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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I will now rule on the point of order raised by the Member for Waterford Valley yesterday.

I reviewed the *Hansard* and the broadcast and, due to the noise levels and disruption in the Chamber at the time, I cannot confirm the comments alleged to have been made. Therefore, I rule that there is no point of order.

However, I will remind all hon. Members of the Oath of Office that all Members recently swore to uphold, as well as the Code of Conduct for Members. As Members we are expected to hold ourselves to a higher standard, and I ask all Members to reflect on that as we move forward and conduct ourselves accordingly in this hon. House.

In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome two guests from the John Howard Society, which will be the subject of a Ministerial Statement. I would like to extend a warm welcome to Melissa Noseworthy, the executive director, and Joan Dawson, the board chair.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome a new Page to our Chamber, Rokiat Adewunmi.

Rokiat is from Nigeria and is currently enrolled in her third year at Memorial University, where she's majoring in political science and minoring in business administration. She's also currently working as a research assistant at Memorial University where she's involved in the study of local government transportation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Welcome, Rokiat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I also wish to welcome and acknowledge some new faces at the Table this sitting.

Ian Tucker is our acting Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. He joined the House of Assembly in December 2025, coming from the Department of Justice and Public Safety where he most recently served as director of the Civil Division.

As well, Emily Gushue, who is currently serving in a development opportunity as committee analyst, starting that role in February. Emily joined the team from the Legislative Library where she served as Information Resources Technician.

Please join me in extending a warm welcome to Ian and Emily at the Table.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear Member Statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Humber - Bay of Islands, Labrador West, Lake Melville, Lewisporte - Twillingate and Mount Pearl North.

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, there are young people who have the vision and the desire to help youth that they will never meet but want to change their lives. One such individual is Alister MacDonnell, who is so inspiring and caring.

Alister heard of my travels to Africa and realized how important soccer equipment is to the youth in Uganda, and he wanted to help. On his own initiative, Alister approached the Corner Brook United Soccer Club, the Paradise Soccer Club, the St. John's Soccer Club and the Newfoundland and Labrador Soccer

Association about what he wanted to do, and over 350 full sets of soccer uniforms were donated, many with the price tags on it, valued over \$10,000. The families and the pride on the faces of the children in Uganda as they received this special delivery, and knowing someone like Alister cared about them, was so special.

Alister is the true testament that distance and never meeting or knowing someone is not an obstacle in showing them love and appreciation.

I ask all Members to join with me in recognizing Alister, a remarkable young man, an individual with the kind heart who cares about others and wants to do his part to improve lives.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Speaker, last week all across Labrador, Cain's Quest celebrated its 20th anniversary.

With more than 3000 kilometres of high-energy racing, this is the longest race of its kind in the world and promised to keep race fans on the edge of their seats. Cain's Quest is a true northern adventure that gives racers the experience of a lifetime.

Speaker, I was one of those racers in the first race in 2006. I was the first one back in Labrador West, but I didn't get no trophy or money because I was towed back.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: This event has earned a global reputation of one of the world's toughest and most respected snowmobile races in the world, but Cain's Quest is more than a

race. It's a powerful showcase of Labrador's rugged landscape, resilient communities and deep-rooted spirit of determination and teamwork. Every time this event is held, it places a well-deserved spotlight on Labrador and the people that call it home.

I want to acknowledge the incredible work of the racers, organizers, volunteers, sponsors, safety teams and host communities. This event would simply not be possible without their dedication, planning and commitment. Their efforts reflect the very best of Labrador hospitality and pride.

I would like to congratulate all racers, but especially first place winners, father and son duo, Randy and Sebastian Malleck, Team 99 and the defending champions for the last two races.

Congratulations to all who made this race another success.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to honour the life of a long-time resident of Lake Melville, Reginald Frederick Bowers, or as so many of us knew him, Reg.

Reg was a man who gave deeply of himself to his community. Through his service as town councillor in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, his long-standing involvement in the Masonic and Shriner communities, his career in the provincial public service and his countless volunteer efforts, he quietly and consistently worked to make lives better for others.

He believed that the true measure of a life was found in service and helping those

around you, and he lived that belief every single day.

Reg generously shared his knowledge by mentoring many who went on to serve their communities. He played a significant role in the campaigns that led to the election of the first Labrador Innu Member of Parliament, and my first election, Speaker, here in 2011 to this hon. House.

Yet, his greatest legacy was his compassion. Time and time again, he stood beside families and their sick children. Helping them raise funds to access life-saving medical care, even when that care was required as far away as Boston.

To Becky and the family, know that Reg will be remembered not only for what he did, but for the kindness, the dedication and quiet strength with which he served others.

I ask this hon. House to stand with me to recognize the life of Reg Bowers.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a topic that resonates with many people in Newfoundland, hockey. More specifically, the Central Newfoundland Hockey League.

This league is made up of four teams across Central Newfoundland: the Baie Verte Sabers, the Grand Falls-Windsor Blades and, I'm proud to say, two teams from my district, the Lewisporte Seahawks and the Twillingate Combines.

This league displays, not only exceptional hockey, but true hockey spirit that is alive

and well in our communities. In doing so, it strengthens our sense of community pride and brings people together weekend after weekend.

These players, Speaker, are not professional hockey players, but ordinary Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are deeply competitive, who have an immense love of the game and who are honouring past teams of the height of senior hockey league in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask all Members to join me in thanking the players, coaching staff, organizers and the many volunteers whose dedication keeps competitive hockey thriving in Central Newfoundland.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. STOYLES: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Ms. Rhona Hynes, a volunteer and a community leader whose contributions have had a lasting impression on Mount Pearl and beyond.

Over 50 years ago, Rhona and her husband made Mount Pearl North their home where they raised two daughters and became deeply rooted in the community. She dedicated over 10 years to serve as president of the Mount Pearl council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada. Her leadership led her to the Catholic Women's League's highest honour as she was elected as provincial president. She also serves as a board member on the national board representing Newfoundland and Labrador.

In her retirement, she continued her dedication to her volunteerism. She has

represented our province as an ambassador for tourism Newfoundland and Labrador, welcoming visitors from all around the world. She also contributed to the educational program at The Rooms.

She plays a vital role in her parish life at Our Lady Queen of Family Parish, the former Mary Queen of the World Parish, and is an active member of the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group, one of the largest seniors groups in this province.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking and congratulating Ms. Hynes for her outstanding spiritual and community leadership.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I understand that the hon. Member for the District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville would like to request leave to present a Member's statement today.

Does the Member have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave has been granted.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a constituent of mine who Members of this House of Assembly know very well for the past number of years, Mr. Bob Escott.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Mr. Escott has served as the Sergeant-at-Arms for the House of Assembly since October 18, 2021, a role he has carried out with professionalism, dedication and a smile on his face.

Prior to his role here, he served as director of Transportation and Infrastructure, bringing him his many years of public service experience, but Bob's service extends far beyond these walls.

He has devoted over 45 years to uniformed service, beginning with the Royal Canadian Navy in 1977, before a continuous career with the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. He has also volunteered countless hours supporting youth and veterans through various Cadet Programs, the CLB Regimental Band, the RNC Veterans' Association and even a few bowling leagues from time to time.

I hope your next chapter with Helen will be a page-turner like the past chapters.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate another constituent of mine, Mr. Alex Brennan, on his assuming the new role as Sergeant-at-Arms.

Interestingly enough, Speaker, this is the third straight Sergeant-at-Arms from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville. Wayne Harnum, the previous one, was also from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, so there's something in the water, I think they say.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking Mr. Escott for his service and wishing him all the best in the years ahead.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Well deserved.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts; and Sport, Recreation and Parks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, we are tremendously proud to welcome athletes, coaches, officials and fans from across the country as we host the 2026 Montana's Brier. This event remains one of Canada's most cherished sporting traditions, celebrating exceptional skill, teamwork and the spirit of competition that showcases curling at its finest.

Speaker, hosting the Brier is more than an opportunity to watch world-class sport; it brings communities together, extends warm hospitality and highlights culture, history and the heart that makes our province such a remarkable place. The energy in the arena, the dedication of the volunteers and the enthusiasm of supporters across the region show how deeply this championship resonates here at home.

This year carries a special significance as Brad Gushue takes part in his final Brier, coming off an extraordinary career and leaving a lasting legacy. We commend his team, along with Team Young, also proudly representing Newfoundland and Labrador, for their impressive performance and the pride they continue to bring to our province.

To all participants and visitors, welcome. We wish every team an unforgettable and rewarding experience.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to join in welcoming the athletes, officials, volunteers and fans from across the country to Newfoundland and Labrador for the 2026 Brier.

Curling is part of many communities throughout our province from small-town rinks to national championships. Like all sports, it's built on dedication, teamwork

and the tireless effort of volunteers who keep local clubs running.

While we celebrate this incredible event, Mr. Speaker, it is a reminder of the importance to continue supporting sport and recreation infrastructure and special event investment to bring competitions of this calibre and the economic benefits to our province. Communities need local facilities maintained, upgraded and accessible so the next generation of athletes can follow in the footsteps of those we celebrate this week.

To all visitors, we hope you've been enjoying your time in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thanks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We join with the government in celebrating this wonderful event taking place right here in the District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. As the daughter of an athletic family, I know first-hand how vital investing in sport truly is. It drives economic opportunity, strengthens teamwork and personal growth and celebrates vibrant communities.

Congratulations, Brad Gushue, and to everyone visiting for this event. Welcome to Newfoundland and Labrador.

To the athletes, I wish you a fantastic competition. Play hard, enjoy the camaraderie and create memories that will last a lifetime.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was honoured to recently sign an official proclamation recognizing March 1 to 7 as John Howard Society Week.

This annual week of recognition highlights the vital work of the John Howard Society in supporting individuals in the criminal justice system, promoting community safety and advancing restorative initiatives across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, the John Howard Society has been a strong advocate for people on criminal justice issues. We value the great partnership our Department of Justice and Public Safety has with the John Howard Society, and we look forward to continued collaborations to make our communities safer. I commend the efforts of Executive Director, Melissa Noseworthy, and the rest of her team.

The challenges faced by those who are supported by the John Howard Society are real, and we are committed to working to find solutions so that those individuals involved with the criminal justice system have the necessary supports to meet those challenges.

Speaker, this year, the John Howard Society is celebrating the 75th anniversary. I ask all hon. Members to join me in acknowledging the great work of the John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize John Howard Society Week and the important role the organization plays in communities across Newfoundland and Labrador.

For decades the John Howard Society has supported individuals involved in the justice system while advocating for safer communities through prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration. Their work highlights just how important it is for strong justice systems to rely not only on enforcement, but also on meaningful support that helps people rebuild their lives.

Organizations like the John Howard Society often step in where gaps exist, helping individuals access housing, employment, supports and community connections. As we recognize their 75th anniversary, it is important that governments continue working with community partners to ensure these vital services are properly supported so that safer communities remain the shared goal for everyone here in our great province.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

We, too, celebrate the proclamation recognizing this week as John Howard Society Week. We do better when those around us do better. This statement rings true when we discuss restorative justice, not just for safety, but for community.

Melissa, Joan and team, thank you.

The John Howard Society supports individuals involved in the justice system so they can rebuild their lives, break the cycle of incarceration and positively contribute to communities. Now more than ever, this

work is essential. That is why we call on government to ensure that the proper investments are made so these essential groups are given the tools that they need to bring forward successful rehabilitation and restorative justice.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today to recognize March 8 as International Women's Day.

On this day, we celebrate the achievements, the strength and the enduring resilience of the women who've shaped both our history and future of our province. From the courageous suffragists, who secured the right to vote for all of us a century ago, to the innovators, educators, caregivers and entrepreneurs and the leaders who continue to drive progress today, we honour their contributions and the path they have forged for future generations.

The theme of the International Women's Day 2026 is Give to Gain, and it calls on all of us to champion gender equality, recognizing that women and girls thrive; families, communities and economies grow stronger. We know this to be true, Speaker.

As we near the conclusion of the 100th anniversary of women achieving the right to vote and to hold public office, I want to recognize the remarkable women who serve in this very Legislature, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Your leadership, dedication and the example that you provide each day

continues to open the doors and inspire future generations of women and girls throughout our province. For this, we should be grateful.

I just want to say, Speaker, before we actually couldn't vote, let alone sit in the House of Assembly to make decisions that impact us as women. It's so important. We will continue to rise here in the House. We will continue to rise across the province. We will continue to inspire. We will continue to break every barrier that remains, because dignity, respect and the opportunity and empowerment must belong to every woman and every girl in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize International Women's Day and the many contributions women make across Newfoundland and Labrador. International Women's Day is a time to celebrate, but it's also a reminder that equality remains a work-in-progress.

Women across our province continue to face challenges, including gender-based violence, barriers to opportunity and the need for stronger support for women and families in our communities. It is also time to recognize the women who provide leadership throughout our province, in our workplaces, our communities and here in this Legislature, who continue to advance meaningful change. International Women's Day reminds us that supporting women and girls strengthens our communities and strengthens our province.

Recognition is important, Speaker, but what matters most is ensuring women and girls

have the support, safety and opportunities they deserve every day of the year.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, I thank you, Minister, for that wonderful shout-out. I am proud to be a Member of a caucus that was the first in this province's history to run a full slate of candidates that not only achieved gender equity, but featured more women candidates than men.

While progress has been made, there is still significant work to be done, including right here at home. Women, gender-diverse people and other equity-seeking groups representing more than half of our population are still waiting for meaningful pay equity and transparency legislation.

We will continue working until equality, safety and opportunity are not aspirations but realities. Women do not ask for a seat at the table as a favour; women belong at the table.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier has said in the media – his words – he hopes this new dry dock will attract federal defence spending. So let's review where we are. The government gave

up guaranteed topside work that they promised. They got a partial payment towards a dry dock that they don't know the cost of, or where the rest of the money is coming from, with nothing but hopes for future work.

We're happy that this project is moving forward, Speaker, but we ask why the Premier didn't get any guarantees in this deal?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right, what we have given the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is hope.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We are back in the oil business. Not only are we back in the oil business, but we've been able to create a new industry. A new industry that promises to end the cycle of boom and bust when it comes to our trades workers and the people who work here in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what we have done, Speaker, and that's what we will continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The problem is, Speaker – and he used the word again, "promise" – people are going to run out of patience with the broken promises by this government, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Yesterday, the Minister of Energy said – and I quote – there are two

partners that are coming into our jurisdiction to operate offshore. I don't know why this would need to be debated in the House of Assembly.

