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Speaker: Honourable Wade Verge, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I am pleased to welcome to the public gallery today a number of people: Juno award winning singer-songwriter Amelia Curran; actors and writers Andy Jones and Mary-Lynn Bernard; Heidi Edgar, Executive Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association; Co-Chair Meaghan Barnhill; as well as members of the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health.

Welcome to the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we have members' statements from members for the District of St. George's – Stephenville East; the District of Placentia – St. Mary's; the District of Bonavista North; the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair; the District of Torngat Mountains; and the District of St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for the District of St. George's – Stephenville East.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I rise to congratulate Mrs. Alfreda Gillis who will celebrate her 104th birthday tomorrow. Mrs. Gillis married Tommy Gillis in 1931 and they had five children. They lived in Highlands, where they owned a farm and made or grew everything they required. Mr. Gillis often worked away, and Mrs. Alfreda Gillis had to care for five children and a farm at a time when there was electricity and no running water.

In the 1950s her and her husband started a business which employed many people in the area and supplied pulpwood to the Bowater mill. Mrs. Alfreda Gillis carried out the administrative work for the business.

Mrs. Gillis is still very active. She cooks, knits, does crossword puzzles, and reads newspapers to follow provincial politics very closely.

I ask all members of the House to join me in wishing Mrs. Alfreda Gillis a very happy 104th birthday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Placentia – St. Mary's.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. F. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Ida Young, formerly Ida Linehan of North Harbour, St. Mary's Bay.

On a June night in 1980, the Linehan home in North Harbour was destroyed by fire, claiming the lives of five of Ida's siblings. One of the four who survived, Ida, fifteen at the time, was severely burned and spent several months in treatment and recovery. Her family was ripped apart by this unimaginable tragedy and the community of North Harbour was changed forever.

Mr. Speaker, Ida survived near death to graduate from high school, and married her fisherman husband, Thomas Young of St. Bride's, and following the struggles of the cod moratorium and as a mother of three small children, she travelled daily from St. Bride's to St. John's to return to school, and today is a successful employee with the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, on September 7 in North Harbour, Ida launched her book entitled *No Turning Back: Surviving The Linehan Family Tragedy*. The little community literally became a giant parking lot as over 500 people showed up to support the launch. The book is a story of tragedy, heartache, and indomitable courage as well as incredible community support, and I understand will soon to third printing.

Mr. Speaker, if there ever was a story of inspiration and courage, it is the story of Ida Young.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand here today to recognize the power of wanting to make a difference with a little compassion, love, and help from friends.

Before Christmas 2013, Collette Kean Attwood of Badger's Quay wanted to do a little something extra for people who are elderly, lonely, bereaving a recent loss, on fixed or reduced income, or afflicted with a special need: physical, mental, or medical.

She used Facebook to contact friends to ask them to buy an extra Christmas gift of a pair of PJ's for someone who might fit the aforementioned criteria. Last year, the PJ project saw nearly 100 people in our area receive a gift.

This year, Collette, along with Denise Hounsell Kean and friends too numerous to list, have named their mission Something Small – Blanket Project and are preparing gifts of blankets. One participant reports buying a blanket at Gander, relating the Something Small story and then got an extra blanket donated by the owner of the store. Currently, there are well over 100 participants.

As the Something Small crew plan to collect and distribute their blankets in the coming days, I ask all members to join me in saluting their humanitarian gesture of warmth and care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Mr. Claude Rumbolt of Mary's Harbour who just retired from the FFAW.

Claude was a true visionary who spent his lifetime working for and with the fisher people along the Labrador Coast. After the collapse of

the cod fishery, Claude saw tremendous opportunity in the crab fishery, when everyone else thought it would never work. Twenty-five years later, crab remains king.

Claude spent twenty-one years as the Labrador representative with the FFAW where he worked tirelessly on behalf of the people of Labrador, advocating for quotas and policies that would benefit the harvesters and processors.

As quoted by the general manager of the Labrador Fishermen's Union Shrimp Company, Claude's philosophy was "we will find a way!"

In 1977, Claude did a fishery report for then Fisheries Minister Walter Carter that resulted in plants being constructed in Mary's Harbour and Cartwright.

Claude was also very active in his community, participating in many development associations and community councils in Southeast Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Claude Rumbolt on his well-earned retirement and wish him well in all future endeavours.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to pay tribute to a well-known and respected Inuit elder, Mr. Boas Jararuse of Makkovik who passed away on Monday at the age of eighty-five.

Mr. Jararuse was born in Killinek in 1929 and relocated to Makkovik from Hebron in 1959.

He was actively involved in helping to improve community infrastructure and an active member of the Moravian Church. He was dedicated to the preservation of the Inuktitut language and was a role model in the preservation of Inuit culture.

He served as a board member for the then Labrador Inuit Association in the 1970s and 1980s including one term as vice president.

Up until recently, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Jararuse would travel by snowmobile back to his childhood home in Hebron every spring. I had the pleasure and privilege of being out on the land with him on several occasions. I will always cherish those memories.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in paying respect to Mr. Boas Jararuse and expressing our condolences to his family. Labrador has indeed lost another native son.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud to stand today to congratulate the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health. Last spring I held a Mental Health Town Hall in St. John's Centre. Over 300 people attended. Together we identified huge challenges facing people with mental health needs, but raising dialogue is not enough. Key groups and individuals came together to collaborate and decide how to move forward. The coalition was born.

The over thirty-five members met every Friday morning for months and shared insights, strengths, and strategies. Next came the LAUNCH, a celebration of all things mental health. Over 1,000 people came because mental health affects us all.

This wonderful coalition of dedicated, determined service providers, activists, consumers, and allies has done much to encourage public discussion of mental health issues and is working to find solutions. This is civic engagement at its best.

Among the members are actors Andy Jones, Mary-Lynn Bernard, Mary Walsh, and Lynda Boyd; comic John Sheehan, musician Amelia Curran, labour leader Mary Shortall; activists

Mark Gruchy, Meaghan Barnhill, Tina Davis, Darren Fancey, Paula Corcoran, Boyd Perry, Robert Leamon, and more.

I ask all members to thank the coalition who care and who will work together to ensure we have the best mental health services possible for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is going to part with a little bit of Parliamentary tradition here now. I was thinking, as the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East read his statement, about a lady who reached the milestone of 104. I thought it would be good if we started a tradition in this House. I think whenever anybody is recognized here for passing the 100-year mile mark, that as members we should all stand and give them a round of applause.

[Applause.]

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Almost twenty-five years ago, on December 6, 1989, fourteen women were brutally murdered at Montreal's École Polytechnique. These women were deliberately targeted because the gunman believed them to be feminists. This remains one of the worst incidents of mass murder in Canadian history.

In 1991, the Government of Canada designated December 6 as National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women in memory of those lost in what has become known as the Montreal Massacre.

The loss of these women is still felt keenly by their families, their friends, their industry, and their country. This horrific act precipitated a movement that strives for a society where women are treated with equality and respect, and we still work every day to achieve those aims.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to effectively prevent and reduce violence in our society, we must first raise public awareness of the unacceptability of all forms of violence and abuse. Through the Violence Prevention Initiative our government continues to partner with community stakeholders towards ending violence against women, and towards achieving equality.

Just recently, the Provincial government launched the fifth annual Purple Ribbon Campaign with the purpose of promoting public awareness about the prevention of violence against women. It coincides with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, beginning on November 25 with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and running until December 10, which is International Human Rights Day.

Mr. Speaker, as a reminder to us all of the events of December 6, 1989, I would like to read the names of those fourteen women who died that day into the record of the House of Assembly: Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Kluczniak-Widajewicz, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St. Arneault, and Annie Turcotte.

On Saturday, flags at Confederation Building will be at half-mast from sunrise to sunset to mark this tragic day.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I ask that we all take a moment of silence to remember these women and all the women whose lives have been impacted by violence.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: At the Premier's request, the House will take a moment of silence.

[Moment of silence]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the Premier for his advance copy of his statement. Of course, December 6 is a somber day. It is a day that all Canadians remember those tragic and those horrific events – a day that will be remembered, as I said, forever. Almost twenty-five years have passed since these fourteen bright and promising young engineering students were murdered on the last day of classes at the École Polytechnique.

The Montreal massacre was a backlash against the women's movement. The gunman, whose name will never be read into any record, ordered the men out of the classroom before opening fire on those young women. Women have and continue to endure tremendous injustice because of their gender, both here and abroad.

December 6 is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women; but, really, every day needs to be a day of remembrance. It is crucial to remember. We remember because we learn.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I, too, thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement. With everybody in this room, I remember only too well that day twenty-five years ago this coming Saturday. We must never allow ourselves and society to forget that these fourteen women died for no other reason than being women. We must always challenge anyone who might question – and unfortunately it happens – why we stop on December 6 to remember these women and all women who have died for the same reason.

We should be proud as Canadians that we have this National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Promoting awareness is important, but we must also have

programs essential for the protection of women who are at present suffering violence – again, for no other reason but that they are women. We must stop the cycle of violence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I am pleased to rise in this hon. House to recognize tomorrow, December 5, as International Volunteer Day.

Volunteers are the backbone of our society, and many of the essential services available in our communities are a result of the time, energy, and dedication of our volunteers.

Nowhere is that more true than in Newfoundland and Labrador, where volunteers, on average, give 155 hours of service per year. For a Province that has just over 500,000 people, we have well over 190,000 active volunteers.

The efforts of volunteers to improve the lives of people in our neighbourhoods and communities, our Province, our country, and increasingly around the world, are proof that the spirit of giving back in Newfoundland and Labrador has never been in better shape.

Mr. Speaker, International Volunteer Day, observed annually by the United Nations, recognizes and celebrates volunteerism, with a special focus this year on honouring people's participation in making a difference at all levels: locally, nationally, and globally.

This year's theme, People's Participation. Make change happen, volunteer! highlights the ability of volunteerism to help create open spaces for dialogue and inclusion, ultimately fostering the participation of people from all age groups, genders, and backgrounds.

Mr. Speaker, as a government, we acknowledge the role of the community sector and its immense value and importance to the social, economic and cultural fabric of our

communities. In fact, we commenced an ambitious Open Government Initiative this year to build even stronger partnerships with communities and give people a greater say in the decisions that make a difference in their lives.

As I look around this hon. House, Mr. Speaker, I see colleagues who are supporting and recognizing the contributions of people across this Province on a daily basis. You thank volunteers and acknowledge their outstanding efforts in many ways, including through special events, awards, and even statements by members.

On International Volunteer Day, I encourage everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador to be inspired by these examples, and to look around their own communities and celebrate exceptional people and organizations that are enriching the lives of others.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Volunteers are incredible people. Their devotion, hard work, and countless hours they give to advance social and economic causes bring tremendous benefit to all our communities. On behalf of all members of the Official Opposition caucus, we recognize the value of volunteerism and acknowledge volunteers being at the heart of every single community.

Our volunteers serve on local service districts and our municipalities across the Province, on recreation and heritage committees, operate local museums, social enterprises, and advocate for change, both locally and abroad. Our volunteer firefighters dedicate endless hours to saving lives and protecting personal property.

Service clubs like Rotary, Lions and Lionesses, Kinsmen and Kinettes, United Way, Community

Food Sharing Association, and a number of charities, non-profits, and organizations have lasting impacts in our community. Volunteers have been making incredibly big things happen in my district and across the Province from inclusive playgrounds, community centres, to establishing programs for people with disabilities.

Government has really failed to inspire me with their lack of movement on their proposed Open Government Initiative as it fails to provide high-value data, information, that can serve beneficial to volunteers and the non-profit secretariat. People matter and our volunteers deserve to be celebrated.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Today, we have several volunteers and activists in the gallery who are passionately concerned about mental health services in our Province. Most work with non-profit community organizations that provide essential and crucial services. They work on shoestring budgets, yet over the past two years government has reduced funding to many of these groups. These volunteers and organizations must be fully supported. Their work is essential to the well-being of our people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Christmas approaches, residents and businesses in communities and regions

throughout the Province will begin decorating their properties for the holiday season.

As properties come alive with sparkling lights and decorations, they symbolize the magic of the Christmas season, the innocence of children, the warmth of the time spent with family and friends, and the treasured traditions and customs.

Over the last number of years, a special tradition has been formed in capital cities around our great country called the Christmas Lights Across Canada. At each of these events, Christmas lights are illuminated on public buildings and public grounds.

For the launch of this truly Canadian celebration, the community comes together and revels in the holiday spirit. This year, hundreds of thousands of holiday lights will brighten the country, creating a joyful connection among all Canadians.

