after this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: So, Speaker, I'm going to try to manage my time now, but I'm going to bring in an amendment.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Energy and Mines, that the private –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – Member's resolution be amended as follows: By deleting paragraphs 1 to 7 and substituting the following –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker, appreciate that.

WHEREAS the Definitive Cooperation and Implementation Agreement, DCIA, was signed between Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, Hydro-Québec and CF(L)Co on August 17, 2026; and

WHEREAS former Premier Andrew Furey resigned from office prior to the 2024

Memorandum of Understanding being full negotiated; and

WHEREAS the Liberal 2024 Memorandum of Understanding included provisions introduced via political interference that would have saddled the taxpayers with almost $30 billion in debt; and

WHEREAS the DCIA corrects these wrongdoing and provides significant and long-term financial benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS the special sitting that occurred in the House of Assembly on September 14 to 17, 2026, provided an opportunity for elected representatives to examine the terms of the DCIA; and

WHEREAS during this time, there was fulsome expert testimony from the negotiating team, independent commercial advisers, financial experts, representatives of the Board of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, Oversight Committee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – Natural Resources Canada and a Liberal Member of Parliament, who spoke to the federal government's support of the deal – just imagine the federal government supports the deal– and

WHEREAS section 2.2 of the DCIA states that the Material Terms of the DCIA "will serve as the basis for drafting of the Definitive Agreements and the Parties acknowledge and agree that they will not modify the Material Terms substantively (or otherwise in a manner inconsistent with the substantive intent expressed in such Material Terms) in connection with negotiations or drafting of the Definitive Agreements"; and

WHEREAS the hon. House voted in favour of the DCIA on September 17, 2026 – imagine that – and

WHEREAS the Premier has publicly committed to tabling the definitive agreements in the House of Assembly and briefing the Members on their contents before that occurs, in addition to providing a format where Members can speak to these agreements.

By deleting paragraph 8 and substituting the following:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly supports the government's proposed process with respect to the definitive agreements.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'll consider the amendments and we'll take a brief recess to consider the amendments and come back with my ruling.

Recess

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

I have considered the amendment and I find the amendment is not in order as it changes the intent of the resolution.

The hon. the Deputy Premier.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's very disappointing, but I accept your ruling respectfully and I'll move on.

In my final minute, I just want to recap. We have a plan for the future of this province. It's not about the next election and it's not about the next vote; it's about future generations.

Speaker, I have three grandchildren and I love them dearly. I tell people in my district

or anyone who questions it that I would never do anything that I thought was going to interfere or cause them any harm, or future generations of this province any harm.

I love this province. I love everyone in this province, and I especially love my grandchildren. I want to make sure that them and every other child has a bright future. It may not matter to me, but it's going to matter to them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: I will make no apologies for standing here and being told I'm going to different levels. I'm staying on a high level because I'm speaking for the people of this province who I care about and our future generations. If these decisions are going to criticized –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – I will take them gladly because we're doing the right thing. It's a new deal, it's a better deal and it's the right deal.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks again for the opportunity for the people of Humber - Bay of Islands to speak in the House of Assembly on their behalf on this very main issue, which is going to affect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for a long way back. It has and it will and the future is going to affect many, many people.

Mr. Speaker, as an independent, people think, oh, it's great because you can stand up and say what you like and don't have to be owing to anybody, but I feel confident that the people of the Humber - Bay of Islands put in the independent who wants to do what's right. He wants to do whatever is right, no matter who it is, who I deal with, as long as it's better for the people of Humber - Bay of Islands.

I spoke before and I mentioned I was in on Voisey's Bay. We were in government on that side and we almost got crucified because everybody thought, no, it's a bad deal. You can drive a Mack truck through it and you could do this, but we stood firm. Now, there are 300 to 400 people working. We stood firm. So sometimes you have to stay firm on your convictions.

Then also I go with Muskrat Falls. I know certain people don't want this brought up. I think I'm the only Member here – no, yourself Speaker – that was here during Muskrat Falls. We spent five days against it. The public all wanted it because it was a great thing that we're going to take away Quebec's hold on Newfoundland and Labrador.

Where did it get us? It cost us $4 billion just to build the transmission line from Labrador to Newfoundland, just that alone. Where did it get us?