So I ask: Does the Premier know why debate is important, or does he agree with the minister's statement?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, as I have said, over 15,000 members of Trades NL have signalled to us that this is a good deal. They are extremely happy with what we have been able to do, not only with Equinor, but also in creating a new industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: The Government of Canada says that this is a great deal; the people in the industry say this is a great deal. What we will continue to do, Speaker, is work on bringing more industry to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Well, Speaker, if he won't comment on his minister's words, maybe I'll use the Premier's words that he said himself, because he said a full debate must happen before decisions are made that would lock our province into a deal to sell the province short.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Now, we know it's already too late to follow these words because the deal has been signed, but I ask the Premier, why won't he live up to his own words?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: This has never been about politicians or politics; this has been, Speaker, about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – the workers of Newfoundland and Labrador, and what we have stood with and stood by and worked with and consulted with are the actual workers that will be working on this project, that will be building a new industry; and that's how we get to this point where we are today, where we actually have a project that the workers of Newfoundland and Labrador will actually go back to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, it's becoming very clear to me, and to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that they have a disregard for democracy and a disregard for what they were elected to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: It is about politicians, because we were elected to be here on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I wish that they would respect the fact that that's why we're here, to debate the issues, and clearly they've dismissed that outright already, Speaker.

And I will say, if it's not about politics or elections, we would have been in a technical briefing the day of or the day before and we would've debated this before it was signed; does the Premier agree?

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

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We made this deal about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's going to bring jobs. It's going to bring equity. It's going to bring royalties. It's going to bring a future.

When we talk about technical briefings, they were offered a technical briefing and never showed up. They couldn't do it the next day, and they weren't all there this morning.

So, listen, we have offered; they couldn't accommodate the times.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, we're in for a long tough battle in this House of Assembly if that's the way they're going to treat us.

Speaker, the funny thing is the comment I just made, they weren't my words. They were the words of the Minister of Energy. He was the one who that wanted the debate on the MOU. He was the one that insisted we come here, and we did because it was important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So I ask the Minister of Energy, who continues to say one thing before he was elected compared to what he says after he was elected: Why the double standard and why do you continue to say lies to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the MOU – let's talk about the MOU and the debate. We asked to be able to bring experts in here and we were denied. We watched them stand up and read, verbatim, from papers that were written for them. We've sat in this House since – I have – 2019 and I don't know if I've ever seen a Member cross the way –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – stand up and debate their own bills with us. We've stood and talked and they've sat on their chairs. So there hasn't been debate. So what he is saying is totally misleading.

Mr. Speaker, we have offered them the technical briefings. We've given them the same courtesies that they've given everyone else. Unfortunately, they didn't want them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, we can talk about the MOU and what is very scary is that Member, yesterday, went out into a scrum and said the MOU for Churchill Falls was one page. This is the MOU. It's clearly not one page. Four days, he criticized that MOU in this House of Assembly without having read it and now the scary thing is he's in charge of shepherding the deal through and he still thinks it's one page. He hasn't even read it.

So, Speaker, I will ask the Minister of Energy: Will you commit to reading the MOU and come back and talking about it after you've read it fully from page to page, which is more than one?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PARROTT: I wonder did the MHA that was just speaking read the LeBlanc inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, this deal – and he said he had a deal for this, okay? The same deal, he said, so he knows the deal, apparently. We've got the MHA behind from Bell Island who says, on the night that this was released, it was a good deal but he has doubts. Then, the next day, he didn't know if it was a good deal and the day after that, he didn't know if it was a good deal or a bad deal. That's all stuff that they've said publicly.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good deal. It far exceeds what they brought forward in 2018, without debate, I will remind you, and it's going to be the best deal the province has just seen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, the Conservatives promised safer communities, but one of their first acts in government was to close courthouses around the province, including in Port aux Basques.

In December, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety established a working group to analyze the root causes of the pressures within the provincial court system, and report back by mid-February. Yesterday, the minister said that the report is coming in two weeks – more than a month late.

How does closing courts make our communities safer, and what are the reasons for the delay?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, timely access to justice is a priority for this government. We are committed to ensuring that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have a criminal justice system and a court system that is accessible, and we are committed to strengthening our court system.

The delays that occurred were primarily due to the disruption with weather conditions and scheduling, but I can say that I've met with the working group. I've met with the chief justice of both courts.

The working group is comprised of many representatives in our criminal justice system. They are making great progress. They are very successful and I am very pleased with the work that they have done to date. I thank them for their volunteer work and appreciate everything they have done to date.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Unfortunately, I think we're going to see that a lot of these Members on this side now, a lot of their own words that they've said on record, are going to be used against them, but we will see.

Speaker, during the election, the Conservatives promised they would – quote – fill all vacant positions while adding positions within the RNC. Then, on December 30th, the Premier backed away from that promise and said he was focused on filling existing vacancies before hiring new officers – promise broken. Now we

hear through the media that the RNC officers are leaving the jobs in droves.

Why have the Conservatives already broken their promise to hire more police officers for more safer communities?

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

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

First of all, I can say we acknowledge how hard the work is that the police in our province (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I can also say that we recognize that this is a priority for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, with respect to having a strong law enforcement and police in our province.

I can also say that I've met with the leadership of the RNC, in particular Chief Roche, to discuss service delivery to see how best to support the officers that serve the people of the province.

I can also say that we know that investments in law enforcement is very important to our government, and we will deliver on our promise to prioritize public safety for all of us.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government recently announced a goal of making Newfoundland and Labrador the tourism capital of Canada.

I ask the Minister of Tourism, when will she be sharing her plan to achieve that goal?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, yes, our goal is to make Newfoundland and Labrador the capital of tourism of Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: And my team are working very, very closely on a plan and a vision and a goal to make this come true, because tourism, I think, doesn't get the attention that it deserves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: In Newfoundland and Labrador we have a unique culture and heritage, and we want to make it shine for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

I would question the minister in that response given that becoming the tourism capital of Canada, I suspect and know, involves bringing people into Newfoundland and Labrador. In the Speech from the Throne, Speaker, instead, the Conservative government has chosen to prioritize interprovincial tourism, moving existing money around Newfoundland and Labrador. I'll be very interested in how that plan and vision unfolds for this \$1.8-billion industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So my question, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Tourism confirm that she will ensure funding for the arts, culture and

tourism will not be cut in the upcoming budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts.

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, again, our goal is to make Newfoundland and Labrador the capital of tourism in Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Last year, visitors, both marine and air, were up 4 per cent, and that is on the high range – 2 per cent is pretty good, but 4 per cent is high – and, this year, we want to make 4 per cent or higher.

We're going to go sky's the limit because we are number one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to go back to the Minister of Energy and Mines to talk about the briefing that was offered.

We did try to get in on Tuesday night, and I was denied entry. Then we wanted to get a briefing yesterday but, of course, we sat in the morning and in the afternoon.

We were briefed this morning. Five Members from our caucus, our team, were over at the briefing this morning speaking with many Members, but I wonder why we weren't offered a briefing the night of the actual announcement?

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

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think if you go back and look at the media clips, you'll see that he was actually at the announcement on Tuesday night.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Secondly to that, we offered a tech briefing, and there has always been tech briefings offered on Wednesdays throughout the day and people have an opportunity to go. It's why we have representatives and technical people inside of our departments.

Thirdly to that, today, when they did the tech briefing, which was scheduled for one hour, we went over that time limit to ensure they got the information they needed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. PARROTT: We were there for an hour and a half and we answered every question they had; yet, they're still coming in here with questions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Mr. Speaker, the NLTA has expressed their disappointment following the Speech from the Throne which made no mention of educators at all; no mention of how they will support teachers and students in the K-to-12 system.

Why are teachers already being ignored by this Conservative government?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

What I can tell you is learning in this environment, in classrooms in this province,

does not happen unless they've got professional teachers and other learning assistants in the classroom. It doesn't happen – it doesn't happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: The second meeting I had, after being sworn in at the end of November, was with the NLTA.

We had a great discussion. We've had a number of meetings. The Premier has met with the NLTA. We've sat down, we've made sure our door is open and we're going to continue to communicate with the NLTA, because listening to teachers who are front line is the only way we're going to solve some of the issues we're faced with.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, that's not what we're hearing from the president of the NLTA right now. They're very disappointed.

It wasn't just teachers who were ignored in the Speech from the Throne, I also heard deep disappointment from the child care and early childhood educator community that they were left out of government's priorities.

Why is this government already ignoring the concerns of early childhood educators?

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said before in this House, our youth, our children are our most valuable resource. Without them, we're going nowhere.

I've met with all the child care agencies. I've met with them. We've sat down and had a

chat with them. They've told us what they think should be improved. We have actually just now completed consultations with them on what can be improved. That's gone out to them for more feedback.

Again, as I said before, I'm interested in the front-line individuals, those with lived experience to help guide us in the policies we put forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

In their platform, the PCs promised 24-hour snow clearing for everyone, everywhere. November 19, on their social media, they posted they're bringing back 24-hour-a-day snow clearing. Promise made, promise kept is what it said. But on January 9, less than two months later, the minister responded to criticism on their failure to deliver their promise by saying to the public – quotes – expectations were too high.

Why does the minister blame the public for believing their promises?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, you know the day that I announced we were returning to 24-hour snow clearing for the 14 busiest routes in the province, that were cancelled by the previous Liberal administration, I said it at the time and I'll remind the Member – and he was at the announcement – it was one of the proudest days I had as an MHA because –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: – one of the main planks in our platform was safer communities and I, along our Premier and our caucus, we were never happier to make that one of our first announcements because it was for the people of this province. We are going to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – to build on it, but we're also realizing the challenges and we're dealing with those challenges with recent market adjustments and extra recruitment, and we will get there. We're almost there now and, next year, we're going to add to the routes. So if the Member wants to ask me about the routes we're going to add next year: based on data.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: So, Speaker, they said they added 14 routes. They didn't add 14 routes; those 14 routes were already being done on a call-in. What the Progressive Conservatives did was they had people at the depot waiting for the snow to fall. That's the difference. So nothing was cancelled. That's a disingenuous thing to say, Speaker.

But I'll ask the minister, on February 18, the Minister of Transportation said, of 24-hour snow clearing, it was probably not where he'd like it to be.

When will the minister actually admit they overpromised and underdelivered?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Well, thank you, Speaker.

What this former administration never done in this House, I'm going to start doing. We're going to be honest with people of the province.

We have got challenges. So this minister will be honest with the people of the province because that's what they want from me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: As for underdelivering, if you can do 14 routes in this province – in his preamble, he's going on about the 14 routes. They were staying at home in their own house. They were getting called out of their house. There was a three-hour return time to get to the depot, warm up the trucks and get on the road. That wasn't 24-hour snow clearing. Now we're in the depots, they're at trucks and they're ready to get on the road.

He knows the answer to that. It's disingenuous for him to be making those comments to the staff that these Members used to represent. They'd be their own staff in that department; it's disingenuous to those people.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Conservatives promised a tax cut, but have done nothing in six months and they missed the chance to deliver any relief to families this tax season.

Why didn't they deliver on their promise?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, I said at my fall fiscal update that we inherited a deficit of \$948 million from the previous government.

One of our pillars in our platform was to make life more affordable, lower taxes. In the upcoming budget, the Member opposite will see that we will honour our commitment to lowering taxes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: – and make life more affordable.

I don't want to use the words "stay tuned," but stay tuned.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The last fiscal update before the election, we knew about the deficit, Speaker, and so the PC Blue Book didn't come out for more than a month after that. So they certainly knew about the deficit when they made the Blue Book.

They expressed concerns for the deficit, at the same time promising tax cuts. There was no mention in the Blue Book about cuts.

Will the Minister of Finance promise Newfoundlanders and Labradorians there will be no cuts to government benefits and services or the public service?

Thank you, Speaker.

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

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, I think the Member was here in the House yesterday when we launched Bill 5, which was an initiative, An Act to Amend the Revenue

Administration Act No. 2, to make the gas tax's permanent reduction in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, in 26 days they were expected to go back up –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: We wanted to make sure that our gas tax will remain the cheapest in the country on gasoline, the second cheapest in the country on diesel. Mr. Speaker, they can't fault us for taking time to plan efficiently.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, last week the government announced funding for communities to help with forest fire prevention and mitigation, yet only gave them two weeks to complete applications.

Why are they putting such a short timeline on communities, and can the minister confirm the communities will be able to get support for forest fire protection?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member for his question.

I'm honoured to be minister of that department. We just joined both departments of the Emergency Services and Forestry together. Two great teams to have together and we've made announcements for forest fire protection, Speaker. We've made announcements of

working with communities, of having our training and supports there. We're going to hire more forest firefighters. We're going to do more training. We got the fifth water bomber (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: We will certainly be working with our communities and making sure that our communities are safe.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

In 2023, the Member for Conception Bay South called conditions at Frank Roberts Junior High School deplorable and unacceptable, that enough is enough, and called on government to complete a full health and safety inspection.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: So I was surprised to hear the same shopworn, bureaucratic excuses in the minister's response to my question on a school safety audit.

In light of the tragic events at Tumbler Ridge, I ask again: Has his department completed an audit on the province's schools to identify deficiencies that could affect the health and safety of staff and students, and if not, why not?

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thanks, Speaker.

Speaker, Tumbler Ridge is quite a serious issue. That's affecting too many schools in

our country and around the world. Anything we can do to improve the safety in our schools has got to be a number one issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: We do audits. We're getting reports. It's a constant, ongoing maintenance with all our schools.

Actually, I was talking to several schools this morning with our officials, that's an issue I will definitely be addressing with officials, but there's no one asleep at the wheel, I say to the Member opposite. That's an ongoing issue and this is a new, evolving issue that's affecting our schools.

A school in my district, it was a pellet gun recently. We're hearing other stories every day. It's very unnerving to me, and it's unnerving to everyone in this House and this province, and in this country. We take it serious.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, that sounds like a no.

Well, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: – is not waiting for the minister to do his job. They've sent out their own safety –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask all Members for order.

We've talked about this at the beginning of the session; I'm going to continue to talk about it. I expect order in this hon. House.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Again, Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association is not waiting for the minister to do his job. They've sent out their own safety infrastructure survey to schools.

I ask the minister, will he have his department complete a health and safety infrastructure audit of our schools and present the findings to the House of Assembly before the end of May 2026, along with a plan to correct those deficiencies?

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

B. PETTEN: I don't set deadlines. I will talk to officials. We will look into it, what we can do to help the safety of our schools.

It's not a funny matter, whoever is laughing opposite. It's quite a serious issue, and I've got serious concerns with it.

If there's anything we can do – I've got to talk to officials. I don't have the direct answer for you now, as the Member opposite knows the difference of that. What we're going to do, we'll come up with a plan. Every school in this province needs to be safe and whatever we can do to improve the safety of our schools, we will do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, this weekend we celebrate International Women's Day. I am encouraged that, while in Opposition and in their platform, this government committed to

redoing pay equity legislation and undertaking meaningful consultation, something clearly absent from the current legislation.

We cannot delay this any further, so I ask the minister: When will we see this new legislation and when will those meaningful consultations begin?