Tonight, our residents will join other Canadians for the twenty-eighth time as we launch Christmas Lights Across Canada. With approximately 60,000 LED lights sparkling on a Christmas tree in front of the Confederation Building, around the Petten Building, the Arts and Culture Centre, and along Prince Philip Drive, it will surely be a joyous event.

Mr. Speaker, this event will be entertaining for families and people of all ages.

I am pleased to be joined by our hon. Premier this evening to host this event and to have the Hits 99.1 Morning Show team of Mitch Colbourne, Brian Bradley and Keliegh Butt serve as the Masters of Ceremonies.

The Royal Newfoundland Regiment Band and the Beachy Cove Elementary School choir, also known as the Beachy Tones, will be performing and singing Christmas carols. Refreshments will be served.

I encourage all members of the public service, members of the hon. House, and all residents to attend tonight's event and help us kick-off the Christmas season.

The event begins this evening at 6:15 in the lobby of the Confederation Building, East Block. We hope to see you all there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly encourage everybody to come out to tonight's event as well. Christmas is one of those times where, especially in this House, we put our politics aside and join together to celebrate. It is a season, Mr. Speaker, that is magical.

I look forward to tonight's event and look forward to the festivities that the Premier and the minister are about to undertake. It is the brightest and best thing that I can say they have done, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement as well. We also would like to wish everybody a very good time this evening. We know that it is always a special time whenever the lights on Prince Philip Parkway are lit up with the colours of the season.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, the Third Party, we wish everybody to have a good time. Remember everybody to play safe as well this Christmas and enjoy yourselves this evening over a cup of hot chocolate.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the objectives of questioning the Humber Valley Paving contract, our issue was to ensure that all subcontractors and suppliers that are owed money get paid for the work that they have done. The minister said yesterday that any company out there that feels they have a claim should go to Small Claims Court and put the claim in. He went on to say that we will look at the avenues that we have at our disposal to be able to rectify that.

I ask the Premier: Are you now saying and suggesting that government is willing to cover all costs, including legal costs, for these companies?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I outlined over the last number of days, the mechanics' lien is in place to ensure that subcontractors are taken care of if they feel they have a legitimate claim against the contractor. In this case, we have the \$1.18 million still held in trust in our department, Mr. Speaker.

What we are asking is, if companies feel they have a legitimate claim, to go to the court system. The court system then will decide exactly what legitimate claims are. We will then release the monies to the court system. The court system then will rectify that by paying the outstanding debts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is some confusion around all of this. So I remind the minister that no, there is no mechanics' lien in place. That expired because you cancelled this contract within seven-and-a-half hours.

My question for the minister is this one. Small businesses are concerned about the legal costs. Yesterday you mentioned this. Are you willing to pay for the legal costs for those small companies? All they want to do is get paid for the work they have done.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, as I mentioned, the mechanics' lien is in place. The money is held in trust so we can rectify any legitimate claims. The courts decide exactly what the legitimate claims are there. We hold it. The process is to go through a claim system. The courts will look at that. They will determine what legitimate claims. That could include other attached expenses relevant to that claim, Mr. Speaker, but that is for the courts to decide. That is the legal process we have in this Province, and it works very well for those companies involved.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those small companies, of course, are not really used to going to court to actually collect money. They expect to get paid and since you cancelled this contract in seven-and-a-half hours that makes it pretty difficult for these now.

The question to the minister is: You mentioned that one of the things you would look at is all of the options that are available; will you pay the legal costs for those small companies, those contractors, who are merely trying to get paid for the work they have done?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I outlined, the courts decide exactly what the claimant is entitled to. In this case, the claimants can put in for other expenses. The court, in their judgement, will determine exactly what should be paid out. We then release the money to the courts. The courts then will pay the subcontractors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things we talked about of course was the small companies. The minister mentioned about the option and the possibility of going through Small Claims Court. Well, government has only talked about the Small Claims Court and these are for claims that are under \$25,000.

I ask the Premier: What are you going to do for the companies – there are a few of them out there – that are owed more than \$25,000?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, any company, regardless if it is \$5,000 or \$125,000, have a legal avenue open to them, and that is go through the court system. The Small Claims system, you are right, it is up to \$25,000 and it is a very inclusive process and very simple to follow. Other companies then would go through the same legal process. The courts would decide exactly what payment would be part of that settlement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister went on to say that there was nothing wrong with the way Humber Valley Paving – the way the contract was cancelled, nothing wrong with that. He even said that the Auditor General found nothing wrong with it as well. Of course, we know this is not the way it happened. We know this is far from the truth.

I ask the Premier: If indeed there is nothing wrong, why is the former minister now sitting as a backbencher?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the former minister is sitting as a backbencher because he resigned his seat; he resigned his position.

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: If he did not resign, why were you going to fire him?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We expect a level of due diligence in all aspects of governing the affairs of the Province. Mr. Speaker, as a result of the report by the Auditor General, the former minister – I will try not to use his name – now MHA, resigned his position. It was as a result of the results of the Auditor General's report.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Let me clarify this. You are claiming that there was nothing wrong with the way the contract was cancelled, yet you would have fired the minister if he did not resign. I would like for the Premier to clarify that.

If there is nothing wrong, would you fire a minister? Why would you do that?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, this was about process. We require and expect that due diligence and process is followed in all activities of carrying out and executing the duties of a government, the ministers in running their own department. In this case, there was a better process that could have been followed. As a result, as I said, the minister resigned. He did that and I accepted his resignation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is admitting that the process was wrong. I would like for the Premier to let the people of the Province know, what was wrong with the process?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we expect ministers when they do their work, and I expect ministers when they do their work, to follow all the processes that are necessary to do due diligence to the work and the decisions that they make. In this case, and as has been expressed by the Auditor General in the review that he had done, the due process and consideration of options was not completed to the full extent that it should have been. As a result of that, the minister resigned and I accepted his resignation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the current minister – not the one who resigned, but the current minister said that everything was above board and everything was out in the open.

I ask the Premier: If everything was out in the open, will you now tell us why this contract had to be terminated the day before the PC leadership deadline?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, it is one thing to talk about above board and another thing about following process. In this case, the minister did not follow all of the processes that should have been followed in the decision-making process. That is what resulted in his resignation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, maybe the minister could clarify when he said yesterday – just yesterday; that is not a long time ago – in this House that everything was above board and everything was out in the open. What is the difference in what you are saying now why this minister was fired? What was not above board?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is confusing the words that he is using. He should be careful in those words, to be clear and to be fair to all.

The Auditor General had a number of options available to him when he carried out his review of the circumstances. He had full, unobstructed

access to officials and documentation. He had documentation from 185 officials and former officials in government. He had the right and legislative ability to interview anybody he wanted.

He examined sixteen individuals, cross-examined with the use of external legal advice and assistance from there. He made recommendations, five recommendations, as a result of that. He had a full, open process available to him, as provided to him under law and supported by the House of Assembly.

He did his work, Mr. Speaker; it has resulted in the report he has submitted.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the Premier, these were not my words; these were quotes from your own minister just yesterday. Less than twenty-four hours ago, it was your minister who said everything was above board and everything was out in the open. These are not my words, Premier.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Skills said he had heard colleagues saying there were issues about the Humber Valley Paving contract, but he has provided no details on who those colleagues were.

I ask the Premier: If everything is out in the open, as was suggested yesterday, who specifically are the colleagues that the minister referred to?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I gave an answer in this House in regard to a call that I had made in regard to that particular – on two other items actually and a curiosity question in regard to the Humber Valley Paving contract. I overheard – but I just cannot remember. There were whispers, even in the general public. I

have people approach me and say Mr. Coleman would not be running and whatever.

Then when I heard there were issues with the Humber Valley Paving contract, I asked the question because I was the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services at the time and I had not heard of any kind of negative impact on any companies up to that time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So just to clarify, there were a number of colleagues – at least, there is more than one. I just ask the minister one more time: The colleagues you refer to, you cannot remember even one?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, there are many things that happen in a minister's day; I will be quite honest with you. When you are in caucus and you are with your other colleagues around tables and whatnot and you are in the general public – to be quite honest with you, I even heard it in the general public, in the construction industry, that there were issues with Humber Valley Paving, probably a day or two or three or four days before.

I just asked the innocent question, was there any kind of negative impact due to the fires up in Labrador the year previous, because I was the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services. At that particular time, the Minister of Natural Resources was not even in the Province, and I handled it all.

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the Humber Valley Paving contract was cancelled, the current Premier was the first alternate Minister of Transportation and Works.

So I ask the Premier: As the first alternate minister on the file, were you aware that the contract had to be cancelled that day, and did you play any role in this?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: No, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, yesterday the minister said that terminating the contract was done in the right manner and in the right process.

So I ask the Premier: Do you agree with your minister that cancelling the contract and releasing \$90 million in bonds all within seven-and-a-half hours, without letting Cabinet know, just prior to a Cabinet meeting, on the day before the PC leadership deadline – is this the right process?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I did say yesterday was that the process was followed. The minister made a decision in consultation with his officials, and that decision stands, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General came back with four recommendations relevant to my department about how we could streamline that and how we could make it more fluent. Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of implementing those to show that this government is transparent and open.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, whatever process was followed, obviously there is a disconnect between the Premier's process and the minister's process. The Premier just said that there was a problem with the process.

So I ask the minister: Was your process followed, or was the Premier's process followed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister of the day followed a process, Mr. Speaker. The decision was made. Since then, the Auditor General has come back with some recommendations that we have started the process of implementing, and they will obviously help in assessing further contracts in the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, parents, students, and educators have told us that our schools lack critical mental health support services for youth. Earlier this year the Federation of School Councils called for the creation of youth, mental health, and addictions counsellors in schools, but government has failed to address this.

I ask the minister: Has her department assessed what mental health supports are needed in our schools; and, if not, when will you make mental health support services a priority in our schools?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you very much.

Mental health supports within our schools will always be a priority, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Attending to all of the needs of the children within our care will always be a priority.

At this point in time, what we have are a number of guidance counsellors within our schools. We have a number of educational psychologists within our schools. Mr. Speaker, they offer support to our children in many different facets, mental health and addictions included.

Mr. Speaker, when the professionals we have within our school system feel that we need other supports, then they encourage families to seek outside supports through the Department of Health and Community Services. We look at that in the full package of trying to support from many different angles any students who require any mental health and addiction support.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the lack of mental health supports for youth is one of the most pressing issues in Newfoundland and Labrador today. Students, parents, and educators are literally crying out for help. It is time to stop ignoring this problem and ensure we have enough mental health and addictions professionals in our schools.

Again, I ask the minister: Will you commit today to addressing the deficiencies in school mental health and guidance supports?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what I am hearing over there is a condemnation of the supports that many of our professionals are offering every single day. They are offering that in the best way they can

within a school system. When they see that they are not able to offer the level of support that is needed, then they engage outside support as well.

That outside support comes through social workers; it comes through mental health and addictions counsellors. There are about 900 people throughout the health care service, Mr. Speaker, that are also accessed through the school system itself.

Mr. Speaker, the indication that we would leave unintended a child with a mental health and addictions issue is really something that I find very difficult to take.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has just released a ten-year strategy for mental health and addictions. While we have many groups out there working as supports and advocates, what we desperately lack is co-ordination.

I ask the minister: In the eleven years that this government has been in power, why have you not developed a mental health strategy?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We do, in fact, have a mental health and addictions strategy. It is called Working Together for Mental Health and it was released in 2005. Considerable progress has been made over the last eight years.

I will be the first to acknowledge in this House and to the people of the Province, Mr. Speaker, that more work needs to be done. That is why I will commit here today to developing a new strategy.

Early in the new year, we will commence a Province-wide engagement process to ensure

that we get it right, that we truly understand the needs and concerns, and that we come up with solutions that are going to be meaningful. We do need to create lasting change in this Province.

One in five people in this Province, Mr. Speaker, are affected by a mental health issue. We have come a long way, but I recognize we still have a long way to go.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that from the minister. I am sure all members in this House on both sides would like to play a part in that.

Mr. Speaker, Western Memorial Regional Hospital currently serves 80,000 people from Port Saunders to François. Right now, there are eleven obstetrics beds and we hear that the number could be reduced to five in the new hospital.

I ask the minister: Is this true?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the functional program for the replacement for the Western Memorial hospital has been developed through interactive sessions with various staff and various executives and experts within Western Health and outside Western Health. The latest version of the functional program for the new hospital does include six labour and delivery rooms, which is down from the current eleven. The need for the six rooms in the new facility is based on demographic and population projections.