The other one that I was a big part of was Gull Island. We were in government and we had a deal with Quebec and because the Opposition at the time raised such public fear of Quebec, it never went through. It never went through, people started resigning because it didn't go through. It's almost the same deal that's being put now for $4 billion, not $25 billion.

This is the part of my experience in this House and the nature of me as an independent is to try to do what's right and work with whoever you need to work with.

I just want to make it and put it on the record. This private Member's motion is

non-binding. If we all, everybody in this House, right now, votes for it, including the government, there is no impact on the government saying you have to do this. This is non-binding. This is for the people to say, look, we're trying to do this. We're trying to do that. There are other ways to do it.

So a private Member's motion, no matter how many people vote for it, the government don't have to follow it. That's never brought up here in this House, about the private Member's motion.

I go back to the 2024 and the 2025 debate, and I'll be honest, that's when a few of the Members from the PC Party walked by me and I got comments: Go back with them, b'y. Why don't you go back with them? I understand that. I take that, I understand where they're coming from. The reason why is because I started the process. The Leader of the NDP and yourself, Speaker, I said I'm going to get an oversight committee on this if they want our vote. What we did, we sat down two days later. I went to Andrew Parsons, who was the minister at the time. We went down and we got an oversight committee to make it stronger.

My role in this House, I believe, is to make it stronger. They have enough right now to go ahead without me, they don't need me, but my role is to make it stronger.

Back when the Liberals – 2025 – I supported it and, of course, I got a bit of criticism over that. I took that, I understand that. But at the time, I thought it was the right thing to do. Fast forward to the election, the PCs took over. The PC Party then started negotiations once again.

There was back and forth with it. We listened to all the experts, who I have a lot of respect for – a lot of respect for. I won't get into any of the details of it to say which deal was better. We can beat that as much as we want. I'm not going to get into that. But the conclusion I came to again is that my role as an independent is to make it stronger.

I went up and I arranged a meeting with the Premier. The Leader of the Third Party was there also. Two conditions I asked the Premier: one, make it stronger, try to get the PUB involved. Today, the PUB presented names to the government or the Oversight Committee to be added to help to give more oversight. The second thing was, bring it back to the House of Assembly. Those were the two things that I asked and they're done.

This is making this deal stronger to ensure what we vote on in this House of Assembly and what's going to be taken next, for the next two or three, four months is followed.

There are people on this side of the House saying, well, we need the PUB involved. They're involved now. They sent names over. Now there are people who are going to be critical and say, well, now we need a committee to oversee what the PUB did. That's part of it, but that is strengthening the process.

Then we get on about what's a better deal? Is our deal better? Is their deal better? What we have to look at is what's in front of us, and when we get the experts in front of us – I spoke to some other people, by the way – they think it's a good deal.

I tell the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, no matter what we do, we have to deal with Quebec. Geography and the '69 deal, we have to deal with Quebec. Like it or lump it, we have to. The Supreme Court decision says it's binding.

If you look at one of the statements I made before – and I asked the question because I was very much involved with the Muskrat Falls one – how much would it cost to build a line if we want to say, Quebec, have a nice day, we want to do it alone? The answer I was given, just to get the regulatory approval to build the line, is going

to take 10 to 12 years. To build the line now, it's close to $25 billion. So whatever you say, good or bad about it, we have to deal with Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, again, my role here is to work with the government. There is no way in the world am I going to say something or do something that I think is not right for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can vote for this and say you have to bring it back to the House. It's already coming back to the House, which the Premier said today. The big thing is, is it going to be a vote?

I can stand here today and everybody can say, oh, great, you stood up, but I'll lose my credibility for the work that I'm after doing with both governments because, if now, all of a sudden, you turn and you say, well, I got that much, look how good I am. My goal is to take it to the endline. My endline is that if the agreement comes back and we need to have a vote, is to put pressure on the government to have a vote, if there are major changes in that. That's my goal. It worked well for the Liberals that I worked with the Liberals to do what was needed to be done, I supported it and I voted for it. I did. I voted for this here because that is my role.

I just want to read something because I was here – some people weren't here – when the former, former premier was asked a hypothetical question in the announcement: "if recommendations are made during this debate, will the government make any changes?"