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

In my role as Minister of Women and Gender Equality, I will answer that question.

I recognize the question is coming from a strong advocate who is really focused on getting answers like us on this side. We are now in government and we are actually reviewing the pay equity, and we are actually taking steps now to see what steps could be done, because we want to ensure that jobs out there that are labelled as women jobs no longer exist. We want to make sure there's equity built into the system, but it's not only for jobs out there where people are working in government jobs that have lots of protections already afforded to them.

We want to make sure –

AN HON. MEMBER: The private sector.

L. EVANS: Yes, the private sector; but we want to make sure that we will extend –

SPEAKER: The Minister's time is expired.

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, we know that language drives action. Families and

communities across this province are devastated by the continuing growth of intimate partner violence in our province. So let's call it what it is, an epidemic.

I ask the minister: Will this government formally declare intimate partner violence an epidemic and commit to the concrete, meaningful action required to address it?

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

L. EVANS: Speaker, in my role as Minister of Women and Gender Equality, I will answer that question.

We, on this side, when we were in Opposition, recognized gender-based violence as an epidemic. We actually recognize that intimate partner violence is something that is so harmful, but yet there is very little education out there that will empower women to be able to access the resources.

For us, as we do recognize that gender-based violence is an epidemic, and what I'm doing now, as the minister, and my fellow colleague here as Minister of Justice, we are working to actually to get the process in place where we will be able to stand here and actually say that we have declared it.

I am committed to that, and the Minister of Justice, and also the other female Member here, the Minister of Tourism and Culture, she is also committed. We've worked together. We talked about –

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has now expired.

Point of Order by the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to rise on a point of order, because I'm actually disappointed that my colleague, the Member for Exploits, the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, has misled the House to believe that it is this government that actually, you know, is going to deliver that water bomber.

It was actually \$14.8 million invested by the previous –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. PARSONS: – by the previous administration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. PARSONS: Speaker, \$14.8 million by my colleague who was actually in the role at the time.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sneakers and water bombers and everything else.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I'd like to respond to that.

SPEAKER: There is no point of order – there is no point of order.

L. PARROTT: All right, Speaker.

I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 49.

During Question Period, the Member for Windsor Lake accused me of lying. It's very clear; you'll find it in *Hansard*.

I expect a full apology and for him to retract the statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I'm sorry, that was the wrong word. I withdraw the word. I should have used the word misleading.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

J. DINN: Speaker, I stand on a point of privilege under Standing Order 34.

Whenever any matter of privilege rises, it shall be taken into consideration immediately, and in particular the freedom of speech. A Member has the right to speak freely during debate in the House subject to the rules governing debate. It does not apply to statements outside.

I realize that is probably written in terms of when it comes to making comments that you are free from liability; however, I do believe that the freedom of speech comes with the right to be heard or to hear your own thoughts and words as you speak.

Now, I've sat in this House for the last six going on seven years and, in the last few days, I'm listening to, I guess, the chirping, the personal attacks, the comments on clothing, the comments on whatever else, while the other people are trying to speak.

Today, even getting up to ask the question, I had to stop. It uses up our time to ask our question, to be heard. It did require actually asking the question a second time.

We're going to be debating, Speaker, in this House today, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, and we probably have people in the gallery and we probably have

people who are listening at home, people who have hearing impairments. I'm just thinking, in terms of the – I guess we've got to have that respect to listen. You heard comments. We had the comment to our office that it sounds like a locker room in here.

I don't mind, in the spirit of debate, the give and take, the question and answers, but when you're trying to listen – and there's some Members on the other side too, and on this side, who are pretty soft spoken, but I think when you get up to speak, you have the right to be heard. You have the right to express your comments without having to shout over.

Now, there are people on both sides of the House, including me, who were teachers for many years, and you know you can't teach effectively if you don't have people listening.

So, Speaker, while I don't know if this – it's not directed at any one person, but we've got to start, at least here. Take it outside if you want to have the comments but, in here, we're getting paid good money to debate some very serious issues. It's obvious that we don't always agree on them, that's fine, but good debate, give and take, I don't mind that. But this chirping, I would say, it's worse in these last few days, I think, than what I've seen it in the last six years I've been here.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Member opposite. I'm not so certain it's a matter of a point of privilege, but it's about House decorum, and I think that we can all do a little bit better when we're going back and forth at each other. We certainly should be respecting the rules inside the House.

So I urge you, as the Speaker, to take action that you need to take in that position and we move things forward.

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to stand and speak on that for one second, because I've been around here the longest.

Not only is the chirping continuous, it's getting so personal. So I ask all Members – and this is the first time in my 20-something years in this House that I had to wear an earphone to hear answers or questions.

This is not targeted at any one person or any party but, I can assure you, for some reason, not only is it getting louder and louder, it's getting more personal. I've been in this House many times when we had chirps, and sometimes it was fun. It was a laugh at each other, because we can have this debate for just one little word, two little words and then it was over; but now, you can sense that it's gone well beyond that.

I understand how passionate we all get in this House of Assembly; I understand that. I've been there. I've been a part of it for a number of years but, all I ask – and I agree with the Leader of the Third Party that this is getting too personal in this House. What happens when it gets personal? We can't share ideas because we don't want to talk to each other because we remember what was said back and forth.

This is the most time, in the three days, that I've been in this House, that I've seen more point of orders standing up in this House on things that have been said. The first time, I have seen so many.

So I agree with the Leader of the Third Party; I agree with the Government House Leader, also. It's all right to chirp, I understand, but when it's constant and it's personal, we are doing ourselves a disservice because we cannot debate the

issues which the people of this province put us here to do, and listen to the questions, listen to the answers. You may not agree, yet we have the right to listen to it.

I say it again, and I'll take my seat, this is the first time in my 23 years I had to wear an earphone the last two days, because it's so constant, and it's so vicious and it's so personal.

I love to hear the answers, I love to hear the questions, great questions and great answers, but we've got to be able to hear it and we've got to let people in this House respect the answers and respect the questions that are being asked.

I thank the Leader of the Third Party for bringing this up, because it is an issue that's getting – and Mr. Speaker, I understand that you mentioned a couple times in this House, and I'm pretty confident that you're going to put reins on this pretty quick. Because I know the type of person you are, that you know that in your position that here in this House people want to hear the answers and want to hear the questions.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to thank the Leader of the Third Party for bringing that forward. I think as we close out the first week of the sitting, it's good for all of us to walk away and take stock, as one of – I think yourself and the Member who just spoke are the only two folks of the 40 who have been here longer than me. This week, some of the ugliness and the language that I've heard shouted across the floor, right down to someone's clothing, that's taking – people elected us, we are professionals, we take an oath on a code of conduct, and we do respectful workplace training and harassment, and that's all a

waste of time and money if we're going to come in and it's a complete free-for-all.

I know that we need lively, spirited debate. Yesterday when we were debating the PMR, on the Opposition calling on the government to go back to the drawing board on the cancelled St. Clare's hospital, I thought we had a good debate for the most part. Toward the end of it, there was some shouting and noise, and we did have some soft speakers, as was already said, and everybody doesn't have a loud voice like their dad, like I do here. I do think that it's incumbent upon all of us on all sides of the House, because what's good for one, it has to be applied to the other.

As we go into the weekend and come back next week, I think it's really important that we have good debate on the bills, and I think sometimes you do get shots across the bow, it don't have to be personal and the language certainly don't have to be unparliamentary.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

On the point of privilege, I will say to the Member, the Leader of the Third Party, I'm not sure if this matter would raise itself as an actual point of privilege. I will take that back and certainly discuss it with the team and I will make a ruling at a later time.

I would say though – and sadly, I have to stand here and say this yet again. I've had on a couple of occasions now, prior to proceedings starting, having to address this issue. I addressed this issue in a point of order ruling today as well. I have had a brief discussion with a couple of the House Leaders, not all three yet. I intend to speak to all three about it, but this has been an ongoing issue.

I realize we have a lot of new Members. I realize it was a pretty competitive, I'll say, election process; it got kind of heated. I

understand there's been a period of time that we haven't been sitting in the House since the last election, probably a bit of pent-up emotions and everything else and a lot of new people, and I'm trying to be fair with everybody, but we have to have decorum in this House of Assembly.

I'm glad to hear the House Leaders and the Leader of the Third Party, of all parties now, recognizing it. It's one thing for us to say it, but we also have to act, and this is not one side or the other. I'm hearing it on both sides. I'm hearing things on both sides that I should not be hearing.

I don't want to be cutting into Question Period time. That's the last thing I want do. The people put us here to debate and to have Question Period. It's very important. I don't want to be cutting into it, but I have no choice if it continues.

So, as I said earlier, we're going to have this week behind us now. Hopefully we can reflect over the weekend but when we come back next week, if I continue to hear this, I'm going to start naming Members. I'm sure that's not something that your constituents want to hear your name in a negative light. If it continues after that, I will be revoking speaking privileges in the House of Assembly.

It's a sad thing that I even have to talk about this. It really is a sad thing. But if that's what we have to do, that's what we have to do. So I thank the Member for raising it. As I said, I will bring back a decision, a ruling on whether or not it's a point of privilege, but your point is well taken. I ask all Members on both sides of the House, please respect this hon. House of Assembly. Please respect the fact that we were put here by the people in this hon. House and we should be conducting our business accordingly.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling 15 Orders-in-Council relating to funding, pre-commitment, for fiscal years 2026-27 to 2035-36.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents.

In accordance with section 19(5)(a) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, I hereby table the minutes of the House of Assembly Management Commission meetings held on October 22, 2024; January 27, 2025; March 12, 2025; March 19, 2025; April 16, 2025; May 21, 2025; and September 10, 2025.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Future Fund Act, Bill 9.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An

Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, Bill 10.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise on this petition today to call for more policing supports in Conception Bay North.

WHEREAS our community has experienced rising challenges that place significant strain on existing police resources, including longer response times to urgent calls for service; increased incidents of property crime, vandalism and disturbances; gaps in patrol coverage, particularly during peak hours; growing mental health related calls that require appropriately trained personnel; population growth and increased service demands without a corresponding increase in local policing resources; and

THEREFORE, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to: Increase policing staff to meet the current and projected needs of our community; enhance regular patrols in both residential and commercial areas; support additional community policing initiatives, including outreach, prevention programs and youth engagement; improve support for mental health crisis response, such as specialized units or partnerships with trained professionals; and invest in crime prevention strategies, technology and community safety infrastructure.

Speaker, I've also attended meetings in my district, as well as my other colleagues who are present who represent the region of Conception Bay North, where we meet with the Joint Council of Conception Bay North. It's something that our local community leaders recognize that is needed.

I also received significant calls to my constituency office from business owners, in particular, where they're seeing repeated crimes and where, unfortunately, they're making the calls, but the resources are just not there to support.

That said, I certainly want to recognize the hard work by the RCMP, as well as the RNC, here in our province. They're certainly doing good work with everything that they have. As a government, of course, I'd like to acknowledge my colleague as well, the former Minister of Justice, with significant investments. I think over \$40 million has been invested by our previous administration to enhance and support the overall Department of Justice and Public Safety, including policing as well as the judiciary.

I also met with my colleague, the minister, recently, for Justice and Public Safety, to talk about this and, as I've always said, when it comes to crime, it's certainly not political. It's not Liberal. It's not PC. It's not NDP. It's certainly something, of course, that impacts all of society. I think we're all on the same page, of course, and we recognize the importance of this. I look forward, of course, to working with colleagues on all sides of the House to do what we can for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

The rising cost of living continues to place significant financial pressures on households throughout Newfoundland and in Labrador. Electricity is an essential service, not a luxury, particularly in a province with a harsh climate. Many Canadian provinces have recognized electricity is an essential service and have removed or never applied sales tax to residential power bills. Removing the PST from electricity bills would provide meaningful and immediate financial relief for families, seniors and others on fixed incomes.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to remove the provincial sales tax, PST, from residential electricity bills in order to reduce the financial burden on households and recognize electricity as an essential service.

Mr. Speaker, this is my second day, of course, presenting this petition. As I've mentioned before, I'm not only hearing from residents in my district, but I'm hearing from a number of residents across the province who continue to face significant challenges in affordability, and the cost of electricity is one.

I mentioned yesterday about an individual who was working away, but I'm also hearing from seniors on a fixed income who are struggling to pay their light bills. I've had a number of conversations as well, Mr. Speaker, with the former Consumer Advocate on the issue of smart metres. I know that's something else that's another tool in the toolbox to help address challenges that we're facing, you know, provide residents across the province with more reliability in their electricity use that they can feel more comfortable in knowing what their usage is and how their metres

are working, because that seems to be a case that a lot of people are presenting to me too, Mr. Speaker.

Some people are not understanding how the metre is being read. They're not seeing the meterman as they used to one time before. So it's causing some concern for a lot of residents and, once again, as I mentioned yesterday, removing the sales tax is something that this government can do immediately to help provide financial relief to residents across Newfoundland and Labrador. I know it's not the only tool to address the problem.

This is something that we want to petition the government and urge them to take action on for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I certainly look forward to more conversations with the new Consumer Advocate that was appointed by this government. I haven't seen any statements or heard from the new Consumer Advocate to date on their position on this issue. I know the previous Consumer Advocate received a number of inquiries, a number of emails and phone calls, and he made public statements on this matter for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So I certainly look forward to conversations with the new Consumer Advocate to see where she stands on this issue, because it's certainly her role and her position to advocate for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador on this matter.

I appreciate the time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, second reading of Bill 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, that Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, be read a second time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the bill be read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate." (Bill 1)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, today is a very important moment for our province. This legislation before this House, Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, represents a commitment fulfilled and a promise kept.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: It reflects something our government believes deeply; that people with disabilities deserve to be heard, respected and supported by systems that work for them. Speaker, that belief is why this bill stands before the House as the first piece of legislation introduced by our new government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: That was not accidental; it was intentional, because when we said during the election campaign that building a more inclusive Newfoundland and

Labrador would be a priority, we meant it and today we are demonstrating that commitment through action.

Speaker, for many years, individuals with disabilities and their families have told us the same thing, navigating government systems can be difficult, sometimes confusing and sometimes it is overwhelming. They asked for something simple but powerful. They asked for an independent advocate, someone whose sole responsibility is to stand up for them.

When we were in opposition, we listened. Our caucus raised this issue repeatedly in the House. We brought forward motions. We asked questions. We pressed the previous government on the need to move forward. In fact, it was Minister Conway Ottenheimer and I who introduced the private Member's resolution calling for the creation of a disability advocate – a resolution that received unanimous support from all Members of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: That moment demonstrated something important. Across party lines, there was recognition that persons with disabilities deserve a stronger voice within our system.

When we sought the trust of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to form government, we knew (inaudible) – we said that if elected this would be the first legislation we would bring forward. Today, Speaker, we are delivering on that promise.