In fact, just to give you an example, today, there are only two of the rooms occupied. The occupancy rate over the last number of years has continued to drop from 55 per cent occupancy in 2010 down to 38 per cent in present year. We believe that the plan proposed makes sense.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, so the minister is confirming here today that there will be less room for expectant mothers and families in this new hospital, which is completely unacceptable. Speaking on behalf of all the people I know who have been shuffled out of rooms because there was not enough space, not enough time, I say: Do you find this acceptable?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: The new health complex in Corner Brook to serve the needs of the West Coast of the Island will be state of the art, and there will be expanded services, not less services for the people of the West Coast of the Province.

The current occupancy rates indicate that there is a need for six rooms in the new hospital. The occupancy rate for year to date is only 38 per cent, Mr. Speaker. The new health facility on the West Coast will have more services and more rooms, not less – but in the case of labour and delivery rooms, we believe that six is the right number, based on the statistics which are readily available.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HILLIER: Mr. Speaker, periodically government has to tender for external office space in the Capital region.

I ask the minister: What location considerations are taken into account when awarding such a tender?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, we assess exactly the best location. We engage stakeholders in this area. We look at what assets we already have as we look at those processes, and we determine what the best investment is here for the people when we move forward on any project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HILLIER: Mr. Speaker, recent tenders for office space in the Capital region have specified that it be located in St. John's, Mount Pearl, or Paradise.

Given that the town has the necessary amenities and is within the government's definition of Capital region, I ask the minister: Why was the Town of Conception Bay South excluded from these tenders?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, we also assess geography. We assess the ability for the travelling public to access those particular facilities. So, geographically we go broader sometimes; geographically we go on to smaller confines. In this case, we have looked for a particular area where we could service people better, and in this case we went with a more confined process versus a larger one. Some cases we go larger and sometimes we go smaller, but it is about ensuring that the best service for people is accessible by geographic locations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HILLIER: Mr. Speaker, one of the facilities is for the 911 call centre.

I ask the minister: Why, if 5,000 people can drive to St. John's every day, can't enough people go to Conception Bay South to work in that call centre?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, we assess all of our services that we offer all through this Province, and we again put out tenders and RFPs to look at where the best locations for those services may be.

In this case, we chose a certain geographic area. There was no slight against CBS or any other community. This was a geographic area that we had selected to go for our RFP. We are going to look at our best investment. This will be a return on that best investment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, residential ratepayers along the Labrador Coast could see a staggering 11.4 per cent increase as a result of Hydro's latest application to the PUB. The Minister of Natural Resources stated in this House that he supports the proposed increase.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs: Does he also support Hydro's latest proposal to the PUB that will see rates increase by 11.4 per cent?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: I thank the hon. member across the way for the question.

Mr. Speaker, it is about supporting the process. It is about the regulator. It is about the company going to the regulator and requesting that. It is about process.

What it is about is making sure those companies that are the providers can provide that service in a responsible and a professional way, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to talking about the Northern communities, of course we are always concerned, but it is about supporting process. There has not been a rate application for some time.

Mr. Speaker, I will say to the hon. member across the way, the coastal communities and their residents are heavily subsidized. The residential customers only pay approximately 13.5 per cent of what it actually costs to produce that power, and the businesses only 32.5 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

There has been a huge outcry from the public about the need for better mental health services in this Province.

I ask the Premier: Will his answer to these people be the tough decisions of further cuts to these services, to use his language from the last few days?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite is correct in identifying the level of importance for mental health and addictions and the impacts that it has on individuals and families in communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

We heard from the Minister of Health just a few moments ago, who said early in 2015 another process, a consultative process is going to take place that we are going to hold. We are going to do this throughout the Province so we can engage with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians

all throughout our entire Province, and we can make our best efforts to get it right, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government finally agreed to replace the Waterford Hospital after years of the public's outcry.

I ask the Premier: Is one of his tough decisions going to be leaving us with the old Waterford, or do we have to wait for years of consultation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is quite aware of the fiscal challenges that face the Province. When it comes to significant infrastructure projects, we have to do what is right and do a full review of the projects that are underway.

We have a variety of projects that are in the very, very early stages and we have projects that are in some form of development. We have some that construction has begun and is underway, and we have some that are nearing completion. It is very important that we consider all of the factors and all of the projects with a higher viewpoint of the fiscal challenges that we face when we make all those decisions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the Premier that I am aware of the mental health needs of the people in this Province, too.

I ask the Premier: Are his tough decisions going to mean further hardship for people waiting a year or more for psychiatrists and counsellors?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, over the last four years alone we have invested \$60 million in new services to support mental health and addictions. We recognize that more work needs to get done.

We need to continue to reduce wait times. That is an important issue. We need to continue with the redevelopment of the Waterford Hospital, as the member raises. In fact, tenders, if they have not already been called, are about to be called for the demolition of the administration building and community health houses on the site. That project is well underway.

We need to improve and expand mental health services in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is a commitment that this government will continue to honour.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mental illness affects everyone in our Province. The Community Coalition 4 Mental Health and the minister's own advisory committee on mental health and addictions have identified huge gaps in mental health services Province-wide. People are desperate.

I ask the Premier: Will he immediately strike an all-party committee to consider the mental health and addictions needs of the entire Province and to develop a comprehensive mental health and addictions plan?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for raising the issue of mental health and addictions and the need for greater supports and services. I thank the Community Coalition

4 Mental Health for their advocacy and their amazing work in the recent months as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: An all-party committee, as the NDP often suggests, is one method of engagement, but I think we need to do more. I think we need to do better and we need to do something bigger. I believe there is a better way that can still lead to collaboration with parties opposite. What we need is meaningful dialogue and we need action and we need solutions.

That is why I am committed to the Province-wide public engagement process that I announced today. I am also committed to strengthening our advisory council on mental health and addictions. In fact, I have invited the co-chairs of the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health to join that advisory council. I am committed to work with the member opposite as well, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre has time for a very quick question.

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Why will he not use every available tool to address this huge mental health crisis and strike an all-party committee on mental health which is an effective tool of this House?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a quick reply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to doing more and we will do more. As the member identifies, an all-party committee is one tool. I believe there are better tools and better ways to engage the public, to engage interest groups, to engage parties opposite.

We will launch a Province-wide engagement process early in the New Year. I welcome the

input from the member opposite. I welcome input from the Official Opposition. I certainly welcome input from the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health because what we need is more than just more consultation. We need action, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to take further action.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act, No 2, Bill 37.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Missing Persons, Bill 36.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS mental health programs and services are crucial to the health of individuals, families, and communities; and

WHEREAS despite mental health services being delivered by government, community-based organizations and informally by families and friends, there are still large gaps in services and programs in the Province; and

WHEREAS despite these efforts, stigma remains a significant barrier for people needing to access mental health services, and participate in society; and

WHEREAS new directions and priorities are needed for mental health programs and service delivery, especially for unique groups such as youth, Aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees; and

WHEREAS recent budget cuts have placed a great strain on organizations delivering mental health services in the Province;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately strike an all-party committee on mental health which, through extensive public consultation, will review the current state of provincial mental health services, receive expert testimony on best practices in mental health care delivery, and report their findings with the intent to provide guidance and oversight in redesigning mental health programs and services to better serve the needs of all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have been presented today, from people all over the Province, with thousands of signatures representing the desires and the wishes of people from across the Province. The Community Coalition 4 Mental Health has gathered these signatures.

It is clear why there is call for an all-party committee. Because of the clout and the legislative verification of that committee, it enables the committee to do an interdepartmental – across all departments – examination, using the lens of mental health to look at housing, to look at justice, to look at women, to look at youth, to look at education, to look at poverty.

An all-party committee is an essential tool – an absolutely essential tool – that is at the hands of this House in order to do a very transparent, thorough, and open process of reviewing the crisis that we are currently in in our mental health services and to come up with recommendations that will guide our department to provide the best services to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no reason not to strike this committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 97, I ask for leave of the House of Assembly to speak to the Member for St. John's Centre's petition.

MR. SPEAKER: The member is asking for leave to be able to respond to a petition. Does the House grant leave?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are more than agreeable to grant leave and would ask leave to have a response as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: No leave.

MR. SPEAKER: No leave? The member does not have leave.

MS MICHAEL: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Is the member willing to grant leave?

MS MICHAEL: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Leader of the Third Party, I will recognize you to answer the question through your mike. Are you willing to grant leave?

MS MICHAEL: Yes, I am granting leave to both sides of the House – the Government side, as well as the Official Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's North, with leave.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Firstly, on behalf of my colleagues in the Official Opposition caucus, I would like to congratulate the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health for all their hard work on this particular issue, and I urge government to hear the pleas of the petitioners, as the Member for St. John's Centre just read.

It was just last night, Mr. Speaker, that myself and the Member for St. John's Centre – and I am not sure, maybe other Members of the House of Assembly – attended a forum on youth homelessness down at Gower Street United Church. It was pointed out – and this is interesting for me as an educator and the Education critic – that educators, teachers, are some of the best people to identify mental health challenges amongst our young people, just from being in front of their students and working with them on a daily basis.

As we have raised in the House of Assembly time and again, issues related to students suffering from untreated mental health issues are becoming more and more prevalent in our communities. Parents and students who contact our offices tell us that they do not know where to go to get help for issues such as depression. Help is simply not available.

Concerns around mental health and lack of supports for our youth are coming up time and time again in the media through the work of the coalition, in the House of Assembly, and so on.

The current levels of services, as we have seen, as we know, cannot adequately address the needs of children and youth who are suffering from fairly significant mental health issues.

Issues such as drug and alcohol abuse amongst our youth go hand in hand with mental issues and are increasing at an alarming rate. Youth are not only more likely than adults to engage in risky substance use, but also to experience greater harm when they do that sort of thing. It negatively impacts their health, their safety, their well-being, the safety of others, and their academic achievement.

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, but I know I am limited by time. Again, I would like to commend the coalition for their work, thank the member for presenting the petition in the House of Assembly today, and urge the government to hear the petitioners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Does the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services have leave to respond?

MS MICHAEL: Yes.

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks to members opposite for granting leave as well so that I can also respond. We recognize that this is an issue that affects one in five people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a really important issue and it is not a new issue. It is certainly one that we have been working on. In the last number of years, we have spent \$60 million on new services for mental health and addictions.

I want to thank the MHA for St. John's Centre for raising this important issue. I can assure her, and I think I can assure anybody watching, that every member in this House, no matter what political stripe you wear, is concerned about mental health and addictions issues in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have written the leadership of the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health asking for a meeting. I want to hear first-hand from the people involved in the community coalition about their issues and concerns, and their ideas. We want to have them actively engaged in the process that we are going to roll out over the next month or so.

As I said during Question Period, an all-party committee is one method of engagement, but I believe we can do something bigger and I believe we can do something better than that. I believe there is a better way that can also enable collaboration with the other parties as part of that process. Let's identify the improvements we need to make to mental health services in this Province and let's do it quickly.

We need to have meaningful dialogue on the best way forward. I will commit today to a Province-wide engagement process starting in the new year. I welcome input from parties opposite. I welcome input from the community coalition.

I have already gathered input from my own advisory council on mental health and addictions. Speaking of which, I will commit as well today to strengthening that advisory council, including involving the leadership of the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health. I also believe there is a need for a greater voice from the education sector on that advisory council. I will commit to that today as well.

In addition to inviting the co-chairs and the steering committee from the community coalition to meet, I have reached out to Mr. Jones and his family. I would like to hear more of their story first-hand because I believe it is a powerful and important one. I have offered to meet with the MHA for St. John's Centre and I will make that offer again today. I would like to have further dialogue with her about the process that we intend to embark upon in the new year.

We have also heard a real focus on mental health during the recent regional forums that will lead up to the Premier's summit in January. I can assure members opposite and the people of the Province that the Premier's Summit on Health Care taking place on January 14 will also

include a major focus on mental health and addictions issues.

This is an issue that we are very aware of. We know it has a profound effect on individuals, families, and communities. I want to congratulate the MHA for St. John's Centre and the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health on showing some real leadership. They had a very successful launch earlier this year in October. We are listening closely to what groups like that are telling us and we will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

The MHA also referenced the stigma associated with mental health. Our anti-stigma awareness campaign, Understanding Changes Everything, addresses the fact that mental illness and addictions are illnesses. It highlights that we are people first and should not be defined by any illness.

It is our responsibility to listen to what our mental health and addictions advisory council is telling us. It is our responsibility as a government to listen to what the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health is telling us, and other stakeholders as well. I commit to this House that we will show leadership and we will take action.

We have been watching and listening very closely. We will continue to do so. We know we have made lots of progress over the last number of years through our Mental Health and Addictions strategy, but I will also acknowledge in this House, Mr. Speaker, that there is more work to be done.

We have increased funding to a number of community groups like CHANNAL, the Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Turnings, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and others. For the first time, as a result, CHANNAL and the Canadian Mental Health Association were able to establish offices outside of the St. John's region and address needs in rural communities as well. I believe there is a greater role for the community sector as we tackle mental health and addictions issues.