Here's the reply: "This has been four years of tough negotiations. The language has been – we have sweated all over it, we have debated it, we screamed at each other about it. The language is the language, but this is an MOU, and I would commit to bring the definitive agreements back to the House of Assembly." It was never ever mentioned for a vote. That's the words right there, and they're not my words.

There's no need to harp on that whatsoever, but those are the words. If you set an example from one government, you cannot ask the next government to be at a higher standard. You can't do it, and I can't do it. I'm not going to ask this government now and stand up here and try to be the hero and say, well, I'm voting against this here, and then go back and my credibility then with the government will be zero.

I'm going to stick with them – which I did with the Liberals – to help them through the process to make it better for the province. I'm going to do the same thing I did before. I'm honestly believe the Liberals, PC, NDP, two independents, there is no one here that got different views of what they think is the best for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador because we're all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm proud to stand in this House today as the Member for Labrador West to speak to this motion before us today.

People in Labrador West know what it means to help build this province. For generations, our workers have built the mines and infrastructure and supported the businesses that keep our communities going. We are proud of that contribution, but our future also depends on having the power, infrastructure and investment to create the next generation of opportunity. This is why the Churchill Falls agreement matters to the people who I represent.

People have every right to ask questions and we have a responsibility to answer them. But as my colleagues have said, in September, this House spent four days

examining the Definitive Cooperation and Implementation Agreement. Members heard from the negotiating teams and advisors, asked questions and debated the agreement. We then voted and endorsed it.

Speaker, for me the question has always been, what will this agreement mean for the people of Labrador West? As my colleague said earlier, the Labrador Trough is often discussed as an opportunity for the country. For those of us in Labrador West, it's also our backyard, our economy and a place where our families are building their lives.

We know what it takes to develop a mine, workers, investment and power. For years, the capacity to deliver more electricity to Labrador West has been a barrier to expanding operation and developing new projects.

The existing transmission lines from Churchill Falls are operating at their limits. We cannot keep talking about the potential of the Labrador Trough and Labrador West without dealing with the infrastructure needed to realize that.

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro has identified a new transmission line to Labrador West as the preferred option. As part of the wider arrangement, the federal government has committed support valued at $1 billion, in 2026, present value towards that line.

Speaker, before that announcement, customers, mining companies, new mining companies were wondering where $2.6 billion was coming from, for this transmission line to go into Labrador West. So without this agreement, we're not getting power in Labrador West. We need it.

Speaker, I'm new to this House. I'm new to this role, but in our first sitting and some of the last sitting, I listened to the Member for Windsor Lake, the Member for Cartwright - L 'Anse au Clair, the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island and the Member for St. John's Centre get up and talk about the need for power in Labrador West. I thought they were passionate about it, then they voted no for the agreement that was going to give us the power in Labrador West. It's a bit confusing for me, being new, so I'll just throw that out there.

There are still engineering, consulting and regulatory work ahead but the opportunity is real for more capacity to support existing operations, potential new mines and other developments in our region.

I want to recognize our municipalities, regional leaders, workers, businesses and the Labrador West Alliance who have advocated for that new line. People in Labrador West have been making this case for years and their word matters.

When a mine expands or a new project moves forward, the benefits reach beyond the mine's gate; they reach the contractor hiring an apprentice, the local supplier, the restaurant and the family that sees a future in our communities. This can mean a young person can build a career at home or someone working away has a reason to come home.

But I just want to make it as clear about something else, a good deal for Labrador has to be about more than jobs. If we expect communities to support major projects, we have to have a plan for the people who live in them. We need affordable housing, sustainable homes for seniors, health care skills, municipal infrastructure and service that allow the people to stay and put down roots.

Not everybody in Labrador West works in the mines. Our communities include seniors on fixed income, people working in schools and the health care system, small business owners and families struggling with the cost of living. Their future has to be a part of this conversation as well.

I said before that we need a plan for people that live in Labrador West, not simply come in and work, leave and go. When our region helps create wealth for this province, our communities should share in the benefits and have the infrastructure that they need to thrive. A stronger Labrador West should be part of a stronger Labrador, where communities see long-lasting benefits from development.