For years, people with disabilities and the organizations that represent them ask government to move forward with this change. They raised the issue repeatedly. They made thoughtful recommendations and they waited and they waited for action. Today, that wait ends. This government believes that when people bring forward clear and reasonable solutions to improve their lives, government has a responsibility

to listen and, more importantly, to act. Bill 1 reflects that commitment.

This legislation was not developed in isolation. It was shaped through conversations with the people who know these issues best – persons with disabilities, families, caregivers, community advocates and organizations that have worked for years to advance accessibility, inclusion and equality.

Groups like the Coalition of Person with Disabilities Newfoundland and Labrador have been clear about the need for a dedicated advocate. Their advocacy and the advocacy of many others help bring us to this moment. Organizations like Easter Seals Newfoundland and Labrador, which has long been a champion for accessibility and opportunity, have also expressed strong support for the creation of this office. Individuals who have worked tirelessly in this space have welcomed this step.

Advocate Paul Walsh, whose work and commentary many people in this province follow closely, has publicly expressed support for establishing a disability advocate. That support matters because it reflects the fact that this legislation is grounded in a simple but powerful principle: Nothing About Us Without Us. The disability community helped shape this legislation and their voices will continue to guide its implementation.

Speaker, if there was one thing I learned in the conversations leading up to this legislation, it is this: For many families the challenge is not just accessing a service, the challenge is finding someone who will listen, someone who understands, someone who can help navigate a system that sometimes feels overwhelming. Parents told us about the frustration of trying to get answers. Individuals told us about barriers they encounter in everyday life and many shared the simple hope that their voices would matter.

This legislation sends a clear message to those families and individuals. Your voices do matter, and this government is committed to listening.

Speaker, the Office of the Disability Advocate will serve an essential role. It will provide an independent place where persons with disabilities and their families can seek help navigating programs and services. It will help identify systemic barriers that prevent people from accessing the supports they need, and it will have the authority to investigate issues, make recommendations and shine a light on areas where systems must improve.

Just as importantly, this office will operate independently from government departments. By establishing it as a statutory office of the House of Assembly, we ensure that it has the credibility, independence and authority necessary to fulfill its mandate. This approach mirrors other respected offices in our legislature, including the Child and Youth Advocate and the Citizens' Representative.

Speaker, independence matters because people must have confidence that their concerns will be heard openly and fairly. Across Canada, many jurisdictions rely on general ombudspersons or advocacy organizations to address disability issues. By establishing a dedicated Disability Advocate, Newfoundland and Labrador is taking an important step forward. We are strengthening accountability. We are strengthening transparency. We are strengthening the protection of disability rights.

In doing so, we position our province as a national leader in advancing inclusion and accessibility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, this moment did not happen overnight. It is the result of years of advocacy by individuals

and organizations who refuse to let this issue be forgotten; advocates who spoke up, families who shared their experiences, organizations that pushed for change. Their persistence helped bring us to this moment.

Today, we recognize that work, because progress like this is never the work of government alone. It is the work of communities. It is the work of advocates. It is the work of people who believe our province can and must do better.

Speaker, at its core, this legislation reflects something fundamental – the kind of province we want to build; a province where people are treated with dignity; a province where barriers are removed; and a province where every person, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to participate fully in their community.

Establishing the Office of the Disability Advocate is an important step toward that future. It ensures that persons with disabilities will have a strong, independent voice – one that speak truth to power, bring forward concerns and help improve the systems that affect people's lives.

Speaker, when we said during the election campaign that we would bring forward this legislation first, we did so because we believed it reflected the values of our government: compassion, fairness, inclusion. Today, we take an important step towards strengthening those values in law.

I want to thank the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being for his leadership in bringing this legislation forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: I want to thank the individuals, the families, the advocates and the organizations whose voices help bring us here. This bill represents a promise fulfilled but, more importantly, it represents a commitment to continue building a

Newfoundland and Labrador where all of us have the opportunity to thrive.

I encourage all Members of this House to support Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: I'll stand, Mr. Speaker, as no one else is standing.

I just want to commend the Premier and the government for bringing this in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: This is something that, of course, many people asked for over the years and many people wanted it over the years and many people needed it over the years. As I was speaking to the Government House Leader today, I mentioned going back in my bit of time when I was dealing with people with disabilities across Canada, as chair of the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Canada and also the treasurer and then, in Newfoundland and Labrador, I was on the board here with people with disabilities for over 22-23 years.

Each one got their own unique circumstances, got their own unique concerns. Something that was lacking at the time, and you always advocate for them in many circumstances, is having someone designated for that. It's just not on the individual cases. It's on the broader cases in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. So having an advocate that the groups can go to and when you get a decision, you get something made, it's for the whole group of some type of disabilities in this province.

If you look back and I remember in, I think it was, Vancouver that the scenario came up and we were talking about people with disabilities. The demographics that would end up having the most needs with disability issues: seniors, because of the growing number of seniors. We always think people that are quadriplegic, paraplegics and other issues, but at that time it was brought up that over the next 10 to 15 years, which is true now, is that seniors will be the demographic that will need issues with wheelchair, mobility and other issues. That is forgotten – that is forgotten.

I remember a good friend of mine, Sean FitzGerald, who was the CEO here in Newfoundland and Labrador and was on the national board, I remember us, as a board, the whole board, we had more offices opened up in Newfoundland and Labrador through the work of Sean FitzGerald and through the work of members on the board, we had more offices opened up in Newfoundland and Labrador than Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI and Quebec combined. That's the advocacy that was done in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I said this in the House before, I remember when they used to have disability week and then there's always the issue that came up and I remember the former premier – I always still have a lot of respect for – Clyde Wells. We used to attend the events. One of the things – and I mentioned it before – they do for some advocacy is that we were going into the Sir Richard Squires Building, we were on the tenth floor, was the premier's office.

So when we got outside the door I said, Premier, here, sit in the wheelchair. He said: What? I said: Sit in the wheelchair. It's advocacy week and go up to your tenth floor. And he couldn't do it. All because of the doors and because of the elevators but then the premier – and I've got to give him credit, again – he then started a lot of issues, with changes in legislation for people with disabilities, and the Sir Richard

Squires Building was changed because of that.

I go back again with the premier when as a part of the week, they have some wheelchair basketball, and he would partake, just to show that he understood the issues and change it. That evolved over the years, but today, to bring in an advocate for people with disabilities is a great move. It's something, probably, that we all push for over the time, but we never took the initiative. Myself too, I'll be part of that because I was in government for a while for that too, and we did not bring in the advocate.

This is why I would have to support that today. This is why I think it's great for the government to bring it in. I know when we had the private Member's motion, all Members in this House supported the private Member's motion. So I can understand how now we're all brought – and this is an education process. This is an education process for all of us to understand some of the struggles.

The other part about it is a lot of people with disabilities are such great contributors to our society. They are such great contributors to our society. It's an honour and a privilege to be around so many that I have been over the years. It was always an honour to learn from people with disabilities, not only with their disabilities, but how they encourage us to become better people also. Their drive, their initiative, their foresight and their ability to say I might have a disability, but I have something to contribute, and I can help people out, and they have on many occasions. On many occasions, I've seen so many disability groups chip in and help so many other people, able people, able-bodied people.

And disability has a wide range. Just because someone mightn't be in a wheelchair, that doesn't mean they don't have a disability. I remember there's one with dyslexia, and it wasn't classified at the

time. It was the school board that I fought with. I even appealed it with the school board. I was working for Clyde Wells at the time. The person had dyslexia and wasn't classified as a disability.

So I had to fight, and I finally appealed it and won it, and she graduated university after she got the resources that she needed. It's a wide range for people with disabilities, and I'll just commend, again, the government and the Premier for bringing this in.

I also know that everybody in this House will have a few words on this, and everybody in the House will support this because this is a time for us to come together to say we understand the concerns. We understand that there's something lacking here where we can – and with the advocate, whoever the advocate is – I said earlier to the Government House Leader, I wish I was younger, because I tell you that would be a great position. I wish I was younger because that would be so rewarding.

Not only that, there are so many disability groups here that, over the years, has asked for this. I remember dealing with the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities and, again, the struggles that they had at the time to keep the doors open and working for it. This whole thing of all the groups coming together now, they have one central person that they can go to, to advocate on their behalf, is a great step forward.

I can tell you, we may not see the improvements here, but I can guarantee you with an advocate in place, there will be improvements for a lot of people who have a wide spectrum of disabilities in this province, that there will be changes made in this Legislature because of that decision made today.

I don't want to name too many people out, but I remember when the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities were going through a rough time. I remember now this person –

they were changing offices and they were going through a rough time; I won't name the person, but I was just up visiting them and doing a few small things – is the deputy mayor of St. John's, Ron Ellsworth.

I remember all the equipment had to come in, all the changes. I said, how are they going to get that done? They said, Ron Ellsworth stepped up and offered, 100 per cent, his whole staff, to change everything, set everything up, what you need, he's going to supply and he set up the new office for the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities. I never forgot that about that man, how he stepped up at the time for the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities.

I just want to say that there a lot of people that helped along the way and I commend them all for doing that. Again, of course, I'll be supporting this bill and I'm sure everybody will be.

I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, because I know there are going to be a lot of other people who want to have a few words. I can tell the minister now, anything I can do to help out, when it comes to people with disabilities, count me in. I think it's a great move because everybody in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve the same services, they deserve the same respect and we, as legislators, have a duty to ensure that we put the legislation in that's going to make everybody in this province equal no matter what their disability, no matter what their colour, no matter what their education, it's our role to do that and I'm confident with the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: And I'm confident that, with the advocate, is now we're going to see major legislation over the next three or four years. You mark my words, there'll be major legislation coming through this House to be approved in this House of Assembly to make lives better, and we all can stand proud because we're a part of it today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; Housing; and Poverty Reduction.

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, congratulations to you on your new role.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I am so pleased to be able to rise today and speak to this bill, Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate. This bill represents a deeply significant step forward for our province and for all persons involved. It fulfills a commitment we made to establish an independent, dedicated advocate for persons with disabilities for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, it's also a moment of great pride because this bill is the culmination of years of persistent advocacy that began long before we formed government. For years, while we were in Opposition, our caucus championed the cause relentlessly. It was our Premier, Premier Wakeham, and my colleague, Minister Conway Ottenheimer, who introduced and secured the unanimous passage of the private Member's resolution.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: That PMR called for the creation of this advocate, ensuring that all parties in the House of Assembly recognize the urgency of the need which was the cause. We raised the issue repeatedly in debates and Question Period and we pressed the previous government on the delays and insisting that persons with disabilities deserved more than promises. As the Premier spoke of, they deserved action.

We stood alongside our community organizations, whose voices had gone unheard for too long, and we committed publicly that if entrusted with forming government, this would be the first piece of legislation that we would bring forward and, as the Premier said, we are delivering on that commitment.

When you stop and think about it, the fact that this is the very first piece of legislation brought before this hon. House, it underscores our government's unwavering commitment to inclusion, accessibility and the rights for persons with disabilities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: By placing this bill at the forefront of our legislative agenda, we signal clearly that building a more inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador is not an afterthought. It is a priority. For too long, individuals with disabilities and their families have had to navigate complex systems without a single, dedicated, independent office to turn to, one that is mandated to champion their rights, their dignity and their inclusion. Today, with this particular piece of legislation, Speaker, we take a major step forward in changing that.

Community organizations and disability advocates have, for many years, called for the creation of an independent disability advocate. Their message was clear and consistent: People with disabilities deserve a champion who understands their unique experiences and can bring forward both individual concerns and systemic issues.

The development of this bill was guided by the principle of Nothing about Us, Without Us. We have been engaging with the disability community directly, and I'm so glad that so many members of the disability community are here in our gallery today, and I want to thank you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Those in the disability community have directly helped shape the mandate, structure and functions of this proposed office. Their input was invaluable, and their support for this initiative has been very, very positive.

Over the years, we have certainly built a strong and trusting relationship with community organizations, advocates, families and persons with disabilities themselves. Through countless conversations, meetings and shared efforts, we have come to understand not only the challenges that they face, but also the resilience, the insight and the leadership that they bring to our province.

This bill is certainly a reflection of that partnership. It is the product of genuine collaboration, mutual respect and a shared commitment, all to ensure that persons with disabilities have the voice, the representation and the support that they have long deserved.

Mr. Speaker, across our country, most provinces rely on general ombudspersons, advocacy organizations or government departments to respond directly to related concerns. By establishing this particular office, Newfoundland and Labrador becomes a national leader, strengthening disability rights, enhancing transparency and accountability, and demonstrating our commitment to inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes that the Disability Advocate be established as an independent, statutory office of the House of Assembly, and the structure mirrors successful models such as the Child and Youth Advocate and the Citizens' Representative. By aligning the Disability Advocate with these respected offices, we ensure independence; we ensure credibility and the authority necessary to carry out the mandate. The advocate will be appointed for a six-year term through the Independent Appointments Commission and that is

consistent with the appointment process for other statutory office holders.

The advocate will be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council upon resolution of the House of Assembly and will be subject to the *Independent Appointments Commission Act* and follow a merit-based public recruitment process.

Section 4 of the bill requires the advocate to be either a person with a disability; a parent, caregiver or guardian of a person with a disability; or have experience working with persons with disabilities or with organizations of and for persons with disabilities.

Speaker, the mandate of the Disability Advocate will be robust and will be meaningful. It will include individual advocacy, ensuring people with disabilities have a place to seek help when navigating government services; systemic advocacy, identifying broad issues that require structural or legislative change; conducting investigations regarding the programs and services provided to persons with disabilities by government; making recommendations concerning programs and services to persons with disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities; collaborating with disability organizations, community groups and service providers; and educating the public, raising awareness about disability rights, accessibility and inclusion.

Speaker, the office will not simply respond to concerns; it will help prevent concerns by shining a light on barriers and advocating for continuous improvement.

I would like to speak clearly about the investigative authority proposed under this bill. The Disability Advocate will have investigative powers similar to those of the Child and Youth Advocate and the Citizens' Representative, including the ability to require the provision of information and records, including personal information;

entering facilities delivering services to persons with disabilities; and make findings and issue recommendations.

However, Mr. Speaker, we have included an important safeguard. The advocate must obtain the consent of the individual before beginning any investigation into any individual matter. This respects personal autonomy and upholds the dignity of persons with disabilities consistent with the principle of Nothing About Us, Without Us.

The advocate's investigative authority will apply only to government departments and large government agencies that deliver programs and services to the public, such as the Health Authority and public education institutions.

Speaker, ensuring clarity and avoiding duplication is essential and under this bill, if the advocate begins an investigation, they must notify any departments or statutory offices relevant to the matter. This will allow other statutory offices to offer their own knowledge, where appropriate, and if the same concern has been raised with more than one office, those offices can certainly determine who is best positioned to pursue the matter further or to collaborate together. This ensures co-operation, clarity and effective service for the public.