The member opposite also referenced the need to involve housing, and justice, and education, and women and youth, and poverty, and she is

absolutely right, Mr. Speaker. I will ensure that the process we embark upon does consider all of those issues and consider those interests and those groups, because we do need to have a holistic process. We need one that is inclusive. We need one that is not about politics and is about real solutions and real action. Health has to be a whole of government priority, and that is a commitment that this government has made and will continue to honour, Mr. Speaker.

So, again, I thank the member for raising this important issue, and I appreciate the opportunity to respond for a few minutes here in this hon. House.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: I would like to respond, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Are you looking for leave to also respond?

MS ROGERS: I am looking for leave to respond, yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member for St. John's Centre have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

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

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

I appreciate all the comments from both sides of the House, and I also appreciate the Minister of Health's commitment to a Province-wide consultation. However, Mr. Speaker, we do know the influence of an all-party committee, and it is a mystery to me at this point why government would not agree to an essential and important tool that is available to this House.

We know the role of an all-party committee. It is transparent; it is open. If the minister is

saying he wants to consult with the Community Coalition 4 Mental Health, and he wants to listen to it and to hear what the committee has said – the committee has clearly stated their desire for an all-party committee on mental health, to take the politics out of it. We know that mental health services in the Province are in a crisis situation and we have to use every tool available to this House.

I would strongly urge the government, once again, to consider the importance of this. I am hoping my colleagues on this side of the House as well would support this. On Wednesday, December 17, I will be presenting a private member's motion asking government, once again, to strike an all-party committee for mental health. We cannot do anything less.

Mr. Speaker, we know that Ontario did this process. They used every tool within their Legislative Assembly. They struck a select committee on mental health. Out of that came an excellent, excellent approach and report. Because what the all-party committee can do, we can call experts from around the world. We can look at best practices.

The other thing the all-party committee does is it informs debate, and we need to be able to do this in this House. We cannot leave it simply in the hands of the Department of Health. We must use every tool at our disposal in order to be able to come up with an effective, comprehensive plan and strategy addressing the mental health and addiction needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind people in the public gallery, we welcome your attendance, but you are not to show any approval or disapproval for debates that happen on the floor.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS coastal communities in Labrador already pay extremely high hydro rates; and

WHEREAS small businesses are struggling to stay in operation against rising costs of hydro; and

WHEREAS Nalcor, a Crown corporation, is proposing 11.4 per cent increase to residential hydro rates and a 20 per cent increase to business rates;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to work with Nalcor to establish rates that are fair and consistent to the whole Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I asked a question to the minister earlier today, and if I could narrow down the response I received is that the minister does not agree with the residents, but he agrees with the process. Hansard could probably confirm that. Hansard is not out yet, but that is what I picked out of it, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at our Province, Mr. Speaker, government has a duty to provide power. It is a duty. I heard the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, I heard the Minister of Natural Resources talk about 13 per cent. Well, let's remove that 13 per cent subsidy. A person who has a \$200 light bill, guess what? If you remove the subsidy they would be paying \$1,600 a month. A business paying \$800 a month, if you remove the subsidy, will be paying \$4,000 a month.

The subsidy can be removed at any time. It can be lowered; it can be raised at any time. What is to say that this government is not going to do more damage?

My point is, Mr. Speaker, government has a duty to provide power. From what this government is

proposing, it does not really matter if someone on the Coast of Labrador gets a \$1,600 light bill because everybody over there is supposed to process. I find it very difficult that the people on the Coast of Labrador who are paying the highest, even with subsidies, are going to pay higher rates.

I have said it before and I will say it again, Mr. Speaker, there is a big difference between 2.9 per cent and 20 per cent. That is a huge difference on top of a cost that is phenomenal already. We talk about the power that is going to come out of Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker; everyone except the Coast of Labrador is going to benefit from it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

A petition.

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

WHEREAS subsidizing day care should be provincial responsibility; and

WHEREAS most Canadian parents are unable to afford day care services, hindering their career, income, and family life; and

WHEREAS those working parents are forced to take more leave time in order to care for their children which can be detrimental to their career and overall income.

WHEREUPON your petitioners call upon all members of the House of Assembly to urge government to provide subsidized day care services for parents and guardians of a child up to Grade 1.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to present this on behalf of the petitioners. Petitioners whom, I would like to point out for the interest of people

in the House, were all younger people who took part in the Radhoc gathering earlier this fall. They came from all over the Province, from St. John's, Clarke's Beach, Tilton, from Bay Roberts, Long Cove, CBS, and Whiteway.

These young people who are facing – not yet most of them, hardly any of them I would think, people who are parents, yet recognizing the difficulty that is going to be there for them as they move past their education and into looking at becoming parents, and how difficult that is when you do not have child care.

In the current situation that we have, it does not matter whether I agree or not, the immediate resolution could be subsidizing daycare services. I personally believe that the best way to bring in subsidized daycare services is to have a public health care system. That public health care system would allow for affordable daycare. The subsidization that would be there would be the subsidization of government being in charge of this system, administering this system, and subsidizing through the government involvement of having a program that is called child care, not just working with an industry out there and letting the work happen without being involved in the heart of it.

In the short term, I agree with the petitioners: subsidization should happen, not just for small numbers but for everybody who requires it. I remember meeting with a woman who was so upset as a single parent that she had to stop working. She could not afford child care and had to go on Income Support in order to take care of her child. We have to stop that kind of thing, Mr. Speaker. The best way, as I have said, to do that is not just to subsidize in the short term but put a full child care program in place.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS government has a responsibility to ensure that Internet access is broadly available so people have the right to be able to access the Internet in order to exercise and enjoy the rights to freedom of expression and opinion and other fundamental human rights; and

WHEREAS the Town of Goose Cove still remains without broadband services; and

WHEREAS residents rely on Internet services for education, business, communication, and social activity; and

WHEREAS wireless and wired technologies exist to provide broadband service to rural communities to replace slower dial-up service;

We, the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly to urge the government to assist providers to ensure the Town of Goose Cove is in receipt of broadband Internet services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, in a modern-day society when we talk about how important it is to be connected and how a number of government services are becoming more and more online, and how when you look at getting feedback and talking about public engagement and access and giving people equal access to have their voice heard, it is so important that communities have access to broadband Internet so they can tap into these types of initiatives to provide feedback and to be able to actually have that voice heard that are in small communities.

This is a municipality, a town, that is trying to provide services to residents, that is trying to develop new business opportunity and look at overall sustainability of its population, just ten kilometres from the largest town on the Great Northern Peninsula of 2,500 people of St. Anthony.

We have real barriers when we talk about our telecommunications infrastructure. I think that is something we seriously need to look at, working with the providers as we advance the broadband initiatives, and partner with the federal government as well, with the hundreds of millions of dollars that has been allocated over the next five years. Let's stop doing things by patchwork and have a real strategy so that we are not leaving communities and towns like Goose Cove, Bide Arm, St. Carols, Great Brehat, St. Anthony Bight, Boat Harbour, and St. Julien's behind.

I will continue to present these petitions on behalf of my constituents.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

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

A petition.

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

WHEREAS there is no cellphone service in the Town of Trout River, which is an enclave community in Gros Morne National Park; and

WHEREAS visitors to Gros Morne National Park, more than 100,000 annually, expect to communicate by cellphone when they visit the park; and

WHEREAS cellphone service has become a very important aspect of everyday living for residents; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is an essential safety tool for visitors and residents; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is essential for business development;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to partner with the private sector to extend cellphone coverage throughout

Gros Morne National Park and the enclave community of Trout River.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I presented this petition time and time again from quite a number of people. The individuals here, I recognize most of them by name, and I have pledged to them that I would present their petition in this hon. House.

The Town of Trout River has approximately 650 people. It is both a fishing community and a tourist community, and one of its prominent geological features is the Tablelands at Trout River. The Tablelands at Trout River is what, in large part, makes Gros Morne National Park a world historic site; that and L'Anse aux Meadows are the two world historic sites on the Great Northern Peninsula.

The Tablelands – the geology is something people find quite striking and, geologically, it is only found in a few places in the world. Piggy-backing on this success and this acknowledgement of being a world historic site, the Town of Trout River has developed a very significant tourist industry and one of the best restaurants in the region is seasonally operated in Trout River. People such as David Suzuki and other individuals have visited this restaurant and gave it high accolades, but they do not have cell service. Mr. Speaker, nowadays people who visit certainly expect to have cell service.

The small number of people in Trout River, being 650, it is the fifth biggest community in the district – in spite of that, certainly it is increased dramatically all through the course of the summer. People are building on a shoulder season for tourism and cellphone service would be an absolutely important feature to grow these businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that we move to Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that we move to Orders of the Day.

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, third reading of a bill, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008, Bill 32.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that Order 2, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008, Bill 32, be now read the third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read the third time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion that Bill 32 be read a third time?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008. (Bill 32)

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

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008”, read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 32)

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Revise And Consolidate The Law Respecting The Control Of Liquor In The Province, Bill 34.

I further move that this bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Finance shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Revise And Consolidate The Law Respecting The Control Of Liquor In The Province, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the said bill be now read a first time?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance to introduce a bill, “An Act To Revise And Consolidate The Law Respecting The Control Of Liquor In The Province”, carried. (Bill 34)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Revise And Consolidate The Law Respecting The Control Of Liquor In The Province. (Bill 34)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

MR. HUTCHINGS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 34 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Provincial Offences Act, Bill 35.

I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Finance shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Provincial Offences Act, Bill 35, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce Bill 35 and that the bill be now read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Provincial Offences Act", carried. (Bill 35)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Provincial Offences Act. (Bill 35)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

MR. HUTCHINGS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 35 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I move that we move to Motion 1, to move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to

consider a resolution relating to the advancing or guaranteeing of certain loans made under The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 31)

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the Speaker now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Cross): Order, please!

We are now debating Bill 31.

Resolution

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure further to amend The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957, to provide for the advance of loans to and the guarantee of the repayment of bonds or debentures issued by or loans advanced to certain corporations."

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

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

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is my pleasure today to introduce this bill to the House. This bill provides an amendment to the schedule to the Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957.

We are bringing this amendment in to allow us to ratify the new loans, and charges or such increases and extensions to some already

existing guarantees. Very specifically, Bill 31 – and I will just read the explanatory note.

"This Bill would amend the Schedule to The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957. The province has guaranteed a letter of credit issued by the Royal Bank of Canada on behalf of Marble Mountain Development Corporation to secure the corporation's payment obligations under a contract to replace the main chairlift. The guarantee will expire on May 15, 2015."

Mr. Chair, those of us who were listening to the media reports over the course of the summer would recognize and remember that Marble Mountain Development Corporation, an operator of a ski hill just outside of Corner Brook – Steady Brook, just outside of Corner Brook – as a result of a lightening fire, had major damage done to one of their lifts. Initially, this was thought to be some minor damage that could easily be covered by the amount of insurance being carried by the corporation.

Upon further examination, and recognizing there had been extensive damage done, well beyond what was visibly obvious at the initial inspection, we realized this was going to require a complete replacement of the lift and some of the apparatus, and the control mechanisms on the towers. There is a control panel, or control mechanisms, both electronic and mechanical that control the lifts themselves. Significant damage was done to that.

As a result of that, of course, there was recognition that the total cost of this replacement, including the cost of dismantling it and replacing the lifts, and there was a contract negotiated with a supplier of this kind of equipment. The total cost was just a little over \$5 million. Obviously, as a result of their application for a rebate of HST, at the end of the day the net cost of this was going to be just a little over \$4 million. We needed to find the mechanism, number one, how were we going to actually replace this?

Let me just speak to that point for a moment, because there was a lot of discussion around, could it be repaired? Could it be replaced? What will we need to do? When we started looking at the cost of repair, there was a recognition very quickly that the cost of repair

was going to go well beyond what was going to be reasonable, given the life expectancy of the remaining portions of this lift.

There was a decision made – a prudent decision made, I might add, Mr. Chair. A prudent decision was made that the best alternative here was to replace the lifts and the mechanisms supporting that lift. As I said, a contract was negotiated with a supplier. Now we have a decision to make about how we actually go about financing this.

Marble Mountain Corporation has had a successful history of operating this hill. They provide a tremendous recreation activity for people not just in Newfoundland and Labrador and not just on the West Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, but it attracts visitors from outside the Province. Albeit most of the visitors to that location are people from within Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is a well-utilized facility. We believe that it was a significant piece of recreation and tourism infrastructure for the Province, and one that we needed as a government to continue to support on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It also has a huge economic benefit, particularly for the West Coast of the Province where this is the centrepiece of our winter tourism initiatives in that area of the Province.