The Innu Nation must be a meaningful part of this work. The Innu have a long-lasting relationship with the land and waters affected by the Churchill development. Their rights and agreements must be respected. The Nation has raised concerns about the agreement and those concerns should be addressed through continued dialogue and engagement.

The agreement includes a commitment that 85 per cent of Gull Island construction person-hours will stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, with priority for qualified Labrador Innu, then qualified Labradorians and then qualified Newfoundlanders. We need to make sure these people can access the training and opportunities needed to participate in these projects.

We also need people to see the benefits in their daily lives. The government has accelerated the Churchill Falls Electricity Rebate beginning in January. Residential customers of Newfoundland and Labrador Power and Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro will receive a 15 per cent rebate on their first 2,000 kilowatt hours of electricity used each month. This help is being brought forward without waiting for the final agreement to be completed, because families need relief now.

Speaker, Labrador West has never been short on determination. We have the people, the experiences and the resources to build a stronger future. We have needed this infrastructure and investment to match the potential that we have,

I supported this agreement in September because I believe that it offers a path to more power and opportunity for the people I represent. Our government will complete the work to bring the agreement to life, as their Premier announced earlier this afternoon, and stay focused on delivering lasting benefits for Labrador.

Speaker, the people of Labrador West helped build this province with hard work, determination and belief that tomorrow could be better than today. Now, it's our turn.

I'm going to say that again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Now, it's our turn. The people of Labrador West are finally getting something back instead of giving and giving and giving.

As my colleague said, the Deputy Premier, I have five children, I have six grandchildren and another one on the way, and I want them to stay.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: I want all of them to stay in Labrador West, raise their families there and work there, the same as I've been doing for the last 35 years.

A future with more power, more value, more jobs, more opportunity and a stronger Labrador West is what we will get out of the deal that we looked at in September. For that reason, Speaker, I won't support this resolution today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

This is a very disappointing day, I have to say, as a newcomer, to see how this is all unfolding has been a real disappointment for me.

I know the last time we spoke about this in our special session, I mentioned that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have a lot of apprehension when it comes to Churchill Falls. You fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me, kind of thing. I also spoke about, I guess, how the communication up until that time, that information session, was a bit of a disaster and it didn't inspire confidence in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Government made no attempt before to provide any details of this new deal. Of course, then we were promised we would get it all in the information session in the House, but we couldn't ask government any questions. Then we could ask questions, but we had to ask them to the negotiating team or to their supporting cast and they'd provide the answers we're looking for.

The problem is, when I asked the Hydro board and their legal counsel about the value of their export power, they couldn't tell me. When I asked J.P. Morgan about the pricing for Gull Island, they couldn't tell me. Then I asked the negotiating team about how the Churchill Falls upgrades power was going to be priced. Is it capacity? Is it energy? What is it? They couldn't answer that question. These are important details and they're not publicly available, you have to interpret them from the DCIA.

So it's been like a puzzle that you're trying to put together but you don't have all the pieces. But do you know what? We did our own work and we figured out a lot of these things. We figured out and interpreted the tea leaves here and came up with what we think is intended here.

What we found is, of course, that we're committing to a 50-year fixed payment plan. It locks us in at about 2.5 per cent a year, and that's all we get, regardless of what Hydro-Québec sells that power for on the market.

We found out that Gull Island is being built in the lowest cost possible way, and that Quebec is getting 84 per cent of the power. Now that power doesn't even go up by 2.5 per cent. That power is going to decline in price every year.

We also found out that Churchill Falls upgrades are not being paid for by Hydro-Québec. They're being paid for by CF(L)Co. Again, Hydro-Québec is getting the lion's share of the power. So, again, why are we doing it? Why are we doing that for Quebec? Clearly, that is a bit of a quid pro quo, it must be, for some other part of the deal.

Last night, we got out early. We don't have a lot on the agenda sometimes, so I did go to the movies. I went to see a movie. I went to see a movie called *You Can See Everything*. I highly recommend it. It's a great movie. It's a documentary. It features the Theranos founder, Elizabeth Holmes. She's in prison now for defrauding investors, but she insists on her innocence. She says she didn't deceive anyone. Maybe she just did a bad job at communicating what her product could do.