Speaker, if this Assembly adopts this particular piece of legislation, we will certainly move swiftly to bring the act into force as soon as possible.

Today's bill is more than an administrative improvement. It is a statement about who we are as a province and what we value. It is a commitment to fairness. It is a commitment to dignity. It is a commitment to inclusion, not just in words but, as the Premier spoke to, in action.

Speaker, as the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, today is profoundly meaningful

to me. My entire career has been dedicated to serving others, helping families navigate challenges, strengthening communities and ensuring no one is left behind.

This moment stands as one of the most significant in my public life. To bring forward legislation that will meaningfully improve the lives of persons with disabilities, to help create a system that listens, responds and supports those with dignity, this is the very reason that I, and I'm sure, like my colleagues here in this hon. House, chose a life of service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Mr. Speaker, today is not just a legislative milestone. It is a reaffirmation of our responsibility to lift people up, to remove barriers and to build a province where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

The creation of this Disability Advocate will help ensure that persons with disabilities have a strong, independent voice; one that can speak truth to power, bring forward concerns without fear and work toward a more accessible and equitable future for all.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to bring forward this legislation today. I look forward to the debate and I urge all of my hon. colleagues to support Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today as the critic for persons with disabilities, as a Member of this House of Assembly for more than a decade and as a mother. On March 6, 1996,

I became a mom for the second time to a beautiful, blue-eyed baby boy. He was the perfect baby; he ate well; he slept well. Fast-forward to February 24, 1999, a hard day in my life, the day he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Tomorrow my son turns 30 years old.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: He's the most loveable person. He's constantly keeping us on our toes and entertained. He's a person with autism, epilepsy and other disabilities. For 27 years since his first diagnosis at the age of three, I have lived the reality of advocacy in our schools, in our health care settings and in our government offices and in our community. I have been his advocate and one day I will not be here to do that.

I was also employed as the executive director for the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living, now InclusionNL, prior to being elected in 2015. I strongly support the disability community and organizations that represent persons with disabilities. Nothing About Us, Without Us, that reality shapes how I read Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate.

The establishment of an independent Office of the Disability Advocate is something the disability community has been calling for. Families have asked for a place to turn when systems fail them. Organizations have asked for systemic review. Persons with disabilities have asked to be heard, not occasionally but formally and independently. This legislation responds to that call.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I have reviewed this bill carefully word by word, because it matters. I was relieved to see that the advocate must have lived experience either as a person with a disability; or as a caregiver or guardian; or someone who has worked closely with the disability

community. That requirement is essential. There are realities that can only be understood through a disability lens.

I'm also encouraged that this office will have investigative authority and the ability to compel evidence. Without those tools, independence can become symbolic. With them, it has the potential to be meaningful.

As Opposition, it is our responsibility to ensure this office is not only created but empowered. Independence must be real; resources must be adequate; accountability must be clear; and the appointment process through the Independent Appointments Commission must result in the strongest possible candidate.

Mr. Speaker, over my 10 years in this House, since being elected in 2015, I have seen progress in disability policy. It is important to acknowledge that when improvements happen for persons with disabilities, they transcend party lines, and they should.

In 2017, we saw the introduction of regulatory amendments, which required new and renovated buildings to have power door operators; increased fines for parking in blue zones up to \$700; introduced a requirement for van-sized accessible parking spaces; increased the percentage of parking spaces required to be accessible; increased the number of accessible units in an apartment complex with more than four units; introduced requirements for improved accessibility in public washrooms; clarified counter height requirements; moved the ministerial spaces back a row to prioritize accessible spaces at the Confederation Building. A very symbolic movement for some, but a very, very important movement for government.

In 2021, we saw the introduction of the *Accessibility Act*, which authorized the establishment of accessibility standards, established a ministerial advisory board, and it was a very good board. I was actually

the minister. It required those subject to the accessibility standards to take action to prevent and remove barriers. It required accessibility plans. It provided inspection and enforcement powers. As a result of the *Accessibility Act*, we released the provincial government's first accessibility plan in December of 2023.

Speaker, 2024, we saw a \$26-million investment to introduce the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit, which included \$400 per month for persons with disabilities who qualified for the disability tax credit. I can tell you, personally, that that has made a significant difference to my son's life. And \$1200 annually for provincial contributions to be invested in an individual's registered savings plan.

Speaker, when I entered politics in 2015, I had a checklist that I wanted to see completed while I was in this position, for persons with disabilities, and right now, I'm down to three things. I'm down to supported decision-making. I don't want to place guardianship on my son, but the Department of Justice and Public Safety presently has supported decision-making in their hands, and I truly and honestly hope that the minister and the department realize the importance of supported decision-making to persons with disabilities. His faith and his decisions need to be supported by those who know him the best – his family.

The rate of pay for self-managed home care employees to be equitable to agency-hired employees – that's my second thing. In April 2025, the rate of pay for self-managed care was \$17.05 an hour. In March of 2026, the rate of pay: \$17.05 – plus the 4 per cent. The 4 per cent represents annual leave and sick leave. So if you're an individual working in self-managed care, you are the employee and you're getting \$17.73 an hour. That includes your sick leave and annual leave, so you can't be sick and you can't take annual leave.

In April 2025, the rate of pay for agency employees was \$19.94 an hour, but in April of 2027 that rate is going to be \$21.05 an hour. So I urge government – I urge government – to assess that. While that is managed by Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, the policy now presently resides with the Minister of Seniors.

In Budget 2026, I hope to see plans to increase funding to supported community employment agencies and providers, so that more persons with disabilities can get job placements, they can contribute to their economy, be taxpayers, and be a solution to the province's looming labour shortage.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon the departments to please look and examine these three entities for persons with disabilities, because this bill, today, is a very, very positive step. But creating an office is not the same as removing barriers and legislation alone does not guarantee cultural change. So the true measure of this bill will be in its implementation; in whether families feel heard; whether systemic issues are addressed; whether recommendations lead to action.

I will be supporting this legislation because the principle behind it is sound, and it is long overdue. I want to congratulate the minister, I want to congratulate the Department of Social Supports and Well-being and the Disability Policy Office. I want to thank Robert Hodder and Sara Dow who give the briefing yesterday; they were fabulous.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: This is a good piece of legislation and I'm proud to stand here today, as a Member of this House of Assembly, and speak to it.

However, I am Opposition, and support does not mean silence. We will continue to ask questions, we will continue to examine the details and we will continue to ensure that this office serves the people it is

intended to serve: persons with disabilities and those who advocate alongside them. My hope is that one day the Disability Advocate will report to this House that systemic barriers have been eliminated and that their role is focused primarily on education and awareness rather than investigation and intervention.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That will be the day that we know we have truly built an equitable and inclusive society. Until then, we will do our job on this side of the House constructively, responsibly and always with the voices of persons with disabilities at the centre.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, congratulations on your new appointment; I know you'll do well.

It is truly an honour to rise in this House and speak to this bill today. I do not stand here simply as a Member of this House; I stand here as someone who lived this reality and knows first-hand how important these supports are. Not in theory, not on paper but in kitchens, in hospital rooms, in classrooms, in homes across Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to ensuring there is access to services and opportunities for persons with disabilities. At the heart of that commitment is a simple but powerful principle: Everyone has the right to access services and to participate fully in their communities without restriction.

We are committed to building an inclusive province where persons with disabilities have the same choices and the same opportunities as anyone else. That means identifying barriers, it means removing them and it means preventing new ones from being created.

When we speak about barriers, we must be clear about what they are. Barriers are not only stairs without ramps and they're not only buildings without elevators; barriers can be physical: inaccessible entrances, narrow doorways or the absence of adaptive transportation.

Barriers can be attitudes. They can be assumptions that someone cannot contribute. They can be low expectations placed on someone because of a diagnosis. Barriers can be technological, like websites that are screen-reader compatible or forms that are too complicated.

They can be communication barriers: the absence of captioning, plain language, interpretation or alternative formats. They can be architectural barriers like buildings, constructed decades ago, without accessibility in mind. They can be systemic barriers, like policy regulations and procedures that unintentionally exclude people because accessibility was never considered when they were created.

According to Statistics Canada, more than 30 per cent of residents in this province live with a disability. When we speak about disability policies, we are not speaking about a small percentage of our population. We are speaking about our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends and our families.

That is why measures like the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit matters. Since July 2025, the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit has provided up to \$400 a month, \$4,800 annually to those who qualified. That benefit is available to persons with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64

who qualify for the Government of Canada disability tax credit, but financial support is only one piece of the puzzle.

That is why the creation of a stand-alone statutory office of the advocate for person with disabilities matters. This office will be independent and the role of the Disability Advocate will not be appointed by government. The office will serve as an impartial voice – a voice focused solely on ensuring that the rights of the persons with disabilities are respected, protected, advanced across Newfoundland and Labrador.

I must acknowledge that advocacy in this province did not begin today. The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities – and welcome you here this evening to witness this bill being passed through this House – of Newfoundland and Labrador is a non-profit organization that was established in 1983 by persons with disabilities. These individuals knew deeply that organized advocacy was necessary to advance inclusion.

The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities have done extraordinary work, but they do not have the resources, the capacity or the funding to review government programs; investigate systemic barriers that hold institutions accountable at the highest level. That is why this role is vital.

In the last sitting of the House, my colleague, Minister Helen Conway Ottenheimer, who was then in the Opposition, brought forward a private Member's bill calling for the creation of this role. Today, we move that work forward.

Speaker, this is deeply personal for me, as I am the father of a child with severe disabilities who passed away. In 1989, my wife was pregnant with our fifth child. It was a Saturday night in March when she went into labour. Very quickly, doctors realized something was wrong, and the air

ambulance was called, and she was flown to Gander.

After what felt like forever, they informed me there were some difficulties with the baby and she needed to go to the Janeway. We did not know the full extent of our daughter's condition until we met with a neurologist in St. John's. They told us there were significant disabilities, more than initially realized. Tests were run; muscle samples were taken. At one point, she had to be flown to Montreal for a fresh muscle biopsy because previous samples had not survived transport.

Eventually, we were given a diagnosis known as congenital muscle fibre disproportion. Fifty per cent of her muscle fibres had developed and there was no explanation, no clear prognosis, no road map. We knew then we were in for a long journey.

Our daughter Candace could not breathe on her own. She was on a ventilator. She was tubal-fed. She had almost total paralysis. She could not even blink. For 3½ years, she remained in the Janeway hospital here in St. John's. Every month, we brought our four other daughters to see her in the intensive care unit. We wanted her to know her sisters. We wanted our family to remain whole, and at that point in time, we became the proud parents of another baby daughter, so there were five sisters visiting the Janeway.

Eventually, doctors agreed to let her come home to Fogo Island. At that time, there were virtually no supports in place. We brought her home anyway. We said we would not only fight for accessibility, we would fight for quality of life, but let me tell you something: Candace was brilliant. Her intelligence was above average. She was the happiest child; never disappointed; never upset; always full of humour, smiling. She never let her condition bother her.

As Candace grew older, we looked into educational opportunities and home-schooling was arranged. A few years later, assessments suggested she could attend school and she really wanted to go to school. At that time on Fogo Island, there were 17 school buses, not one had a wheelchair lift. The school board put a contract out for a wheelchair-accessible bus for tender. No one bid on it. They told me I had the right to bid myself, so I did. I flew to Montreal, purchased a used wheelchair-accessible bus, drove it back and my wife and I transported Candace to school ourselves for years.

Candace tried; she graduated high school with a topnotch average. At her graduation, using a speaking valve attached to her ventilator, she addressed her classmates. There was not a dry eye in the auditorium. She sang at one of her sister's weddings. She lived fully. But the journey was not easy. She had severe Scoliosis and surgery would have been too high risk. We chose comfort and quality over intervention.

In November 2007, at our home on Fogo Island, Candace went into congestive heart failure and passed away peacefully surrounded by her family. We are grateful that she was home, that she was comfortable, that she was scared in a hospital room, far from the place she loved.

I would not be standing here today if it were not for Candace. She shaped our family. She strengthened us. She taught us resilience. She taught us perspective. She taught us that accessibility is not charity; it's a dignity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: I am familiar with the gaps. I have navigated the system. I have experienced the exhaustion of advocating while simply trying to be a parent. Families should not have to fight every step of the way. They should not have to buy buses to access education. A statutory office for the

advocate for persons with disability will ensure when barriers and gaps exist, someone with authority can address them. It ensures systemic issues are identified and corrected. It ensures accountability.

Today, we have the opportunity to strengthen our commitment, not just in words, but in legislation, to say clearly that persons with disabilities deserve not only support but representation, oversight and advocacy for the highest level. For Candace, her family navigated the system. For every child who wants to go to school, for every adult who wants to work, to contribute, to belong, let us build a better Newfoundland and Labrador where inclusion is expected.

Our government is working hard to make sure that no one is left behind. When government works for all of us, we are delivering on a commitment to establish an independent Office of the Disability Advocate for the person with disabilities. The office is being designed for persons with disabilities, informed by extensive engagement with individuals and organization that represent life experiences. Stakeholders' input has directly shaped the mandate, structure and authorities of an advocate.

I think that this is imperative for all the 40 districts of this province and all of Newfoundland and Labrador to send this bill with Royal Assent to be passed.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Before I go with what I had written here, I just want to acknowledge it's not easy following the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's or the Member for Fogo Island -

Cape Freels who had children impacted. They were the voice and I think parents of children with disabilities will continue to be the voice. But now this statutory office that we're looking to create will magnify that voice. So I just wanted to just mention that.

So, Speaker, today is a good day. There's no question. We know, as already said, that nearly one in three people in our province identify as having a disability. That's a significant portion of our population. So there has been some progressive changes to the *Buildings Accessibility Act* passed in 2023, alongside with the important work, the *Accessibility Act*. This legislation was shaped by the voices of the disability community and guided by the principle of Nothing About Us, Without Us, which I'm sure we've heard lots, and will hear many more times. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the great work the Disability Policy Office does, in working across departments and community partners to identify and remove barriers.

This piece of legislation before us, Speaker, is another positive step for persons living with disabilities. While I admit there have been calls for quite some time to create a disability advocate similar to the Seniors' Advocate, the process to create an advocate was well under way when I became a minister in mid-May of 2025.

As many have said – just about everybody – this conversation did not begin today. It has been driven by the disability community itself; by individuals, by families and organizations who have constantly spoken up and called for meaningful change. Their message has been clear: Decisions that affect persons with disabilities must include their voices. Again, the principle of Nothing About Us, Without Us has guided much of this work, and is the principle that we, as legislators, should always keep front and centre.