We were able to work through an arrangement, Mr. Chair, where as a government we were in a position to assist them financially. They themselves only had \$1.5 million – or actually it is not \$1.5 million; it is \$1.2 million. They had \$1.2 million insurance payment that they were going to receive from the insurer, and now we needed to look at how we were going to bridge the rest to be able to fully fund it.

This was obviously an unexpected event. Last year when we developed our Budget, we would never have envisaged this happening, so we did not obviously make a Budget allocation for a replacement of a lift at Marble Mountain. This was an unexpected event and now we needed to look at how we might facilitate the financing of that.

We looked internally within our own financial resources. There was an area within the

Department of Finance where we make an allocation on an annual basis for such things as the cost of EI premiums, workers' compensation premiums, the payroll costs associated with having people work for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. In August month when this happened and September when we started to consider the issue, we recognized that based on how much we had actually paid out of that expense category or that Budget allocation, by the time March 31, 2015 would roll around, we would have some savings in that particular allocation.

Members might recall each year we come to the House and we do our Budget and we discuss the Estimates here in the House. The Estimates have identified areas of allocation. Under the heading of personnel benefits, that category of budget, we were able to identify and come to a realization that by the end of the year we would have some savings in that earlier allocation. So, what we decided to do was we would take a couple of million dollars from that particular allocation and put it into this project. This did not affect, in any way, employees. There were no staffing changes as a result of this. This was no money that was budgeted to pay salaries. This was money that was originally budgeted to cover the payroll burden associated with having employees working for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So that came up with a couple of million dollars to be able to assist this process. Couple that with the \$1.2 million of insurance money, we need it then because, as I said a moment ago, this was an unexpected event – and, as well, unintended, but it was something we had not prepared for financially in our Budget.

The supplier was able to provide some temporary financial support by way of a line of credit – not a line of credit, but if we guarantee that when this equipment arrived that we would be able to pay for it upon installation. So the Marble Mountain Development Corporation arranged a loan with a chartered bank to borrow \$1.5 million, with our guarantee. They were not in a position to go to the bank themselves and, on their own, qualify for the \$1.5 million loan without a guarantee from the Province.

What this bill does, Mr. Chair, the House confirms, for the purpose of the legislation, the House ratifies a decision that has been made to guarantee a loan to the Royal Bank, the loan that was made to the Marble Mountain Development Corporation.

Then when we sit in this House again, later on in 2015 when we bring a Budget forward, in that Budget we will have a document that we will refer to as the Estimates document where we lay out the money we are proposing to spend by category, how we spend the money on an annual basis. All of us have been a part of the Estimates process in the past and you will recognize that each time government says they will spend X number of dollars and here is where we are going to spend it, that is laid out in the Estimates document.

When we get back in the House in 2015 and we start to debate the Budget for next fiscal year, we will have in that the \$1.5 million allocation to pay off this loan. As we see from the bill, Mr. Chair, the bill talks about this guarantee expiring on May 15. I guess that is notice to members that we have to have the Budget passed by May 15 because we have to pay off this guarantee. This \$1.5 million will be embedded in next year's Budget to pay this off. That is the mechanics of how this loan guarantee works, what it was intended to do, and how it actually is lending itself to fund this particular significant piece of infrastructure.

I just want to go back for a moment to the decision to do it in the first place. One of the things we have recognized is that we have a very vibrant tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are many elements to that, many attractions and many areas of the Province that are popular destination points for tourism, both winter and summer. There may not be as many destination points for winter tourism as there might be for summer tourism, but this happens to be one of the most popular destinations for winter tourists in the Province, I say, Mr. Chair.

In our decision to support this particular initiative – and there were some people who raised some questions about whether or not we should or should not be doing this, or whether this was something that government should

recognize it is something it has a responsibility for. One of the things we had come to realize many, many years ago was that this particular facility is operated by a Crown corporation. As a people and as a Province, we get tremendous benefit from this. Not only does it provide a tremendous recreation opportunity for many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but it is a significant source of economic activity in the Western part of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Travel to that area of the Province any time during the winter when there is snow on the ground and you will see hundreds of people on the hill. The parking lot will be filled, hotels, restaurants, gas bars, all enjoying the prosperity of having a draw of people into their regions who are spending money and enjoying themselves. We consider this, Mr. Chair, as being just one more additional strategic investment that our government continues to make in infrastructure in this Province for the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and to stimulate and support continued growth and economic activity in many parts of our Province.

As we deliberated on what we would do here, we recognized that this was a critical piece of infrastructure that we needed to support. There were some issues about timelines. There was a discussion around whether we would do it this year or whether we would do it next year, and how we might approach doing it.

I am very pleased to say that the hill proposes to open on time, as planned, on Boxing Day again this year. The slope that is used that this lift supports is due to be open sometime in mid-January. So work is in progress to do the installation and have it up and running for when the hill opens just after Christmas.

Also, Mr. Chair, we are going to be very pleased next year, in 2016, as we welcome to our Province the 2016 National Winter Special Olympics, and they are going to be held in Corner Brook. They are going to be held at this hill, or one of the venues will be this hill. Next year, in 2016, we will have an opportunity to once again showcase to Canada the tremendous infrastructure we have in this Province, the tremendous hospitality we extend to people who visit our Province, and the marvelous

infrastructure we have in those regions of the Province, we are able to accommodate both in the hotels and the restaurants.

Once again, next year – and these sorts of things do not just happen because they want to come to Newfoundland and Labrador. In part maybe, yes, but without having the critical infrastructure in place to support these kinds of activities these kinds of events would never exist in this Province. We would never have the opportunity. We would miss the opportunity to again showcase our people, our Province, and extend to those people who will be visiting next year the great hospitality we have become accustomed to and we have gained a reputation for, as we host these kinds of national events.

I just use that, Mr. Chair, to point out the kinds of advantages we have, and the kinds of benefits we derive from when we make strategic investments, such as this one in Marble Mountain.

Mr. Chair, I notice the time. I am kind of running out, but I welcome comments from members opposite. If there are some questions around the process we have gone through here, or if there is some question as to why we do it at all, I would be only too glad, and proudly, to speak to and justify why we have done this because we believe this is a strategic investment in what is critical infrastructure of the tourism industry in this Province. So, I welcome comments from members opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the opportunity to stand in the House today to debate this bill, An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957.

I would echo the minister's statement around the incredible hospitality and beauty of the West Coast. A place where I spent many fond years early in my childhood. A place I know very well, and a ski hill I know very well, that certainly this side of the House supports.

I want to say a quick thank you to the staff of the Department of Finance for their briefing. I also want to thank my colleagues, the Member for St. Barbe and the Member for The Straits – White Bay North, as we prepared for this discussion in the House of Assembly today.

The minister made reference in his comments – I think his statement was: as we all know what happens in Estimates. As a new member of the House of Assembly this year, the learning curve has been steep, but one that members on this side of the House have certainly helped me climb. I have spent a tremendous amount of time poring over historical documents and reports, including previous budget documents and previous Estimates. While we will be certainly supporting this bill, I was struck by the information I was able to learn as I did my homework in preparing to come into this hon. House today and have this discussion.

There is no doubt that this asset on the West Coast is a strategic asset that many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians enjoy, and also an asset we will be showcasing in the coming years and have showcased in prior years; but, fundamentally, this discussion today is not about the beauty of the West Coast. It is not about the incredible hospitality of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It is about money. It is about fiscal accountability. It is about how we, and how this government, make sure that the finances of the Province and taxpayers' money are spent in the best way and with the best of intention.

As we were going through the briefing, Mr. Chair, I have to say that at one moment as the staff were very eloquently explaining the \$5.2 million and how much of that money was being sourced by the corporation from insurance proceeds, and they were explaining that this particular amount of loan guarantee was to enable the corporation to finance \$2 million worth, it was very quickly identified that there was a \$2 million gap.

As the minister has referenced, he explained that gap was closed by identifying an allocation of money that – I believe he said an allocation of money related to payroll costs. I am assuming, as he said, EI, CPP and other costs that were able to be identified to be provided to close the

gap. I have to tell you, as somebody who has spent many, many years on an annual basis, on a monthly basis, on a daily basis accounting for every single penny, I was a little dumbstruck at how quickly \$2 million could be identified.

That prompted me to go and do some work on the Estimates that the minister mentioned. I spent hours poring over how budget numbers compare to Estimate numbers. I was surprised at the gaps that are seen on a frequent basis, annual basis, from when a number is budgeted and when we go into Estimates, when my colleagues have gone into Estimates through Public Accounts Committee and looked at how much money has actually gotten out the door.

When you think about, well, why would there be a difference? It really comes down to two things. Number one, obviously, the money was not spent. Why was the money not spent? Was it not spent because a decision was made to cut a program or service, or something that was important to the people of the Province; or, did it not get out the door because government failed to actually execute the plans they committed to in a budget process? Now, I have not had the pleasure of sitting through Estimates as my colleagues have. I am sure they will speak to that when they stand up.

One of the things that surprises me when we talk about the amount of money government spends, to be able to find \$2 million as quickly as was able to be found, it was certainly very surprising. I think it highlights the inability of this government to ensure the taxpayers' money is well stewarded.

We are looking at three deficits and another one looming. I think what people are talking to me about are decisions that government makes with respect to risk. Interestingly enough, when I did do some additional research on Marble Mountain, it was certainly interesting to go back and review the Auditor General's report of January, 2012.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: In the Auditor General's report of 2012, when he assessed Marble

Mountain Development Corporation's ability to steward its money as a Crown corporation, there were a number of things he identified. One of the things that struck me was he actually identified in 2012, the board minutes were not signed as approved, and the terms of appointment for eight board members had expired. These members continued to serve on the board without the required approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council to extend their terms.

One of the things that struck me when I saw that the minutes had not been signed was whether or not the board had been functioning under the processes that would be considered best in class. I would assume that an audit committee, functioning from the Marble Mountain Development Corporation, would have done a risk assessment around the insurance capacity that the corporation had. Maybe they made a decision that for financial reasons they underinsured; but if the minutes had not been signed and the directors had not been in place, I guess I have to question, as a member of this House, how due diligence actually took place in making sure the right insurance was in place at the right time.

The Auditor General's report from 2012, which was discussed at length in the Public Accounts Committee, references numerous, numerous, numerous areas where the decisions that needed to be made to protect this strategic asset, to protect this important asset for the West Coast of the Province, were questioned by the Auditor General. Those are things that I wonder how much of those processes, those processes that were flawed in the past, contributed to a lack of insurance being in place.

I guess the other thing I would certainly like to bring up in the House today, as part of this discussion, is the fact that when the staff revealed to me that we were able to kind of close the gap of \$2 million, we asked: From where? The staff, certainly in the moment, had some difficulty explaining the exact place because they had worked with a number of different ministers and were not really sure exactly where the decision had been made.

What is frustrating about this conversation is you have an asset that needs this investment, but

it highlights a problem which, I believe, is the attention to the pennies that are spent in government – attention to where every single dollar and penny of taxpayers' money goes.

Why is that important? Well, strategic discussions around priorities and where money must be deployed are critical. I suggest that today's conversation, and certainly the Ministerial Statements about violence against women and the importance of mental health supports for youth in our Province, indicate there are many places where government has a responsibility to ensure it is spending money in the best interest of the taxpayers based on the priorities of the people of the Province.

Wasting taxpayers' dollars, or worse, not actually hitting the target and the promises that you make in a Budget document by not getting that money deployed, is creating a tremendous amount of questions certainly from the people in my district and I believe from people throughout the Province.

When people talk about where is the waste happening, I would suggest that seven by-elections and the amount of office space and money that has been spent on by-elections – I think in Virginia Waters this government spent \$23,000 on office space just for that by-election. Another area would certainly be things like important announcements. The CETA signing last year was a wonderful event that everybody raved about at The Rooms. It was hugely costly.

What people are asking about when they hear that this government can come up with \$2 million to invest in this strategic asset on the West Coast is if they can come up with that money that fast, what other places are they wasting the money? People do not want their money wasted. They want it invested in things like mental health services for our youth. They want it invested in our school system so there are mental health services provided and the right resources are in the right place at the right time. They certainly want it invested to prevent women and children from being under siege in the community.

When you make a priority decision to eliminate the Family Violence Intervention Court, but you can find \$2 million overnight to fix a problem

that was generated from a governance issue inside a Crown corporation, then the people of the Province have questions. This side of the House is going to continue to ask those questions, Mr. Chair.