It made me think about another part of this deal – transmission rights. I'll quote what was in the government release when this was announced. They said they "secured the ability to transmit power from Churchill Falls and Gull Island through Quebec to the U.S. marketplace …." But what they meant is they can sell power to Hydro-Québec at the same price Hydro-Québec gets in the US or Ontario. But that's not even quite right because it's actually the same price they get after Hydro-Québec takes their transmission fees, which we don't even know what those are. That couldn't be answered yet.

Now, before the film – a good film, you should go see it, really, it's like three hours long but it's really good – there are trailers, of course, but then there was this wonderfully produced local ad featuring the Premier touting better and more – better and more, not necessarily good or best, but better and more.

As we wrapped up the information session of the House last month, we were unable to get a straight answer on whether the final agreements would come back. Now, we heard today, we're going to get them back after they're signed. It's a moot point. It's sort of silly to get it back and talk about it and debate it after we get it signed.

So I have to wonder why is the government running these ads now? If the deal is done and there's no need to have more debate in the House, this isn't for public information. This is propaganda. It includes partisan slogans, and a more cynical person might conclude that this is an ad campaign and nothing more than an attempt by the PC Party to salvage some votes after an overwhelming public disapproval of the DCIA.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: It's inconceivable.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. PARSONS: It's quite conceivable that the PC promise to hold a referendum on Churchill Falls was the deciding factor in the election last year. Right? Last winter, government hand-picked the review panel to do a post-mortem on a dead MOU – I don't know why. The report came out in the spring. Unfortunately, the authors weren't available to speak to it. Then a short time later, with a Quebec election looming, the Premier announced they'd reached a better deal. Unfortunately, there was no time to do that referendum anymore and they had to abandon even some of those pesky recommendations that were in their own review.

The public has spoken loud and clear on this and you have to be deaf not to hear what they're saying. They know this is being rushed. They don't have confidence in the process. Negotiators and advisors are jumping ship, including the lead negotiator today.

I agree with government in one thing. This deal can't wait until 2041, absolutely not, but it can't be rushed either. So we have a window right now to take our time and negotiate the right deal that allows us to break the shackles of 1969, but, more importantly, ensure we get a fair deal for many years into the future.

I appreciate the idea that my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands brought up about working to get a better deal, but the only problem is now we're not going to see any aspect of this deal until it's too late.

I don't have any allegiance to an old deal or a new deal. I don't care about better; I want to see the right deal. I'm going to appeal to my colleagues across the way to think about what we're doing here. There's no need to rush this. There's an opportunity right now to get the best deal for the long term.

We know there are problems here; everyone acknowledges it. We know that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador aren't comfortable with this deal. If that's the case and if government wants to rebuild some of the trust that they've lost throughout this fiasco, commit to bringing that final deal back before it's signed.

Again, my colleague mentioned this is a non-binding resolution, and we really like fooled around here this afternoon. It's really disappointing that we're not even having a serious discussion about it. We're just flexing. But I'm appealing to you seriously, bring this back to the House, bring back the

work and let's talk about all the different parts of this agreement. Let the public see it before its signed. Let us analyze it seriously and let government defend it.

Let's do this right. Don't rush this through, and that's my appeal to you today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the resolution calls for a debate and a vote before they are signed and/or binding. It makes perfectly good sense. In all my years as an NLTA member, we never brought back a signed agreement for people to vote on; we brought back a tentative agreement which, if it was ratified, then it would be signed. That was the order. If we did bring back a signed agreement and the membership not vote on it, I would tell you there would be hell to pay on it.

That is basically, in a democratic process, that it would be brought back beforehand. That's one of the conditions we set down.

From the beginning, I know my former colleague and my current colleague, we looked at this deal basically as a financial deal, as a fiscal deal, as an economic deal, as a business transaction and remove the partisan politics out of it.

I was prepared to vote yes on the last one once the report of the Oversight Committee came back and depending on what it said, and the same thing here with regard to any final agreement, if, indeed, the truly independent Oversight Committee comes back and says, overall, this is better.

I don't think there is any perfect deal. There is always give and take. It's as simple as that. You're going to play the cards you've got and come out with the best deal. There is no zero-sum game in collective bargaining, not for any deal that matters.