A jurisdictional scan and additional research was conducted and examined potential

structures for the offices; however, this work was paused in 2023 as we know, when the House of Assembly began a review of the statutory offices. As part of this 2023 statutory office review, the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador evaluated a number of these independent offices, and it was recommended, as most people here know, that it be given to the mandate of the Seniors' Advocate to include the persons with disabilities rather than establish a new office.

I can hear the eyerolls from the members watching up here in the gallery, Speaker. The disability community made it very clear – very clear – that this approach was not acceptable for them, and that they had a strong belief that persons with disabilities deserve an advocate, an independent office to represent their needs. As I said, I know many of these groups are here today, and I'm happy they came out.

After the private Member's resolution brought by the Opposition of the day, now the government, to the floor of the House of Assembly, as we know there was a unanimous vote in favour of creating a disability advocate, and I applaud them today for bringing this piece of legislation forward.

When we were in government, we were in full support of creating an advocate for the persons with disabilities. We had listened carefully and took steps to respond. I would like again to thank the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities and the broader network, because it's not just that group. They kind of took the lead for the broader network, through their advocacy and engagement on this important issue.

Our commitment when we were in government was to move this forward with urgency and purpose to develop this legislation and establish this office. That meant taking time to consult with stakeholders, listen to the disability community, and review similar offices in

other jurisdictions to ensure we got it right. I'm sure this is what the government of the day has done as well.

In fact, when I was minister I know I had a few meetings with the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities and other stakeholder groups. Just the one day alone, Speaker, we met with the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, Inclusion Canada Newfoundland and Labrador, Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, EmpowerNL Disability Resource Centre, Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We had other meetings and there were other meetings rescheduled, some due to the unfortunate North Shore and Paddy's Pond fires. I even, Speaker, had a meeting with Rick Hansen – a virtual meeting – as most people would know from the Man in Motion, and asked him about his take on this. This is something that he was very much adamant for and thought something that this Legislature should push forward.

Our intention was to bring this forward in our next sitting of the House of Assembly, which would have been back in October. Regardless, I am extremely happy that it's here now, Speaker.

In the meantime, we as Opposition, and me personally as the MHA for Waterford Valley, will continue to support persons with disabilities and their families and the organizations that supports them in any way we can.

To close, at the end of the day, I am absolutely thrilled to see this legislation here on the floor of the House of Assembly and I applaud the government for taking and continuing the work that we started. That said, Speaker, this legislation about creating An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate should not be about who gets credit in this House. It shouldn't be about the Liberals saying we started it. It shouldn't be about

the PCs saying they called for it. It shouldn't be about the independents saying they called for it. It shouldn't be about the PCs saying they tabled it.

While all this is true, this bill should not be about politics. It should be about the House of Assembly coming together and voting on something because it's in the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and, more specifically, persons with disabilities and their family.

If there's any credit to give out and there certainly is, as said by many people here, that goes to people like Nancy and Syd from the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities; Paul Walsh – there are too many people to add, and I'll leave a ton out, so to the friends and family and, mostly again, the people identifying with having a disability and their families.

For that reason, I am proud to support the creation of a Disability Advocate in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm happy to say, I think, I played a small part in that and that's something that I'll be proud of whenever my days here are done and, mostly, I look forward to seeing this office established and the important work that this advocate will do in fairness, accessibility and inclusion for the people of our province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

This is the dawn of a new day, Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, the first piece of legislation introduced by our government and it is honouring the commitment that we made to establish a

stand-alone, independent Disability Advocate office.

Persons with disabilities needed a strong voice and, for many years, they felt ignored. They called upon their representatives for action and, today, we have to acknowledge the work of all of these advocates. We should bow our heads in gratitude to all the disability advocates who worked relentlessly for years, decades of advocacy and for those who advocated before them. We thank you for your advocacy and for your commitment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: On Monday, I heard from a disability advocate, that evening, who after the House of Assembly opened up that day, and after we introduced this bill in first reading, she was emotional. She said it brought her to tears. She thanked all of us for listening to those people with lived experience and she called them our knowledge keepers. She said, this is the dawn of a new day and she said, it's about change. She indicated that people who devote their lifetimes, years of lobbying for the rights of persons with disabilities have the opportunity now to witness change.

So I think it's important to thank them, to acknowledge everything that you've done to bring us to this day. I also want to acknowledge our Premier who remained committed and steadfast to ensure that, in our province, no one is left behind –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – and to ensure that this government, under his leadership, is a government that works for all of us.

Speaker, I also think it is important to recognize one of the proudest days I had in the House of Assembly and that was back in May of 2025 when we introduced the

private Member's motion and when we had unanimous approval and support for establishing a disability advocate.

We had 10 Members in the House of Assembly all stand, from all parties, in this hon. House. Each of those Members were passionate and shared their own personal experiences and some who had lived experiences. I want to thank them as well for their contribution because, as well, this has been possible because of the work of all of us. We were united; we were one; and we remain that today in this hon. House of Assembly.

Speaker, I also want to acknowledge the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities because under his direction and leadership over the last few months since we became government, he remained committed to ensuring that this legislation would be the best legislation we would see for disability people in our communities.

So thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I only have to say that, today, we all should be proud here too because all of us have remained committed. We all believe that this is the dawn of a new day, that we are seeing change. That is change in action, and we want to acknowledge the knowledge keepers who brought us here for this important legislation – those who are marginalized and who are oppressed, those whose voice, really have never been heard.

Now with a Disability Advocate, they will be heard, not only on an individual basis, but with respect to systemic issues. It is a dedicated office to address systemic issues, individual issues in all of our facets of services that disability services, like health care, like employment, like education, like housing. That is our commitment to you,

that your voices will be heard, and we are honoured to be able to be here today to see that possible.

Again, thank you to everyone who made this bill a reality, and we look forward to everything that comes as a result of this for our disability community.

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.

Speaker, I want to say that my heart is truly full because I want to commend all of my colleagues in the House, certainly many here who have expressed and shared their lived experience in both the joy and the heartache of supporting a family member with a disability.

I share that experience in a different way, and I know that so many people in our communities, in our families, everywhere, are very thankful for this day. I am very proud to stand here and support this, and I know that my colleague is as well.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible advocacy that is both present here in the gallery for a very long time and, of course, throughout the province as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: This has obviously taken a long time, a lot of effort to get here, but it is something that is absolutely necessary in our communities.

I just wanted to say people living with disabilities face barriers that are not often apparent to others. As a result, our laws and social programs often fail to meet the needs of those with disabilities because policy-makers are oftentimes unaware of how their

decisions affect people in community. But we have been reminded by people with lived experience and people who are advocating and I am very, very grateful for their presence in community and the hard work that they've done.

That's why the NL NDP really believes in the need for a Disability Advocate and are happy to support it and this is around the House, from every corner, I believe, that you are going to see the support for this, independent of government, to stand up for the rights and the needs and the interests of those living with a disability – and, of course, the NDP have made that commitment as well in their platform in 2021 and again in the campaign trail as well.

I think it's truly amazing to see this day come and I want to speak a little bit, if I can, Speaker, about my own personal experience. Because I actually worked for several years in this area when I was really quite in my early 20s. I remember there was a transition that was happening from what was formally known as Exon House, and it was when the Avalon Community Accommodations Board was first being formed.

I was hired as a group home worker for a little house on a street just off Leslie Street. It was shocking to the people in the neighbourhood and the community because they didn't know. They were afraid. Usually, that's what sets it all on fire because people don't understand that people with disabilities needs support within community.

I had such an incredible experience and education through that experience of working as a group home worker with individuals who were institutionalized within Exon House for several years and, questionably, shouldn't have been there. Thankfully, society has continued to progress since that time.

The beautiful part of that story and that experience for me, in my short time working

there, I was there for about a year, but it was something that really shaped my understanding of people living with disabilities in community, and the people in the neighbourhood who were very afraid of what this was going to mean – or the NIMBY, the not in my backyard principle, started to kick in – it was amazing because the head of the board at that point in time actively went out and engaged people in the neighbourhood and all of the people who were protesting, all of the people who had issues with this advancement, ended up becoming board members of that board.

That's how we talk about progress. That's how we talk about teaching people. So there's an education component to this.

There's a protection component to having a Disability Advocate. It's somebody to advocate, but it's about protections and educating the public along the way about how important it is that everybody is included and supported in our society.

So that was one of my earliest experiences that I had that really, truly shaped my attitudes. Of course, my own family experiences, with a family member with mental health issues, neurodiversity, and of course my privilege of working with the City of St. John's and working with a council that enabled us to be able to work with community and advocate with community so that the city itself could see, certainly, advancements.

This day today, this has been a conversation that's been happening here long before my time as a newbie here in the House of Assembly, but I am so honoured that we can see the spirit of collaboration when we talk about supporting people with disabilities in need. This is a day that I am very proud to be here in this House of Assembly.

My second experience working in community was with a national program called Ready, Willing and Able; another

program where I worked collaboratively with many of the organizations throughout the province to help individuals that were on the autism spectrum or with intellectual disabilities actually find sustainable employment in community.

I had the great privilege of actually advocating and be a labour market facilitator to go out and seek out those opportunities, engage those businesses, with people who could actually help forge the deal, who were supportive. There are businesses in our community who are very supportive and who actively support and employ people with disabilities. It's absolutely phenomenal to see it in action. So, again, another lived experience of seeing how support for people with disabilities is so crucial.

Again, in my maiden speech, I mentioned about the privilege that I had of working with the Down Syndrome Society of Newfoundland and Labrador in my artistic capacity as a photographer, trying to end the stigma to help showcase that people with Down syndrome are active, willing, wonderful contributing members of society.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: So these and many other experiences, whether or not they're lived or whether or not they're through work – but, ultimately, it is the community that has been advocating on behalf of people with disabilities that truly, truly is the workhorse. I want to say thank you to everybody who's had a hand in bringing this forward. I'm very proud to be here.

I also want to say one final word, as well, that I want to thank the Speaker for taking some independent initiative here in the House of Assembly for independent efforts to advocate for increased accessibility here in the House of Assembly, in that this is the peoples' House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: I thank you, Speaker, for highlighting that and forging that ahead to ensure that everybody can have access to the people's House.

In closing, I really just want to say thank you to the advocates. Thank you to everybody who's had a hand in this. Obviously, there always got to be checks and balances when we're talking about an advocate, and to have somebody who is truly independent being able to act on behalf of persons with disabilities, I think is extremely, extremely important.

So thank you very much for the opportunity. We will be very happy to support.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Lane): The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's truly an honour to rise in this hon. House at any occasion. I'd just like to say we've had a boisterous couple of days here, Mr. Speaker, but the beauty of this House and the people in this House is that, when something like this comes to our table, we get to transcend partisan politics and we get to talk about something that's absolutely the best move for the people of this province.

It warms the heart, and I'm proud and honoured with my colleagues in this House to be part of that. So thank you for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: I'll take a minute, if I may, Speaker, just to talk about the democratic process in and of itself, too.

What you see is we have representatives in the gallery here today and their continued

advocacy for this very position and for the Disability Advocate. What we've seen is, we've had House proceedings from days gone by, in the last session of the House, where this came from a PMR that came down to be debated, unanimously passed in the House, then it hits the table as legislation, then we have people join us to celebrate this day, to talk about something that's truly meaningful and that's going to give everybody equal access in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: If I may, we all have families, we all come from districts with lots of people and stuff too, and I'm just going to make this point a little self-serving here, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at our fathers and our mothers and as they age, and our seniors – and senior population is growing. That's a fact and we watch our heroes and heroines that have led the way and built this province for us, we see them age and we see them have difficulty. They need access as well.

I just want to say it to everybody here, as we think of people with disabilities, we really don't think about those elders that are having access problems and that as much as we should maybe. So I say that we keep them in top of mind as well and, as we respect everybody in society, we respect the elders, those people who paved the way for us, showed us how to be and that put us here in this beautiful place.

In saying that, I want to talk about something a little more personal in my district as well. I'll take this opportunity, if I may, Speaker, to give a shout-out to the Special Olympics team, the Howling Huskies, of Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: In working with them and celebrating them over the years, too, this definitely applies here.

But I want to talk about, if I may, my former CA, Carla Saunders. She is, right now, the Labrador navigator for the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I will say, in hearing, I was a little surprised at the actual number, of maybe one in three or 30 per cent in our province saying that they recognize themselves and identify as being disabled. In saying that, the uptake in Lake Melville is high, as well.

On behalf of Carla and her son and her work as the navigator there, I just want to say thank you to everybody and thank you to the minister for bringing this forward and making this possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, I'm so glad to be a part of this. I'm seeing everybody speaking from the heart, and that is a wonderful thing.

Again, like I said, there's always going to be the political stance. There are going to be people that put politics first. This is definitely not one of those cases. This is about people. This is about relationships. This is about advocacy working and coming full circle and becoming something that has meaning and that is going to compliment the other advocates that we reference in this House all the time, too.

Again, it was mentioned by the minister I believe, or perhaps even the Premier, it's not about duplication in any way, shape or form. It's about expansion of service. It's about having a dedicated resource for people with disabilities, and that is something truly, truly to be celebrated.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say one thing. A couple of weeks back, we all had the pleasure – all of us who decided to go – of going to the great District of

Labrador West with my colleague to see MINEx. I just want to relay one conversation we had with a young gentleman that was mind altering. To me it was mind blowing.

It was a young, autistic gentleman that was having a really in-depth conversation with our Premier and he said one thing that really struck me. I had never thought of this ever. He said to the Premier, do you know what, Premier, with the right supports, you could get us out and expand the workforce and have us chip in and do our part too.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: I was so inspired by this young man. I just had never thought of that. I had never thought of us taking to task the work in this House that leads to an advocate where something like that can become a reality, and he has the supports then. This young man would have the supports and the ability to have a dedicated resource to go through and to make something like that happen; to see that in Labrador West they have the same supports we have in Lake Melville and all across this beautiful province.

With that, I just want to say, Speaker, I'm so proud. I congratulate the minister on getting this bill to this House. It's momentous. It's monumental. It is celebrated by so many. It's affecting every district, every single person in this House, every family in this province. This is what we are here for. This is democracy and the House of Assembly at work for the people of the province.

I just want to say I'm so proud to be a part of this and to be a part of a government that recognizes that this is the way. It's about supporting everybody. It's about access for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

Certainly, it's a pleasure to speak in this hon. House today with the Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, Bill 1.

I just want to say, listening to the speakers today is very heartwarming. We talked about the decorum in this hon. House earlier and, when I looked around, I could see that everybody here is in agreement with this. It's wonderful what we're doing. It's a historical day. I'm so proud to be part of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Certainly, you know, those speakers that talked today about personal experiences and so on, you hit us all right here. Thank you for sharing.

Our Liberal team certainly values and celebrates important contributions to our province by persons living with disabilities, but we also have to recognize the obstacles and challenges that they face. We have made significant investments as government to address many of the physical, economic and social barriers faced by those persons with disabilities.