That being said, I would like to again reiterate that as a proud person who was born on the West Coast, our caucus on this side of the House will be supporting helping Marble Mountain Corporation get through this transition that they need to with this infrastructure piece they need to buy, and making sure they have the capital to do it. We are going to continue to ask the tough questions on where every single dollar is going to be invested on behalf of the people of the Province to make sure it is in their best interests.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am happy to be able to speak to this bill, which we have had in our hands now since the House opened almost for this session. It is an interesting discussion that I think has to be had with regard to the request from the government through this bill, which is to do the letter of credit on behalf of Marble Mountain Development Corporation to secure the \$2 million in payment obligations for replacing the main chairlift.

I have a number of questions – three or four – that I want to put forward to the Minister of Finance and, again, because we are concerned about accountability and wise management of the public purse, the answers to the questions that I require for clarification is not that we will not vote for the bill. I think voting for the bill is something we are going to have to do, but we have questions to ensure that down the road we may not need to stand again to approve a bill of this nature for Marble Mountain, and the questions I am asking I hope will give me answers that will show that government is going to ensure due diligence is done as we move into the future.

The minister – and I thank him, and his staff did the same thing – has given a good explanation of this situation, but there are some whys. My questions, they actually are whys in some cases and whats in another. The minister has not really answered, and I think it is important to ask them so people will know that the Marble Mountain is being managed well by the Marble Mountain Development Corporation.

So one of the questions I have, and which I have heard from others, is: Why is it that the insurance policy was done in such a way that the insurance did not cover a larger amount of the cost of damage that was done? We all know what it is like to have insurance on our homes. When you take out your policy you make sure you really are given the full cost of replacement if the house got destroyed, or the full cost of replacement of outhouses on the property. If you make significant changes to your house, if replacement values are going to change significantly, if you change your property and new buildings are put up on your property, the insurance policies change and you get adjustments made.

So the question is: When was the last time the insurance policy was put in place, and why did it not reflect the replacement of the parts that were damaged – the cost of that replacement? So that is one question I would like to have answered.

The second one that goes with that is: Is there going to be, on the part of Marble Mountain Development Corporation, a review of their insurance policies to ensure that if such damage were to happen again they would get the cost of replacement covered, than is happening this time with the accident that happened with the lightning strike? I think these are really important questions, Mr. Chair, if we are going to see that good management is going on in the use of the people's money.

I want to refer to the study that was done by the Auditor General who looked at the Marble Mountain Development Corporation in 2011. The Public Accounts Committee also held hearings with the corporation on August 29, 2011, but we do not have reports from those hearings. I do have the report, though, from the Auditor General. I think the Auditor General revealed a number of problems with the

operation of the corporation. I would like to bring those up and ask the Minister of Finance a couple of questions related to the AG's report.

For example, the AG found the corporation was running a deficit above and beyond its annual \$400,000 operating grant from the provincial government. The report also said the resort ran a deficit in five consecutive years requiring an annual operating grant, as well as an approved line of credit, of \$2.1 million. In particular, the ski lift operations had run a debt totalling more than \$1.3 million over three years.

We all know that sometimes these kinds of deficits have to happen, but this seems to be an ongoing thing with the Marble Mountain operations. It is continually running deficits. At the moment, they are paying interest and bank expenses totalling \$164,115 annually to service the existing debt. The amount of the debt is going up. I am presuming that is going to get higher with the current situation they are in.

We also find from the AG's report there were problems with purchases which were not properly done through the Public Tender Act and the use of fuel for snow groomers was not properly monitored. There are a lot of concerns in the AG's report that we have no proof have been really addressed.

As well – and this is I think a point that needs to be made – thirty-one condominiums built in 1999 at a cost of \$3.1 million have never seen occupancy rates above 25 per cent, and not one unit has ever been sold, unless something has changed since the AG's report in 2011, which I do not think has happened. What was the underestimation that went on here when this project was put together? What is being done to try to make more money from these condominiums that are sitting there? They are lovely condominiums I am told. I do not ski myself, so I have never gone there. I pass it lots of times when I am travelling back and forth.

We have a situation where the latest annual report shows a continued deficit. We are told that the corporation's CEO, the chief executive officer, claims the resort has a long-term sustainable future as a winter tourist destination, but it seems to me it has a long-term sustainable future as long as the government is there to bail

it out all the time. Is that a way to go? Is that the way it should be managed?

I need to know if the Minister of Finance has a plan from Marble Mountain Corporation that shows it has a long-term sustainable future. Will it ever stand on its own feet, or has there always been an overestimation with regard to who is using it, how many are using it, and et cetera? These are really big questions here with regard to responsible management of this facility. I know it is important to the West Coast. I know it helps the economy and that is really important, and for that reason I am going to vote for the bill, but we have to ask these questions.

I need to find out from the minister if the concerns of the AG are going to be taken care of, if concerns that must have come up when the Public Accounts Committee met with the corporation are going to be taken care of, or is the message to Marble Mountain Development Corporation going to be it does not matter, you can keep running deficits, you can keep having problems because we will always be there to take care of you?

I know of things in this Province where they do not get that message from government. So why is it that this corporation should get that message from government? They have to be able to stand on their own feet. Is government monitoring their PR, their whole public relations? Are they monitoring the marketing that is going on? It seems to me there have been problems over there for a long time. Is marketing the problem? What is the problem?

I will leave those questions with the minister. I am looking forward to hearing some answers because I think people will want to know government is on top of these issues, that we are not going to be, ten years from now, government still just giving money to the corporation as it continues to run a deficit and as it continues to be, maybe, poorly managed. I think this is an issue government has a responsibility to look it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to speak to this bill today, Mr. Chair. My first exposure to Marble Mountain came way back in 1998, in the lead up to the 1999 Canada Games. The Canada Games in 1999 were probably the best Canada Games in the history of the Canada Games in over forty-five years, and it continues to be talked about.

At that particular point in time, Mr. Chair, Marble Mountain was then developed as a centrepiece for the 1999 Canada Winter Games. Mr. Chair, it continues to be the centrepiece for winter tourism on the West Coast of our Province. Marble Mountain is certainly a prime attraction and many business people on the West Coast have taken advantage of the fact that Marble Mountain is there and they have built their business around it: restaurants, hotels, and bed and breakfasts. All those things were built around the economic activity that is generated at Marble Mountain. I know a lot of that economic activity is provincial in scope.

If you get on a plane from December 26 until April, if you get on a plane here on a Friday afternoon you will see there are many, many avid skiers from this part of the Island going to the West Coast to avail of the great facilities and the great skiing, the great cross-country skiing, the great skidooing that all can take place in and around Marble Mountain.

Mr. Chair, as we know, in August of this year there was an unfortunate incident – you can nearly call it an act of God – a lightning strike. A lightning strike took out the main chairlift for Marble Mountain. It is called the Governor's Express, or for skiers and the people who are in sports, it is just called the Governor. The Governor is the main lift that can get you to all parts of the mountain so you can enjoy the Marble Mountain ski experience. When you are on the top of that mountain, Mr. Chair, and you are looking down over the West Coast of this Province, it is one tremendous site.

Mr. Chair, the Governor got hit. Unfortunately, the hit was more damaging than previously expected. When the lightning strike hit and the damage was realized, Marble Mountain realized that they only had \$1.2 million in insurance and the actual bill would be somewhere around \$5 million.

They came to government, Mr. Chair, looking for security so they could replace the Governor. It has been said by the minister in his earlier comments there were some savings found. I know the hon. member opposite talked about how those savings were found and all the rest, but it was not enough savings found. What happened was Marble Mountain Corporation went to a bank and basically got a loan that needed to be secured. It needed to be secured by a letter of credit from the Province. That letter of credit was roughly \$2 million.

Mr. Chair, this strike could not have happened at any worse time for Marble Mountain because August, September, and October is when they get into their early bird sales. That is when they get into their lift sales and their early bird sales. It is a vital time.

The fear was, Mr. Chair, if there was not a commitment by government to help repair the Governor, or replace the Governor as it came to be, that the season would be gone – the season would be ruined and their cash flow. Their highest cash flow happens in August, September, and October in the early bird season. This is just bad timing. The lightning strike was just pure bad timing.

Mr. Chair, it certainly did have some effect because reports out of Marble Mountain say the early bird sales this year were down about 13 per cent. They thought it was going to be a lot more drastic than the 13 per cent that the sales were down. They fared a lot better than the corporation thought.

Mr. Chair, it has been encouraging over the last number of days and number of weeks actually to hear that the lift is being replaced. The lift will be up and ready by mid to late January. There will be no interruption in the ski season.

I heard the ad the other day and I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition was pleased to hear that the mountain is opening on December 26. I would be surprised if he is not on the hill on December 26 or in a hockey rink somewhere.

It is a very, very big economic generator. Marble Mountain is a very special place. Not only for businesses, Mr. Chair, but there are offshoots of other things that happen on Marble

Mountain. There are also people who have invested in zip lining. I have never done the zip line on Marble Mountain, but I hear it is one of the most fantastic rides that you can ever take in this country. It is something out of this world. I have had friends do the zip line and I know how exhilarating it was.

Not only that, but Marble Mountain, Mr. Chair – I believe it is late March or early April, I can be corrected on that – also has a big event at the mountain. The big event is a big economic generator on the mountain as well because it is called Snow West. They normally bring in bands. It is a party weekend. It is a great weekend. The condos are filled, the hotels are filled, and the food service industry is going great.

Also, out of Marble Mountain there is adventure tourism. That is also a large economic generator on the West Coast. Our investment in Marble Mountain is logical. I am pleased to hear that both Opposition parties will be supporting this bill as we go further this afternoon.

Mr. Chair, Marble Mountain is not only an economic generator; it is a vital component of the sport industry in our Province. We have three sports that use Marble Mountain as their base of training. Our alpine ski program and our alpine sport program use Marble Mountain. Also, our provincial snowboard association uses Marble Mountain as their base of training. These sports bring in economic activity as well because they host the Marble Cup. The Marble Cup is one of the biggest alpine sport events in Atlantic Canada.

Also, Mr. Chair, there is the slope ski. Slope ski is also coming into being. All of these provincial sport organizations, these new sports, use Marble Mountain as their base. It is the way that we generate our athletes for our Canada Games program. Marble Mountain also plays a vital role in the provincial sport of this Province.

As the Minister of Finance said, it will be the focal piece and the centrepiece once again for 2016 when the national winter Special Olympics come to Corner Brook. I am sure, based on my experience in 1999, that it will be probably the best Special Olympics winter games ever held in this country. The volunteers who are on the

West Coast of our Province will put off one of the best shows that they will ever see anywhere in the world, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, this was a good investment. This was a good investment in a hill that provides a lot of jobs to a lot of people, but it also provides a lot of jobs in other industries. Not having Marble Mountain in operation for this ski season would be very detrimental to the businesses on the West Coast.

Mr. Chair, that being said, I will take my seat and say that I am very pleased to support this bill today, and very pleased that government stepped up to support Marble Mountain.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Loan and Guarantee Act, which would essentially be guaranteeing a \$2 million loan to the Marble Mountain Development Corporation which was established in 1988. It is in its twenty-sixth year and is 100 per cent, as a Crown corporation, owned by the Province.

I have had the pleasure, along with I am sure a number of my colleagues, to ski Marble Mountain and enjoy the facilities. I do not think I ever made it down the hill without falling a couple of times, unless it was the bunny slope. Needless to say, it was quite a bit of fun and certainly a great asset that we have in the Province.

The whole point of what we are talking about here today is we are talking about money and we are talking about financial resources that are being deployed to a Crown corporation that is 100 per cent owned by the Province. We all know that the lightning strike was an act of God. For insurance purposes, the fact that there was only \$1.2 million in insurance coverage asks a lot of questions about the governance structure and the oversight when it comes to looking at Marble Mountain and how it was run.

The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has not answered why the corporation was under insured, why it did not have a replacement cost built in for these types of disasters, and what measures have been taken to ensure all of these types of assets that are at Marble Mountain would be made sure that they do have the adequate insurance coverage. A few years ago I sat on the Public Accounts Committee for a couple of years, myself and my colleague for St. Barbe, and my colleague for Bay of Islands. We questioned quite significantly the Marble Mountain Development Corporation at the time because there were a number of outstanding issues, especially relating to financing and the day-to-day management that was happening back in January 2012, the findings of the Auditor General's report.

It pointed out the corporation was running significant deficits at the time, ranging from \$126,000 to \$563,000 in 2011. To help finance their operations, they had to get an annual subsidy from the provincial government of \$440,000; that continues. Also, the Province approved a line of credit, at the time, of \$2.1 million and it was guaranteed by the Province. We are now talking about guaranteeing an additional \$2 million because the corporation, which is owned by the Province, did not cover an adequate insurance policy to replace these lifts.