So that's always been our approach to this. Strange to hear, I guess, NDP talking about it from a business point of view but, in the end, it's too important just to get mired down in politics.

I will say this, I've got the unredacted resignation letter of Michael Wilson in my hand and the letter that the clerk of the Executive Council sent to Mr. Dennis Browne, chair of the Independent Churchill Falls Negotiation Oversight Panel. I will tell you that those two letters – because I spoke to the Premier on the day we were being sworn in and I did say good on you for doing that. At least we know what the issues are.

Well, really, that's where the transparency stopped, because we did volunteer. I said I would like to be included and, I said, not only us but I'm sure independents and the Liberals would like to be included. How do we move forward here in choosing something that is truly independent?

I will tell you, these two letters, I guess, if anything else, were part of the reasons why we set the three conditions. We said once burned, twice shy. Rather than get into a debate, we wanted to set our conditions at the beginning, upfront, so people knew where we stood. We wanted a truly independent oversight.

I wrote several letters to the Premier and we did have a good conversation during the debate up in his office, with the independent Member as well. We wanted that oversight review, someone that was totally independent, whether it was through the PUB or through a Manitoba Hydro one, someone who wasn't connected at all so at least they could come back and say this makes sense.

To be honest with you, whether it's a market-based measure or the CPI, I don't

know, I've talked to various people and it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. In the end, I do think either deal is better than the original deal. I do believe that. I don't know by how much, but I do believe it's better. I don't think anyone on either side was trying to negotiate a deal that was worse than or equal to, I really don't.

But we didn't have a referendum, and that's fair enough. I never thought promising a referendum was prudent if we weren't going to put the appropriate public information, education, into the process. For many of us here, we've debated this issue twice. I don't know if I'm any closer in understanding it now than ever but the fact is we've had two goes at it.

We couldn't question the Independent Review Committee on the report. The debate was a lot more controlled. I often thought that maybe it would have been better too to have public information sessions throughout the province where people could question the IRC and the experts as well. Because there are plenty of good people out there with some very interesting questions and critiques that I'd like to hear how the committee responds to and how the negotiating team responds to it, but nevertheless it's been a lack of that transparency because that's what we've called on from the get-go.

Now there's been two amendments, basically, that are attempting to change this resolution, which is basically asking that a debate and vote before any deal is signed be brought forward here before it signed. In the end, whether everyone on this side votes against it not, it's still going to pass. But at least there was a debate.

Our support is going to be contingent on the oversight, what that review comes back. If that reports comes back and says, you know what, overall this is a pretty decent deal, you have our support, as simple as that. It comes. The same thing with the last one. But we want to be sure that the questions that we still had are answered and we understand what we're voting for.

I don't care whether it's PC or Liberal, I really don't. In the end it has to benefit, I would say in this case the Innu, the people of Labrador first have got to have it. I know from my colleague how important this is and I think then there's the benefit to the province as a whole. As someone said, this shouldn't come down to in a referendum, the majority of people who are not living in Labrador voting on the future of Labrador.

The last one, I think, is absolutely crucial and I think there is certainly a commitment from the Premier on this, with regard to support of the Innu. That has to come, not just simply that we're going to be partners but they've got to come out and say, look, we're behind this. We're on board. The issues have been reconciled. Those are the three conditions.

I will gently correct my colleague from Labrador West. As I said in the debate, it's not a no vote, it's just a not yet. We haven't committed one way or the other. Our decision will be very much predicated on what the Independent Review Committee comes back with. Whether this deal has got more power than the last deal or whatever, as long as it has got enough power for Labrador to do what it needs to do and, in the end, the whole province prospers, that's what we're behind.

Right now, I would support this only because it's one of our three conditions that this is brought back for debate and a vote in the House of Assembly. This doesn't mean that we're going to vote against it. It doesn't mean we're going to vote for it, but we are going to vote in the best interest of the province. It's going to be based on the information we have at that time, which, I hope, is going to be from a truly independent review committee this time and we'll get some clear answers and some guidance.

Again, the Member for Labrador West talks about his grandchildren. He's right, Speaker, my oldest granddaughter will probably be a grandparent herself when this deal expires.

AN HON. MEMBER: Ten today.