In order to build a more inclusive, accessible and supportive province, our government announced a \$26-million investment to introduce a basic income pilot, which we all supported, which provides up to \$400 a month to persons living with disabilities, and we also introduced an annual \$1,200 registered disability savings program, so that was \$100 per month, and this was probably the highlight of my ministry. It's been the highlight that I keep going back to. Despite all the things that happened prior to that and have happened after, I will always remember that day and that announcement.

That day I sat and stood with Dennis Gill. Dennis was the former president of InclusionNL, and Dennis was there at that announcement. To see how that made him feel and what an important day that was for the disability community. Wherever I went after that and talked to people, people with disabilities, the parents of people with disabilities, they were so appreciative of government for that.

I have to say that, certainly, you know, I guess I have the same feeling that you all have, and you all will have when you do something great and you know that it's going to impact so many families.

One of the previous speakers, as well, mentioned the Supported Employment Program. I've been advocated for funding for that for some time now. It's so important, especially on the Burin Peninsula. My colleague, the Deputy Speaker, and I have talked a lot about this, the fact that this has to continue.

In the community of St. Lawrence, for example, we have a supported employment group. It's called 3L Training and Employment – Marystown has much the same – but we have clients, and we have people who work with those clients. The clients in my community, they make jewellery. They actually make jewellery from flourspar. They feel part of the community. They're so proud when people walk in.

AN HON. MEMBER: I have a piece.

P. PIKE: Yes, some people here have some.

They feel so proud. They'll bring you over and show you what they're doing and show you how they do it, then they bring you out and try to sell you something.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: But it's fantastic. It's fantastic. They're becoming entrepreneurs, plus

they're learning that great skill. But, you know, that's what it's all about, isn't it? You feel so great about that.

One of the things that I want to talk about as well – I have so many things here, but I know it's getting late – is the whole idea around transportation for persons with disabilities. That's so important, you know, accessible vehicle grants, accessible taxi program. We put \$2.1 million into our poverty reduction plan.

I had the honour, as well, of visiting Clarendville, where they have the CREST busing system and that is working out fantastic and, the last few years, we've given out amounts of \$5,000 to \$10,000 to communities to do studies to see if that would work in their communities.

I must say, a great response and communities have actually come together. In my district, for example, Grand Bank and Fortune came together. They did a study, and they're looking at trying to get a busing system. It's so great for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It's wonderful for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. But going back to the CREST busing, that's done completely by volunteers – completely. If you volunteer to be a driver, they tell me, you might get to drive once every three or four months. That's how busy it is. That's how many people want to get involved.

There's nothing better, I guess, than getting a busload of seniors in your bus and driving. Imagine the conversations you can have, people from all walks of life. It's just wonderful, and that's where we need to be, but my point in that CREST busing is that up to 75 per cent of the people that ride that bus have mobility issues.

We are making a difference. We, I mean this House, are making a difference in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: We certainly, as well, would have done this legislation, I have to say, because it's something that we talked about and put a lot of work into it. There were studies done, as mentioned earlier, but thank you for getting it over the line.

We all worked together on this at some point. Now it's over the line and we all feel good about it today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: I'm just going to share a little story I have here – not a story so much as a call I had from a constituent this morning, but I'm working with this constituent over some time now. I just want to read it, and that will tell you, I think, or give you a sense of why we need an Advocate for persons with disabilities – why we need it.

I have a constituent in my district that's looking for funding for an accessible bathroom. Two years ago, we worked with this family to construct a wheelchair ramp, as the mother and her son have muscular dystrophy. This ramp allowed the son, who has a small window in his bedroom, to be able to access the ramp in case of fire, so we felt we had to do it and we did it. The cost was \$15,000, by the way, but we gave \$7,500 to the mother and \$7,500 to the son to create this ramp. It was something that had to be done for the safety of the family.

Now the mother is calling and saying we require an accessible bathroom; the bathroom is not accessible anymore. The son is getting older, the mother is getting more frail and neither the mother nor the son can use the bathroom now in the sense of showering and so on. The bathroom is not big enough; the shower is too small. You need a 36-inch shower; they have a 30.

The cost of making the bathroom accessible, she tells me – she had a quote in from a guy that does that type of work – is \$15,000. They have been given \$4,800 by the Muscular Dystrophy association in

Canada, but Muscular Dystrophy Canada it's called, pending approval from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

The mother got a letter a few days from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing stating that – I mean, I was, as you know, the Minister of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and there are rules and guidelines they have to follow. The mother got a letter stating that they'd received funding two years ago, so it'll be at least another five years before they can get any funding. They'd been denied because they've already spent over the limit.

Now the lifetime limit, by the way, for people taking advantage of this program is \$12,300. So I guess I should end there by just saying, that's why we need an advocate. That's one of the reasons why we need an advocate so the advocate can work with government offices to ensure that this doesn't occur.

Anyway, I had some other things, but I think I've said enough. I just wanted to make sure that we all have to realize that this is so important. I want to tell you, as well, that I, personally, will certainly be supporting this bill.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, first, hats off to the minister and the Premier; long overdue and glad to see that this bill came to the floor today.

Last May, when we did the PMR, I openly said I'm a person with a disability; something that I hadn't said in the 18 years prior to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, 20 years this January coming, I would have lost my leg, on January 15, 2007, and from that moment forward, I never once looked at it as a disability.

As a matter of fact, I think, like most people with disabilities, it empowered me and it became my ability, not my disability. I don't think that we recognize that enough in people. The disability community, if you take the time to sit and talk with any of them, you will quickly understand just how intelligent, how brilliant, how special, how much they can make you smile, what they have to offer to each and every one of us every single day. The sad part is that we failed them for a very long time, and this bill is a great start for that.

When we talk about accessibility issues and the things that we go through and see, certainly here in the House of Assembly, it is real eye opening. I think all of my colleagues – and I will say this: The Clerk and certainly the Speaker with his advocacy in here, there was a whole lot of stuff that went on over the last three years when I was in here without a leg and in a wheelchair after surgeries I required – being proactive – and I've never lost sight of that. There's so much respect for all my colleagues and certainly Ms. Hawley George – I know I'm not supposed to say her name, but I'm going to – and the Speaker this spring when he reached out to myself and the minister looking for support in doing some upgrades inside of this House.

The upgrades inside of this House are one thing, but what this bill is going to do is not only give the disability community a voice, it's going to give them something to fall back on. It's going to give them an opportunity to have their voice, not only heard and recognized, appreciated, but in some instances, it will give investigative authority, and it will help them fix issues that probably never should have been broken. So I applaud that immensely.

The one thing that we don't realize as people is how many people are affected by disabilities and situations and how quick it can happen to us as individuals. We sit here today, and I'm not going to name names because I'm afraid I'll leave people out, but in this room, every single one of us, I can guarantee you, are either affected or a friend of or have a disability, and that's massive. When you think about the statement that over 30 per cent of the population identifies – one in three, just think about that. Look to your left and look to your right, that means one of you probably identify as someone with a disability.

The bill speaks volumes to where we can take things and what we can do, and the advocacy that's happened for many, many years – I mean, this has been going on for a very long time and, unfortunately, in 2026, we're just doing this. It's too bad that it has taken this long, and I will personally apologize and I think it's taken way too long.

But we're here and I think it's a great moment, not just for the disability community in our province, but for the province as a whole. I think it sends a message to the rest of Canada and the rest of the world that we care about everyone and that we will stand for what is right. I applaud the Premier and the minister for making sure that this was – it's just not the significance of it being a bill that we're passing today, that's the easy thing; this was identified as Bill 1.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: So Bill 1, and not in a government that had been here for a long time, it's the very first bill that the Premier and all of his team decided to bring to the House of Assembly. That speaks volumes for character, for promises made and promises kept. It certainly speaks volumes for this whole House, that I believe is going to support this bill.

I'm not going to beleaguer this. I will say, as we're walking around and we pull into a parking lot, don't occupy the blue space if you don't have to. Don't leave your shopping cart next to it. Always understand that just because you can't see the disability, that doesn't mean they don't have it. On your darkest of days, give someone a smile and a wink because they probably need it a whole lot more than you do.

I thank you people for your advocacy. It's extremely important. It's how we got here today. Each and every one of you can take some credit for all of this and, at the end of the day, you can believe the Premier when he says he's here for all of us. He's here for all of you.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I would say people watching today will say this is how the House should run a lot more often. Everybody is getting up and chiming in. It's a good piece of legislation that's on the floor of the House, and those who want to support it are all kind of jumping and feel like we have our own stories to share from the various districts across this beautiful province that we represent.

I, too, want to say that I'm very happy to support Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Disability Advocate, and over the last hour or so since we've been in debate, I've been reflecting on story after story, various circumstances that – I guess life was busy – I had not recalled in a long, long time.

I want to start with my time over in CSSD. This is going back to maybe 2017, when I was the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development. Housed there, that minister was also Responsible for the

Status of Persons with Disabilities. I want to say that, like all of us, I think if we're being honest, we like to think we know a little bit about this and that and most things, but I learned so much from people in the disability office over there that maybe my colleague across the way has met some of them now. It was unbelievable. I would try to relate to them.

Often – and we're all different personalities – when I meet someone, I'm trying to learn something about them and I'm looking for a common ground. One of the stories that really sticks out with me to this day, there was a young lady – she may be still there – she was in a wheelchair. One day we were waiting outside, the bus was coming for her and I was waiting for someone to pick me up that particular day, so I started to share a story about, in December of '93, when I was pregnant, I had an accident. I wrote off the car, I ended up in a wheelchair for the rest of that winter – four months in a wheelchair – and trying to work from home and trying to manage everything.

So I shared the story, and I said: I know how tough it is to be trying to get around in the winter in a wheelchair, and I just did it for a tiny window in time. She looked at me, and she said: Minister, my barriers are not this chair, it is not bricks and mortar, and then she went into a conversation about attitude and acceptance and the way people see you. It stays with me to this day. I said: Thank you so much for sharing that story, and I won't assume that I know anything of what you're going through there anymore.

Also, in the DPO office was a young man who was blind. He used to come in every day with his dog. I was so in love with the dog; however, when he came in and that dog was working, incredible. You couldn't speak to him because he knew he was on duty, but once his owner got into work, the dog knew that he could wander around the department and be friendly. He had a bed and everything there.

So I just wanted to share those couple of stories about people that are out there every day. We jump up and we're racing out the door, we don't have mobility issues – and I do want to say it's not just mobility. I started focusing on mobility, but we take so many things for granted.

There are a lot of names that have already been shared here on the floor today, people that I came to know and meet and work with and have tremendous respect for on my journey as well; people like Nancy Reid's name; people like Dennis Gill, who served on the board. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Myles Murphy and his daughter, Renee Phair-Healey, who did an incredible amount of work and lots of reach out and lots of advocacy.

Disability, Speaker, when we think about them, they're really diverse, covering long-term physical, mental and cognitive conditions. So we can see the disabilities that are physical, that might hold someone back a little bit or might limit what they can do, but we can't always see the mental health, maybe the developmental delays, the learning disabilities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: And along that road, I think every one of us, as Members in this House, we know people who get up every day and they're fighting incredible battles that we don't even know about. That is why it's so important for us to have the supports in place so that they can, you know, live meaningful lives and go on and contribute to society – as my colleague mentioned, if we are able to pool from the disability community.

One of the things I also learned, the disability community are trying to move to a new language, and they would remind me: Let's not say disability, because it's like a barrier right away. Let's say different abilities. We all have different abilities, and I try to recall that as well, Speaker. You

know, there are two or three children that I represent in my constituency far along on the autism spectrum and, I have to tell you, they are in my heart and the hearts of pretty much everyone in our small communities, because there's just something incredibly special, and they're so smart. They just express things in a different way than we do.

I'm only going to use about five minutes, Speaker. I just wanted to chime in and say that I support this, and I do want to mention some programs that we have that are really helping people across our communities and across this province.

My colleague made reference to home repair. There's a little program called Home Modification and it's making a tremendous difference in many lives. If you represent rural, you're in and out of people's homes, maybe a little bit more than if you're representing a larger city. You're knocking on the door. So I've been in most homes, I would say, of the people I represent in my district, and it's always interesting.

If I go to a home and some little lady says: Come in my dear, I want to show you the bathroom, and then she referenced: My husband can come in here now and he can have a bath, just because we gave him the money and there's a kit. When they're no longer able and they're far along in life to lift their foot in over, there's a little door and they can go in. That means the world to people.

We have to be in tune with the needs of the people that we serve, and we have to make sure that these programs that, on the big, grand scheme of things, are not a lot of money, but they do make an incredible difference in the lives of people. It certainly helps people with different challenges to be able to stay in their own homes longer.

I'm just going to sit down and say I'm happy to support this bill. I think we represent people across this great province that really

just want to be able to live. They need the supports to be able to live independent, meaningful lives, whether that's go to the movies, go to the grocery store, go to sensory-safe spaces and things like that.

So I'll just end with something that I learned during my time there and since, we should be moving forward with their motto of Nothing About Us Without Us. I'm happy to support Bill 1 in this House today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to come back to this House of Assembly for my third term and speak on behalf of the people of Placentia West - Bellevue, especially our disabilities community.

I am father of a son with autism and that's what brought me to this House of Assembly. I advocated on behalf of him when I didn't know where to turn and it got kind of thrown at us. I know this, from the community, that we didn't lay it on somebody else's plate and say we want a free handout or we want you to take care of this. It was about making sure that we could get that quality of life, an education, an understanding of how life works.

Luckily, we had very early intervention because of, I guess, being able to notice a couple of things weren't quite exactly the same as our older boy and stuff like that. There were lots of different things. So I said, well, why don't we take him to the Janeway – we got a recommendation, obviously, from our GP and we took him to the Janeway and the rest is history.

He's 14 and because of some supports – he hasn't had anybody helping navigate school even since Grade 2. I'm happy to say that

last year he graduated Grade 7 with, I think, it was a 76 average.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: But that took a lot of work. That didn't come easy.

The disabilities community has asked for this for a long time. Thirty-two per cent of our province identifies as having a disability. That's not always a mental health issues or cognitive or physical; sometimes it's a combination of all. Sometimes people are nonverbal, and that's the issue, that's what drove me to know that we needed a disabilities advocate.

I worked with the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair that just spoke before me. We talked about this seven years ago, when I first started in 2019, and we shared our experience. Then, moved forward to the next one and we had former Minister Abbott and we done the same thing and I went to him and I said, I think we need a disabilities advocate, and we started the ball rolling. We created a board and that way the board could relate back to the community and could relate to the department.