At that time in 2011, the corporation had drawn down \$1.9 million on its maximum of \$2.1 million line of credit. So it left the corporation in a very difficult financial position at the time. We saw there were a number of interest costs being escalated. There were decisions made when it came to other financing that just increased the operating costs of the business.

I would like to see that the government, the Department of Finance, has met with the board and followed up, beyond what the Auditor General's recommendations were, to make sure the corporation itself is making sure it has the best financial practices in place.

If we look at the annual report, the last one that was posted on the Marble Mountain Corporation Web site, it shows the ski visits. In the 2008-2009 season there were over 90,000 skier visits. Then in 2009-2010, that dropped to just under

85,000. In 2010-2011, that year it dropped significantly down to 72,500. It stabilized there in 2011-2012 at just under 72,500, still a small drop. In 2012-2013, the last year that there is a public reporting mechanism available online, it is 66,069 skier visits.

When we look at an asset in the Province, and we look at the revenue generation of the Marble Mountain Development Corporation, we need to make sure that, providing that level of service, we are increasing ski visits, not reducing.

We have to find a way to work with the stakeholders and work with the board of directors to ensure more focus is placed on the core product of ski visits, because there is a whole industry built up around that when it comes to the condos, the hotels, the hospitality industry, the restaurants, and other services and businesses that are certainly profitable and reaping value from the asset that is owned by the Province. That is a good thing. That is a good thing that private industry all around the Marble Mountain Development Corporation is generating a profit.

When we look at the Marble Mountain Development Corporation and we look at some of the assets, it undertook the development of condominiums. They have thirty-one condominiums built at a cost of \$3.1 million. They were supposed to be marketed for sale, yet the condominiums had never proved to be profitable. Each of the last five years in that Auditor General's report show that it ranged from 17 per cent to 25 per cent occupancy.

Mr. Chair, if you are running a business and you are only getting a 17 per cent to 25 per cent occupancy rate, you are really not going to see a success in that. We have seen that they have been unable to repay the loans to the Province in that situation.

When you look at this guarantee and this financing, is this going to be further debt that is going to be continuously carried over and incurred interest costs? We need to make sure the corporation has the ability to focus on the core competencies. I believe that is running the ski hill, not necessarily running the accommodations business that is there.

I think there are other avenues, as I expressed in the Public Accounts Committee, to looking at other entities. There are other condominiums that are rented out or sold in that area, to maybe look at seeing if there is an interested buyer, looking at getting over the number fifty, to avail of the tax credit that exists in the Province so we can offload that cost and that burden that is a financial challenge for the corporation. If we have an income investment, then we can help offset some of this additional cost that is being incurred.

No matter where the findings were made, whether it is in the Department of Finance or it is in various other departments, it had to come from somewhere; whereas, if the corporation could have generated its own revenue to pay for this cost, then we would be in much better shape as taxpayers for the Province. That would be much more fiscally responsible, in my view, when we are looking at this.

I think that there needs to be a thorough discussion with the Marble Mountain Development Corporation moving forward, a strategic plan around looking at the core competencies of operating as a ski hill, focusing on increasing the visits, and working with the private entities that are all around that are very, very profitable and are employing people, so that we can be in a better financial position as a Province moving forward, so that we can be that premiere snow destination in Atlantic Canada. That is where we want to be. That is where we want to stay, but we do not want to see such rapid decline in the ski visits that have happened based on the report of the Marble Mountain Development Corporation.

I think that given the current circumstance and the timeline of having to have the Governor's ski lift replaced, right now there is very little alternative but to support this motion of lending the \$2 million and guaranteeing that loan from a provincial perspective. I think on go-forward basis there are other avenues that we can make the Marble Mountain Development Corporation more profitable and really benefit the residents of the West Coast and all over Newfoundland and Labrador, and increase the visitor experience.

So let's not take a narrow view on this. Let's get focused and let's become really much more successful in how we operate this particular Crown corporation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I simply want to say a great big thank you again to the people of the District of Baie Verte – Springdale. It is always a pleasure and a delight to stand in this hon. House to have some dialogue and debate issues and legislation. I am always grateful to the people for supporting me, for their continuing support. Of course, everybody in this hon. House feels the same thing. They are honoured to be here, it is humbling to be here, and it is a very humbling experience. It is exhilarating as well, Mr. Chair, once in a while.

I also would like to thank the minister and his department officials for giving us a briefing on this bill, Bill 31. In fact, I simply want to say a thank you to all the department officials out there. I would like to applaud them and commend them for their hard work and their dedication that they do day in and day out on behalf of the people of the Province.

For the purpose of people listening today, Mr. Chair, we are debating Bill 31, An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee, 1957. From what I have heard so far – I do not want to be presumptuous – but I think that this bill will go through unanimously this afternoon, and that is great.

I simply want to, as I always do, read the explanatory note on page 2, "This Bill would amend the Schedule to The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957." This is what it says, very simple, "The province has guaranteed a letter of credit issued by the Royal Bank of Canada on behalf of Marble Mountain Development Corporation to secure the corporation's payment obligations under a contract to replace the main chairlift. The guarantee will expire on May 15, 2015."

Mr. Chair, this bill will amend the Schedule to the Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957 – I just alluded to – in order to ratify new loan guarantees or changes such as increases to existing guarantees. What happened in this instance, Mr. Chair, we are amending the act to include a letter of credit in the amount of \$2 million, as was pointed out earlier, to secure the corporation's payment – the corporation we are talking about is the Marble Mountain Development Corporation – obligations under contract to replace the main chairlift.

Back in August, I believe it was August 8, as some people alluded to earlier, the Marble Mountain Development Corporation suffered a very unfortunate and most unexpected event when lightning hit the main chairlift, the Governor's Express. From my understanding, I think they have it renamed. I believe it is the Lightening Express. I think a very appropriate name, Mr. Chair, after the event.

The main chairlift is essential for the maximum operation of the ski hill, which is a first-rate facility in this Province. When it was first realized the damage was more significant than we had originally thought, the Marble Mountain Development Corporation came to the provincial government with a funding request asking for help with the damages.

Mr. Chair, the twenty-year-old chairlift was destroyed by fire caused by lightning on August 8, which I said earlier. This fire destroyed the lift shack at the top of the mountain and caused a cable supporting the chairlift to snap. The chairs collapsed to the ground. According to their general manager, the normal lifespan of a chairlift is around twenty-five years. Some pieces were at the end of their useful life, so he said it does not make sense to use old equipment with new equipment since most of it is not even compatible anyway. From my understanding, and according to the general manager, this new equipment is going to be equipped with lightning prevention equipment. So that is good to hear.

Replacing the chairlift required a significant analysis by the, I will call it the MMDC now for short. They had to work with their insurance company, they had to work with their inspectors, they had to work with the lift manufacturers – I

think the manufacturers name was Poma. The manufacturers also had to come up with a replacement plan for the equipment; and, of course, government had to go through a process to seek financial assistance outside the current, normally budgetary process.

I simply want to say a great big thank you and give the corporation full marks for acting expeditiously, diligently, following due process in trying to get that ski facility up and running.

As we know, in September this government was pleased to announce that we were providing more than \$3.5 million for replacing the damaged infrastructure, which includes the chair, grips, and a new lift cable. It was pointed out earlier the estimated total cost to dismantle and install the new chairlift is around \$4.7 million, plus HST. Of course, we all know the insurance will only cover \$1.2 million and the total cost to government would be \$3.28 million.

We understand, Mr. Chair, this has been a very difficult time for Marble Mountain since the lightning strike on August 8. We are aware of how diligently, like I said earlier, everyone has been working to get Marble Mountain up and running for the 2014-2015 operating season. From my understanding, the season will open as planned on December 26, Boxing Day, with the lifts that are already operational. According to the manufacturer, he is very optimistic that this new piece will be installed and operational around mid-January or late January.

We all agree that Marble Mountain is a very, very important component of winter tourism on the West Coast of our Province. They are the epicentre, if you can call it that way, of winter sports. The ski facility is an economic stimulator for the whole economy on the West Coast. It is a catalyst for tourism in the area including increased private sector investment in accommodations; the food service industry; adventure tourism businesses such as zip lining; and as the Member for Port de Grave pointed out earlier, snowmobiling; as well as new winter sports such as Snow West.

Mr. Chair, in a nutshell, this is a good story. This is a story where government stepped up to the plate. It was unfortunate it happened. It is a good story because there were no injuries, no

lives lost. It could have been a lot worse if we had a fatality. I am glad to hear it is only a piece of infrastructure which could be replaced in short. I compliment the fire department and the responders for the diligent job they did in addressing this unfortunate incident. It is a good news story. Government wants people to be employed.

Mr. Chair, we all need a lift once in a while in life, no pun intended. A ski hill is not a waste of money. The West Coast facility is a prime attraction for the whole Province. I believe it is over 67,000 skier visits went to that ski hill last year and had a lot of fun. We all agree that recreation and sport, and leisure activity is very important to cut down on obesity and deal with chronic diseases and illness.

Mr. Chair, I am certainly pleased, as a government, we stepped to the plate. We want people employed. We did not want to see a big hole, a big gap – actually, the whole season might have been wiped out when it comes to that particular chairlift. So this maximizes the chairlift facility.

Again, back to resident travel. It is a very important aspect as well, of the tourism industry in general. Our goal is to extent the traditional tourism season and increase winter tourism business in the Province, primarily in snowmobiling and ski product areas, as well as promoting other winter activities.

Mr. Chair, this is an example I suppose of diversifying the economy. We gave \$110 million to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. Their tentacles reached far and wide. By us giving \$110 million to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, you are investing in people in King's Point. You have invested in people in Springdale. You have invested in people's lives in Middle Arm.

Mr. Chair, we have invested in Rambler Mines and Anaconda Mines in my district. That is another example of diversifying the economy, by enabling these mining companies to invest in modern technology so they can prolong the mining life and, hence, sustain and maintain the 200-plus jobs on the Baie Verte Peninsula, in that region. That is a real good example, Mr. Chair, of government again stepping up to the plate and investing in small businesses and

sustaining and securing the jobs in a particular region.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will conclude my remarks. I hope this bill will pass unanimously.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. J. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I rise to speak in support of the bill, although I have a few concerns.

Mr. Chair, the first time I skied Marble Mountain, I was sixteen years old. I like Marble Mountain. I have skied most of the Alberta Rockies. They are much bigger and faster, but Marble Mountain is a great ski hill, one of the best in Eastern Canada without any doubt, underutilized, yes. It is like a well-kept secret, which is not a good thing. It is actually a bad thing.

I did not learn to ski on Marble. I already knew how to ski before I skied downhill on Marble when I was sixteen. I learned to ski holding onto a rope behind a snowmobile. I do not recommend it. Learning to ski holding onto a rope behind a snowmobile on a pair of skis, taking turns with your brother to see who can last the longest, is not the safest way to learn how to ski.

What you do not learn when you are behind a snowmobile is you can let go and stop anytime. When you go up to Marble Mountain and you go down, you do not realize that you are supposed to know how to stop. It is almost like being in the House of Assembly; sometimes you do know when to stop.

In any event, Marble Mountain is a great ski hill. My last interaction with Marble Mountain was two years ago when the issue of the Marble Mountain Development Corporation came before the Public Accounts Committee. Marble Mountain had some troubles. I will not reflect on those troubles. If we could see the financial update, then it might be useful to be able to

determine if, in fact, the recommendations of the Auditor General have been fulfilled.

At that point after what I feel was a relatively good vetting of the issues, the very first matter that came before the current Public Accounts Committee was Marble Mountain Development Corporation. The person who appeared before us was a relatively new chair. He seemed to have a good handle on things. The one thing which may have escaped oversight, and seems to have escaped oversight, is the adequacy of the insurance.

Mr. Chair, for those who do not fully understand the nature of the enterprise, the nature of the beast, the ski hill is a pretty substantial ski hill. It is a good employment generator and it operates with a \$400,000 annual grant from the Province. Some of the problems that they had encountered, before the Auditor General did the review in 2011 was that it was running substantial deficits in addition to the \$400,000, which would be a concern for anyone.

Like I said, if we were to look at the current financial statements we may be able to determine if the remedial steps that the board took a few years ago were enough to resolve the issue or not enough to resolve that issue. Hopefully it was. It is troublesome that we have to support – not that we have to support the Marble Mountain Development Corporation, but that there was inadequate insurance on a valuable part of the corporation.

One of the issues that the Auditor General identified was that there was not a proper capital asset list. The assets needed to be listed and the assets needed to be identified. That was one of the shortcomings. To have the insurance shortfall of this much is troublesome. If it is a \$5 million asset, and it has a little more than \$1 million in insurance coverage, then one would wonder why the corporation had not taken steps to determine the adequacy of the insurance.