J. DINN: Yes, 10 today. That's right. I even sang Happy Birthday to her this morning. She wasn't impressed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: And my colleague across the House, the Education Minister, is also expecting his first grandchild.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: I would say in this House here, we've all got a lot riding on it and not just for ourselves, I've got to believe that. But from our point of view, it's not a matter of trusting, we just want the unadulterated truth as to if it makes sense.

Whether it's a perfect deal doesn't matter. Is it a good deal? Does it give us what we want? That's the question that I'll be asking when I go to vote on it, but I would like the opportunity to have that vote before it's signed, otherwise it's a moot point.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The Speaker now recognized the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition and mover of the motion to conclude the debate.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I listened to everybody this afternoon and I just agree, first off, with the Member for Corner Brook, that this is a disappointing day, not having the ability to vote on the most important deal in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador before that deal is finalized. I would have thought that Members of the House of Assembly would have wanted to do that and I would have thought the Premier would have given the Members on all sides of the House, including Members of his own caucus, the ability to table their vote and to be the voice of the people in their district.

I've done a lot of reflecting over the past few weeks for personal reasons and, I guess, for work reasons as well. I thought how lucky I am to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, right from the day I was here, friends I made when I was a little kid that are still my friends, they're all still here in Newfoundland and Labrador, too; a great school; teachers I still see around town; a great high school; everything I had at my fingertips.

I graduated from Memorial University. It's incredible, back in the day we had the foresight to build a university for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. My mom taught at Memorial University. My dad was a physician and worked in the Department of Health, everything they gave to this province so me and my sisters could grow up here and have those opportunities.

I graduated from Memorial, went away to school, came back, built my professional career here. I worked with the best lawyers in the country, appeared before the smartest judges in our province's history. I learned and became a better lawyer and became a better person. I got involved in politics because it always interested me and I wanted to participate. Never in a million years did I think I was actually going to put my name on a ballot.

I felt I had something to offer. I wanted to participate because Newfoundland and Labrador has given so much to me – everything I had. My wife is from here. She's a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. My two little kids here. Everything I want, I have and I did feel like, you know, maybe if I

did put my name on a ballot, maybe this miracle would happen and I'd win and people would appreciate that I wanted to give back and I had something to offer. Maybe my experience as a lawyer, as Justice Leo Barry said, it's the best breeding ground for politicians, maybe I could use that to better Newfoundland and Labrador.

Everybody who stands up in this House of Assembly, I can tell you, it's just a line we all use when you stand up and you say it's an honour to stand up in the House of Assembly. I would have thought, what an honour to stand up in the House of Assembly and speak to the most important deal in our history. I would have thought the Premier would want it to do, to stand up and say, give me the support Newfoundland and Labrador, this is the right deal, and explain why it's the right deal. If there are questions about it, he would answer them: This is why it's the best deal for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Isn't that why we all ran, to vote and decide on the future of Newfoundland and Labrador? Isn't that why you all put your name on the ballot? Did you put your name on the ballot so things could be done behind the scenes in secret when the House is closed? What are we talking about here? This is the people's House. There are 40 people in here to speak on behalf of over 500,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Everyone's voices are silenced today and not on a policy issue or an issue that might not affect everybody – the issue, the biggest issue that we've been waiting for since 1969: no voices, no votes, no opinions, no scrutiny, nothing, we'll let you know when the deal is done. Don't worry about it. Trust us – trust us.

I don't even want to get into the last year about the lack of trust we have in this government and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, too.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: This is what it's been for the last year. When we ask a question: What are you doing about education since you got elected? They talk about the Liberals. What did you do about health care since you got elected? They talk about the Liberals. What did you do about Churchill Falls? We didn't like your deal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: If you want to chirp, I suggest you find an aviary.

The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: This is an important opportunity to speak to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I thought really hard about what I wanted to say today. I'm getting chirped. It doesn't stop, Speaker, but I'll carry on. It's important to me.

I would have thought that the Premier and his caucus would have taken the opportunity to present this to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, to hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians from 40 districts and to potentially show some leadership and if there are issues with the deal, to make those changes; to have a debate before they sign their names on the dotted lines, to just think, have that sober second thought: Should we do this? Should maybe we take that suggestion that came across the floor, rather than just say we're not going to do it, because it's a Liberal idea or an NDP idea or an independent idea?