Through that board, I think, that was their biggest recommendation, was that they saw that there was a need for a disabilities advocate. Because we needed a Seniors' Advocate, as well, at the time and both were housed in the same department at the time, but we also had a changeover in the Child and Youth Advocate. That really brought to attention how important the advocacy side was. Because the Child and Youth Advocate can go to court with a child that's in care or anything like that. So that's what we kind of need for our seniors that are not able to navigate the system. That's what we need for our disabilities community that's not able to navigate the system on their own.

So today is a historic day. I commend the Premier and I commend the minister, and I

commend this team and I commend this House because without this kind of compassion, understanding and truly advancing our disabilities community, it's incumbent on us all to take that responsibility serious.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you.

I can advocate all I want as a parent, but if I don't have anybody listening, I can fall flat. I think the Janeway found out pretty soon that I was going to be pretty persistent. I didn't know at the time if my MHA was fit to eat. I didn't know that I could go to my MHA and say that at that time. But then as I started navigating the system for my son, I realized that the help of my MHA was so important. So I entrusted everybody. I had no choice.

That's why I think with the minister putting in the piece of this legislation that's so important, and that's the piece about the lived experience, because there are no ivory-tower decisions need to happen to our disability's community. If you're not living it, you really don't understand 100 per cent what's going on.

We're not all in the same boat as parents. We're all trying to navigate a system and we're trying to do the best for our children, but as the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's said, it's a journey that never ends. But what's always in the back of every parent's head is, what's going to happen with my child if something happens to me? It's scary.

But when we have leaders that are sitting in this House right now that have compassion, we are going to have a better province all the way around because we have compassion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: So I will say that this is a very historic and important day. On a personal

side, after living this life, you will not understand the immense pride. I have listened to debate today in that chair. It made a difference.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: My son is only one of that 32 per cent of the population, but he's everything in my world. So is every other child in a family that's always dealing with this. My colleague from Fogo Island - Cape Freels was so eloquent in how he explained his daughter, Candace, that if that never touched your heart, then look for re-election or a by-election or something because you don't deserve to be here. I want to say thank you.

In closing, I will say thank you, again, to the Premier and the minister for bringing this forward and for having the support of caucus and Cabinet to make sure that this happened today. I want to thank everybody that came here to be part of this historic day. It makes a difference. Because we were listening to what you had to say, but we never ever thought that we were going to not listen to the boots on the ground – and I'm not saying that that's what was happening, but 2026 seems to be a little long overdue but we're here now. Pat yourselves on the back. You guys got us here and we're all here now and we're all going to live this experience together.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I was reading a little cheat note here.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm going to try this at the start because I just want to note, when people were talking about compassion, I can't even make it 10

seconds. The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and I think the Member for Humber - Gros Morne, earlier this week, when he gave his maiden speech weren't afraid to show their emotions. I gave a speech on Tuesday night in an event and a lot of my female caucus members were there. I can't ever give a speech when I start talking about my kids and hold it together. It is very, very difficult but I think it's great that people in this House, men in this House, are willing to show their emotion, show that they care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Years ago, I think that would have been an embarrassing moment for men in this House of Assembly, but we've come a long way, and we support each other in those kind of moments. I think it's really great to see.

I made it through; pretty good.

I know we're coming to the end of the day, so I'm not going to take 59 minutes, especially because, believe it or not, Speaker, everybody's on the same page – and how great is that to see?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: And because we're all on the same page, people who have all spoken, I echo every single thing that everybody has said so far, and the people that speak after me, I know, are going to say the same thing.

I did laugh a little bit, I have to say. I know today was a loud day. In my honest opinion, I didn't find it any louder than usual, and I'm really not surprised that, an hour or two later, we all calmed down and agree on what's important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That's how the House has worked since I've been here, and I know it will continue to work that way. The important things will get done. We always look out for why we're here and why we got elected, and that's to look after

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, each and every one of us.

I want to thank all the advocates, community organizations, families, everyone who has worked towards getting to where we are today and to push government, and trust me sometimes government needs a push. It's difficult to get things done sometimes, even when people are on the same page. It does take a lot of work. It takes a lot of time. Even to draft this piece of legislation didn't just happen yesterday. There are a lot of people behind the scenes who did a lot of work, and there's a tremendous amount of advocacy that went into this, and those people see the fruits of their labours and their efforts today. They should be extremely proud to see what's happening here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I can't mention everybody, of course, but I want to – there was already mentioned, Renee and Myles. They might have been two of the first individuals that I had the pleasure to meet and work with after I became a minister back in 2021.

I'm glad that – I certainly saw Renee is here today, and certainly people that I knew before I was elected here as well, lucky enough that they trusted me to be their legal counsel. That was a great honour. It's great to see them here today. I think it just shows in Newfoundland and Labrador, you just cross paths with people. It's such a small place and we're all affecting everybody. The people we meet, you never know when you're going to meet them again down the road. I think that's what's great about this place is that we are small, we're all together and we do all want to go in the same direction.

I'm not going to talk politics, but I am going to talk about sort of my political philosophy without talking about partisan politics, what I've always believed and what I try to live by when I'm making decisions, when I was

making decisions as a minister and premier. It's always, where does government help? Where is it the role of government to try to do something?

You can't do everything for everybody, but you have to have a basis for making those decisions on who you help, why you help. I always think you help when it's just trying to give everybody the same chance, Speaker. Everybody deserves to get ahead in this life. Some people have it very easy and some people have it extremely difficult.

So how do you help those people? You have to make that decision to say: Everybody just needs the chance. Everybody needs a fair chance in life. Some people need a little more help than others, and that's what government is there for. That is my philosophy; help the people who just need, who deserve the chance that other people in this province have.

I know now that when we have a Disability Advocate, with this bill, the strength of this bill, it's going to be easier to articulate what those barriers are, what government needs to do, what groups need to do, what organizations need to do and what people in this province need to do to try and give people that little bit of fair play so everybody in this province can reach their dreams, whatever they are; whether you need a bit of help financially, you need a little bit of help physically, whether a building needs to be changed, whether you just need to talk to somebody or whether you need real serious supports in your life.

There's an array of those things and not one policy, not one government decision, not one piece of legislation is going to solve all those problems for everybody. We need to continue to look at what those solutions are. We need to know what those problems are. We need to know what those barriers are, and there are people in this province who can't articulate that for themselves. Maybe some people don't even know what they need, as the Member said, maybe some

people don't know who to talk to or didn't know you could talk to your MHA about that.

So let's make sure that, not only that this Disability Advocate, when they're put in place, that we promote the office, that we make sure this office is available to everybody who needs it and let's not forget that we are 40 advocates here in this room. We have a job to do as well. We can assist the Disability Advocate. We can assist people in the community.

I know how tremendously hard we all work each and every day as MHAs, and that's the job we're put here to do. Being a minister and a Premier and a parliamentary secretary, while all very extremely important, that can come and go, but we were elected to be advocates on behalf of our constituents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: And trust me, the job of minister and premier does come and it does go.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: But as I make that joke, I am still here as an MHA.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So it is an amazing opportunity for us to do good things for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's amazing that we can be on the same page. This House offers an opportunity every day to continue to do that work and to be the voice of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I know that my caucus was incredibly excited, happy, engaged in having the opportunity to be here today to debate this bill. My colleague from Placentia - St. Mary's, when she went to the briefing yesterday, she texted after it was over and said this is a really good bill. She told our entire caucus.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: The bad news is I have some questions for the minister in Committee, but we'll get there.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: But they're good probing, positive questions, and, look, I tell you what, if people want to know how this House can work, watch Committee when we get to it and look forward to the answers. I look forward to the opportunity as well to have those questions answered by the minister.

Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you to everybody else.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for St. George's - Humber, that debate is now adjourned.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the debate be now adjourned.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion has been carried.

Before we conclude for today, I know there are some Members here that want to have a few words. I am going to first recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Before I do, I just want to say on the last one, and I'm just using a little bit of discretion as Speaker, maybe not quite within the rules of order per se –

AN HON. MEMBER: You are the Speaker.

SPEAKER: But I am the Speaker.

I just want to say that I'm very, very proud of the work that has been accomplished, the second part of this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Good job, everyone.

Anyway, I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Old habits die hard, hey, calling yourself the Speaker.

I think we're all going to take a couple of minutes just to thank Bob Escott for being (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We heard, in a Member's statement earlier today, the tremendous and long career he's had and the contributions he's made to Newfoundland and Labrador and thank you for all of that.

I guess I can say, Bob, it's been a real pleasure to work with you here in this House of Assembly over the last years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: You have a tremendous ability to be serious and take the solemnness of this place and radiate it out to all of us, while at the same time, you can crack a joke and you can have a smile and know that there's an appropriate time for that as well. I think that's a tremendous skill set and it really speaks to, I think, who you are. You've done

such tremendous, serious work in this province, but done it with a smile on your face and with a very kind heart – with the exception of the time you wouldn't let me in here to vote. But the seriousness of it was, he seriously told me with a smile on his face that I can't come in here because I missed the bells.

That moment really, I think, sums up who he is. We're going to miss you around here. I'm going to miss you around here. To your wife, I guess more to see of him at home. I don't know if that's good or bad for you, but he's your problem now.

But seriously, congratulations on a well-deserved retirement from this place. You can watch us every day Monday to Thursday at 1:30. I'm sure you'll tune in, and we'll do our best to behave even though you're not here.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've said a few kind words and I'll say more – I said them already in previous, but I will repeat them. First, I'll start with the security. We take it for granted and we know that, in many jurisdictions, where we've had politicians, because of their political views, who have been killed. I'm not saying that we ever feel that way here, but I think, in many ways, we take it for granted. It's like the air we breathe in many ways. But certainly when Bob was out in charge of security in here, we always knew that we were in good hands, that's for sure. So we certainly thank you for that.

Again, it's good to see a fellow Celtic that I went to school with in this role. I will say this, I had the privilege of working and the pleasure of working with his wife, Helen,

setting up a radio station at Holy Heart, and with Daniel, their son, who's done quite well. But I know that there's education, that it was always important and integrity is certainly core.

I will echo the Leader of the Opposition, certainly a great sense of good humour. I know that while the Member for Topsail - Paradise, on this side and here, I mean, he endured a lot. I don't know if he improved any but nevertheless, the fact that he was able to give it back to us.

I know that in his retirement, I'm sure he's not going to be stuck at home. I have a funny feeling there'll be more rides on the motorcycle. I would assume more promotional events for his author wife and, sort of, he will be the baggage handler and the events organizer, but I know that whatever he's going to be doing next it's going to be in service of someone either in the family or some community organization.

On behalf of Sheilagh and I here, thank you very much for your work and best wishes in your retirement – well, retirement from here, anyway.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess I'll start off, Bob, you've seen more than a few people stand in this chair right here, and to the Leader of the Opposition to his point, he's seen a lot of us, a lot of people come and go.

Long before you were here, you were serving your country and you were serving your province – a lifetime of service, and for that we are all truly thankful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: I can attest to the sense of humour that he has. Anybody who cheers for the Toronto Maple Leafs certainly needs a sense of humour. I just wanted to get that in there, but I have watched him work in this House of Assembly. As has been said, previously, from the serious nature of the role and what it means (inaudible) and what this House of Assembly means to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the professionalism you have brought to that role.

I also know how comfortable you have made all of us, as MHAs, here in this House of Assembly, by the simple smile, the simple gesture, the simple, how are you doing? All of those things matter and sometimes, as I said, it's not always the great, big deeds; it's those small, little things that you have done for everyone. We have been a part of your life in this House of Assembly and for that we all thank you, again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Now as you move on to your next great adventure, and if it's accompanying your wife Helen on her book sales, I have no doubt that if you are accompanying her, book sales will increase.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: As we say goodbye to you as a colleague, we also want to say good luck to you as a friend because that's what you have become to all of us here in the House of Assembly. I will say to you, Sir, as my father said to me, you don't measure a man's wealth by the amount of money he has in his pocket; you measure it by the friends he keeps, and you, Sir, are a wealthy man.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I guess I got so caught up earlier in trying to figure out who the speaker was that I introduced the Leader of

the Official Opposition and I didn't really say what it was he was going to have to say a few words about. I guess for the purposes of *Hansard* and anyone who might be watching, we're speaking about Robert Escott who is retiring now as our Sergeant-at-Arms here at the House of Assembly.

I've known Robert – we go back a good many years ago. I think it was back in the late '80s, early '90s, I got my first real government job, if you will, at the RNC, and I had actually worked there for a few years in the records department and then in the communications centre. I got to know a lot of officers, of course, over the years. I had two brothers who were actually in the RNC, and my father-in-law was a police officer in the RNC, but I got to meet Bob there. Bob has a sister, Sue, who was also an RNC officer. I'm not sure if she's still there or retired now.

Bob was one of those guys – because there were a lot of characters there and Bob can attest to – he always looked the part. Just like now, always looked the part. His uniform was always impeccable. He always had that calm demeanor, that stern demeanor, I think, that a police officer needed, but he also had that smile as well. I know that when he was there as a sergeant and so on, that all the officers that reported to him, they respected him. You could tell. You could really tell.

Many years have gone by, I guess, and I would run into Bob every now and then here and there perhaps at some sort of a ceremonial event, Remembrance Day or whatever. He's involved with the RNC Honour Guard, of course. But I was really somewhat, I guess, surprised and excited when he came here to the House of Assembly. I got to see him do his work here. As others have said, he has done a tremendous job as our Sergeant-at-Arms, and he is so meticulous with everything that he does.

I think we've all, perhaps ourselves, or we work with other people in the past where you can tell someone, when they're sort of going through the motions. They're working and they're doing their job, but they're not really committed the way they should be. But Bob has always been so committed in this House of Assembly, in this Chamber, outside this Chamber, with everything that he has done related to his duties.

One thing I've come to learn since taking on the role of Speaker of the House of Assembly is that our House of Assembly staff are like a family, really. Certainly I've heard our Table Officers and others over the last few months in particular, when we finally got wind of the fact that Bob was going to retire, everybody was so sad to hear that he was going to be leaving, and that he was going to be so missed. Everybody had good stories, positive stories. They all love him to death, no doubt about it.

I'm not sure if he's kind of, like in a family setting, if he was sort of a big brother or maybe a little bit of a grumpy uncle or maybe a combination of both, but everybody in this family certainly has the utmost respect for Bob and the job that he's done, as I say, whether it's been here in the Chamber, outside the Chamber during the mace tours that we started last year under former Speaker Bennett, and we actually did one at O'Donel High about a month ago, and Bob was there front and centre.

We're very pleased, obviously, to have Alex Brennan as our new Sergeant-at-Arms, and I know he's going to do a great job as well, but we're definitely going to miss Bob. So, Bob, I just want to thank you for your service to this House of Assembly, and as has been said, to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador over a very long professional career in public service. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts, and we're really, really going to miss you.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Carbonear -Trinity - Bay de Verde, that this House do now adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

This House do now stand adjourned until, tomorrow, Monday, March 9, at 1:30 p.m.

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