The fact is they're too afraid to bring the deal to the table, to the House of Assembly, to the public so Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can actually see what's going to be signed.

I can tell you, we will continue to ask for it and we will continue to push for it because

it's the right thing to do. It's an important thing to do. People have questions.

This is not me saying this, I've talked to my colleague from Labrador. I mean, people in Labrador are not only worried about the deal; they're worried about what it means for their communities. They've lived through Muskrat Falls. They've lived through the pain and terror and the horror, difficulties. They're continuing to live through it.

They don't want to hear bigger, better deal. They don't want to hear more transmission. They want to hear what it means to people. They want to hear what it means for them to be able to buy their groceries tomorrow. They want to hear what it means for their children to get a good education in five or 10 years down the road. They want to hear what it means to have their roads paved so they can access their communities that they've lived in and that they built from the ground up.

I was fortunate that I got to travel the province a lot when I was growing up. I played a lot of sports. I don't know how many times I drove up and down the Burin Peninsula Highway just so I could lose to the St. Lawrence Laurentians, but I did it.

Over the last year, I've been to so many other communities, and nobody brings up politics. They just bring up the issues that are important to them and that are dear to their heart, and that they want to help their families, they want to be there, they want to do what's right, but they need to know what is going on. They need to know how this and other policies or other ideas of this government are going to help them, and they're not hearing it.

Now what they're hearing today, the government is admitting they're not going to hear it. The government is telling them it doesn't matter what you think, because you're never going to see these agreements. You'll see them when they're done. You'll see them when the Premier signs off on them. You'll see them after we met in secret, behind closed doors, and nobody knows about anything that's happening. You'll see it then. Don't worry, everything is going to be fine.

I'm not sure everything is going to be fine. So I would ask the Premier, I would ask his Cabinet and I would ask his caucus, regardless of what happens in this vote today, because things could change and you could change your mind, talk to each other, encourage each other to do what's right and bring these agreements back to the House of Assembly, so we can see them, so we can ask questions and so, if it's the right deal for Newfoundland and Labrador, that we can support it.

I can tell you, I was always prepared. The night I lost the election, I encouraged the Premier to move forward with a deal on Churchill Falls. I was prepared to support it then. I was prepared to support it on the day of the announcement, if it was the right deal, and I'm prepared to support the final deal if it's the right deal for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

However, me being prepared to do that is irrelevant, because the Premier doesn't care what I think. The Premier doesn't care what anyone on this side of the House thinks. The Premier doesn't care what 500,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians think. That's why this is all being done in secret. That's why it's all being done behind the scenes.

It's why we presented this PMR today. We hoped it was an opportunity to present our case and that Members on the other side would listen. They're not listening. They refuse to listen. They refuse to hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are saying just stop for a second and think about what you're locking us into for 50 years.

I'm proud to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I'm proud that I've lived here

my whole life. I'm proud to raise my two little kids here. I hope, more than anything, that as I get older and retire and they graduate from school, they'll still be here and they'll raise their families – I hope.

Hope is a difficult thing. It's important that we all have it, but you need something to rely on to have that hope. That reliance, to me, is slipping each and every day. My worry grows and my hope decreases but I will never give up hope, because Newfoundland and Labrador has faced incredible obstacles in its history. We all know what we've gone through as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and what we also know is we always come out on the other side better than we were before.

I hope this Cabinet and this caucus and this Premier can think about what's happening and make sure we don't make a drastic mistake that will jeopardize our future and force us, like never before, to have to push through that mistake to come out better on the other side. I know we will, but we shouldn't have to put Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through that again, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER (Gushue): John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred Hutton, Jamie Korab, Lucy Stoyles, Jim Parsons, Bettina Ford, Michael King, James Dinn, Keith Russell.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Barry Petten, Lela Evans, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Joedy Wall, Craig Pardy, Jeff Dwyer, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Jim McKenna, Mark Butt, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Joseph Power, Eddie Joyce.

CLERK (Hawley George): Speaker, the ayes: 16; the nays: 21.

SPEAKER: The motion has been defeated.

Given the hour of the day, this House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, being Thursday, October 29, at 1:30 p.m.