The annual insurance premiums the AG identified from a few years ago were \$100,000 that they were paying. Maybe if the insurance premiums were more focused, maybe if there had been a better use of deductibles, better use of potentially co-insurance, then maybe the taxpayers would not have to come up – not with

what we are discussing today because this is a loan guarantee. I understand hopefully that will be short-term, only for the next few months until the longer-term financing is put in place. That is after the government has already come up with quite a bit of money in order to support the purchase in addition to the loan guarantee.

Mr. Chair, it would seem advisable that whatever assets are involved and whatever Crown corporations, really a review is undertaken of the insurance of all the substantial assets of the different Crown corporations of the Province. We do not know if there is other exposure that the taxpayers may be exposed to for any loss.

We do know, for example, that the Province takes an interest in some insurance premiums. Also Public Accounts dealt with the forest diversification, also known at the Roddickton pellet plant. We know that the Province is paying for insurance to insure that asset, even though the asset in some people's minds seems to not be producing as it should.

If anything, Mr. Chair, I would hope that the appropriate individuals in government would issue a directive, if they have not already, to say what assets we have. We need to know what they are, and we need to know what the insurance coverage is. Is the insurance adequate so that we do not have this type of exposure? If you are struck by lightning – and that can happen I suppose, although they say lightning does not strike twice. It is not the lightning strike; it is the inadequacy of the insurance which is the problem here.

I think that everybody, I expect in the whole House, wishes Marble Mountain Corporation well. I would encourage people to come to Marble Mountain Corporation, come to the hill and start at the bottom of the hill. You will not need a hill as high as the one we are talking about with the government. You could start at the bottom. You could start with the rope tow. You could start with the bunny hill and learn how to ski.

It is a great sport. Eventually, after you start at Marble Mountain, you may graduate to the bigger hills. One of these days after a few years skiing you may even go to the double black

diamond at Nakiska. That will be a real eye-opening experience if you tackle the double black diamond at Nakiska. It looks like the face of a cliff and you are pretty much going straight down.

For sure we need to support this bill. It is a caution that in addition to maybe reviewing the operations to see if they are back on track and see if there is a cash flow shortage, that any and all assets of the Province should be listed and properly insured.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am delighted to rise today in the House of Assembly to speak on Bill 31. It is a very important bill that ties in to the tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I actually come from the East Coast, from Bonavista South and I do know how important the tourism industry is to the full Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This particular government continually invests in projects like this. They invested in projects in my district, the beautiful historic District of Bonavista South.

I would like to just move away a little bit and talk about some of the investments that are very important to all regions of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether you come from Labrador, whether you come from the West Coast, the Central part of Newfoundland, the East Coast, and places like the beautiful District of Bonavista South where I reside and I have great passion and pride in. I am sure people on the West Coast feel the same way about a beautiful site like Marble Mountain.

I was amazed first when I visited the West Coast and looked up at the hill and looked at Marble Mountain, how important it was, and the contributions that this site makes to the tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr.

Chair. There is no doubt that we have a great tourism industry. The tourism industry is growing. It is a \$1 billion industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Sites like Marble Mountain certainly contribute to the tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In my district, we have a number of tourism sites like the Matthew Legacy site that this government has contributed towards and invested in. It adds to the tourism industry as well. The Sir William Coaker Foundation – millions of provincial dollars have gone into that particular site, and helped the tourism industry grow in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Most recently, this government invested \$500,000, Mr. Chair, in a new Sealers' Memorial in the Town of Elliston, a small town in Newfoundland and Labrador with a population of 250 people. That beautiful town is revitalized because of the tourism industry and because of investments that this government invests in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and invests in tourism industry projects like that.

Mr. Chair, I must say that I am delighted to stand on my feet today and support this particular bill, Bill 31, that is very important to the West Coast, very important to the Marble Mountain Corporation and employees who work there. The tourism industry is growing. We are going to have challenges from time to time based on issues that happen, unforeseen challenges that occur, like lightning strikes and projects like that that go through a difficult time. It is good that our government can stand with the people, no matter where you live in this Province. With projects like this, we realize how important they are to the people of this Province.

We have a growing tourism industry that is expanding, expanding each and every day, Mr. Chair. It is growing. We have an international group of people who visit this Province and they want to visit this Province not only in the summertime, because most of the tourism industry on the Bonavista Peninsula is in the summertime.

So we are contributing to a tourism industry project on the West Coast that is a growing industry, and we are expanding right throughout the year. That is very important that we continue to do that and pay close attention to big projects like the Marble Mountain project.

This government will continue to invest, like I said, in projects like this, and we see some great work coming from a large number of volunteers on the West Coast as well, who tie into that particular growing industry and the Marble Mountain site. Tomorrow is the International Day of Volunteers. I had to mention volunteers when I got up here to speak today, and I have to commend the large number of volunteers all across this Province who actually assist and help out in many cases in sites like the Marble Mountain site and other tourism industry initiatives throughout this Province, Mr. Chair.

So I have no problem standing on my feet here today and supporting a project such as the Marble Mountain ski lift project and so forth. The total cost to this government is expected to be approximately \$3.5 million in a loan guarantee. This will mean a brand new, high-speed chairlift for Marble Mountain which will have a twenty-five year life expectancy. Mr. Chair, a twenty-five year life expectancy with the highest technologies, as one of my colleagues mentioned earlier. This is a very worthwhile investment.

In addition to that, the national winter Special Olympics will take place in Corner Brook in March 2016. Every effort is underway to ensure these games will be very successful. This government realizes the importance of events like this and how they tie into the tourism industry and the physical activities of what our people do on a continued basis, Mr. Chair.

This government is also looking at this from an angle of economics and how important this ties into jobs. The future employment levels will increase in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador because of initiatives like this, Mr. Chair.

So, we will continue to pay close attention to what is happening in different regions of this Province. We will definitely invest in projects like this as we move forward. As a government,

our track record is definitely proven and we will continue to work with organizations in the future.

Marble Mountain had 67,000 skier visits in 2013-2014, an increase over the numbers that actually visited the site in 2012-2013, Mr. Chair. Approximately 90 per cent of Marble Mountain's market is residents, with 60 per cent coming from the local area. Other people come from different parts of the Province and different parts of the world.

I remember actually going on a holiday and spending time in Calgary and talking to people in Calgary, and different parts of the country – Marble Mountain, the treasure that you have on the West Coast. How many times did it hear Marble Mountain mentioned on my travels outside of this Province – the beautiful Marble Mountain.

It is very important that everyone get the experience. It is an awesome experience, Mr. Chair, an experience that people from all over the world come to this beautiful Province for. It is a gem. It is an icon. It is a treasure. I can feel a passion when I talk about Marble Mountain. It is on the West Coast of this beautiful Province and it certainly ties into what we are all about as a Province. We will continue to invest in important projects like this as we move forward.

Again, I would like to say I will be supporting Bill 31. It is a very important bill. I appreciate the opportunity to stand on my feet here again today and speak in the House.

The Department of Finance, the staff in the Department of Finance, and the minister responsible is certainly paying close attention to projects like this. I commend each and every person in relation to supporting such a bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure for me to stand up here, with an hour or so left in the proceedings today, to talk about Bill 31 and to speak to Bill 31. Bill 31 in the Explanatory Notes says, "The province has guaranteed a letter of credit issued by the Royal Bank of Canada on behalf of Marble Mountain Development Corporation to secure the corporation's payment obligations under a contract to replace the main chairlift. The guarantee will expire on May 15, 2015."

This is a money bill of course. People who are watching at home may not be aware, Mr. Chair. Members of the House of Assembly are allowed a certain amount of leeway to speak broadly on issues affecting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to money bills. The first thing I would want to say is that we will be ensuring that this bill gets reasonably speedy passage through the House of Assembly. There is no question about that. This is something that has to be done.

As other Members of the House of Assembly on this side of the House have pointed out, there are ways that this could have been prevented. In many instances, there are ways that problems could be headed off. Whether it is the Marble Mountain issue, the lack of insurance, or the insufficiency of the insurance to cover the damage that was caused by the weather, it is an act of God so to speak. Or other decisions that government makes from time to time, be it the expropriation of the Abitibi mill, or the failure to ensure that information technology is kept up-to-date so that we can track funds and make sure everything is on par and public monies are accounted for. Or even the Christmas trees, Mr. Chair, out in front of the House of Assembly.

I understand and maybe somebody – I do not know if the Minister of Transportation and Works or the Minister of Service NL is aware, but I think we are on the third Christmas tree.

They are going to light it later on this evening out in front of the Confederation Building, but I think this is the third one now they are after putting up there since the month came in, or since the end of November. The first tree they put up there they said it was not full enough or something like that, it was not branchy enough, it was not bushy enough, and they took that tree down. I am not sure how much that tree cost,

Mr. Chair. It cost somebody something anyways. I do not think it was donated.

Maybe the Minister of Transportation and Works or the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador is able to clarify, but I do not think that tree was donated. They took that tree and they chucked that one and then they went and got another one.

I understand – this is what was told to me. I do not know if the Minister of Transportation and Works or the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: Oh, I understood they had to get a boom truck to come in the other day from Whitbourne to put another one up there. That one looked fine to me. It reminded me of my Uncle Mar. My Uncle Mar was never, ever was satisfied with the Christmas tree; he always had to take it down and replace it with a different one. Sometimes it was right up to Christmas Eve he was replacing it.

This government's activities around the Christmas tree remind me of my Uncle Mar. I actually feel good about that, but I do not think anybody, including my Uncle Mar, would be very pleased to see that government cannot even put a Christmas tree right up in front of the House of Assembly. They will spend money several times over on multiple trees to finally get the one they have there today.

Mr. Chair, I am glad the day has come that they are going to light the Christmas tree because if they did not light it today, they would probably have to get another one for Monday. Who knows, if we are right up until Christmas Eve, it will definitely be reminding me of my Uncle Mar to be putting one up every other day. Thank goodness today has come for the tree lighting so the government can stop wasting money on multiple trees out in front of the House of Assembly. I will leave you with that.

On a more serious note, I just wanted to go back to a subject of conversation that we had today which is the issue of mental health supports in schools. I did not take an extensive period of time to go over this today because I thought

others should have an opportunity to speak. Certainly, the Minister of Health had quite an extensive opportunity to speak. Good for him, and hopefully he will act on the things that he promised and guaranteed the people of Newfoundland and Labrador here in the House of Assembly today. I believe he said that was all going to be starting in January, so everybody over here will be paying very keen attention.

I wanted to go back because that there has been a lot of discussion about mental health issues in the Province. I issued this press release on May 8 of this year during Mental Health Week. It was a different Minister of Education at the time and I think it was prior to the changes that were made by the current Premier. I pointed out that we continually hear from parents and students, teachers and administrators and school staff, and others, leaders in our community and advocates that our schools do lack critical mental health support services. As I said today in Question Period, that is one of the most pressing issues facing the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador today.

In its pre-Budget consultation submission, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils called for a new allocation for youth mental health and addictions counsellors. It was a ratio of 1 per 500 students. Now, government failed to provide for that in Budget 2014, and there are all sorts of other things that are relevant to this.

I have been looking at what other provinces are doing. I cannot help but notice what is going on in the Province of Nova Scotia. They have a new government and they have come in and they have kicked the tires and had a look at what was being done. That province looked at pledging more guidance counsellors for schools, more mental health clinicians for schools, and looking at more youth health centre co-ordinators as well.

As I said today – and I do not think it can be said enough – when we met last night there was a panel discussion down at the Gower Street United Church talking about the issue of youth homelessness, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but all across our country. One of the things that were said – and I guess it sort of stuck with me because of my own work in

education. The person who was speaking was actually a professor of education. He said he knows from teaching teachers, from working with teachers, that teachers know when they have all those kids in their class and they are there all day long, day in and day out, they know where the trouble is. They know where the problems are. They know which kids are having difficulty at home.

They know which kids have issues around substance abuse that they are dealing with at home. They know which kids are dealing with problems associated with spousal abuse at home. They know which kids miss a lot of time because of health issues, including mental health issues. They have a good idea which children need more attention, which children need more supports for not just mental health issues, but for all sorts of disabilities and special circumstances and special instances – things that are going on in their lives particularly.

As a gentleman said the other day on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, he said when you meet one child with autism; you met one child with autism. I really feel similarly about children in our schools. They are all individuals and they are all facing individual challenges. Though we cannot provide individualized supports for them all, there are some that we surely can and have to do that for. If we do not pay now, we will pay later.

I think it is a far better investment of public money to spend that on that. Not on multiple Christmas trees. Not on keeping the light and heat and insuring schools that are going to be demolished before long and a play field put there. Not on things that the Province does not need and the taxpayer would say is a foolhardy errand.

So, it is not really about spending more money. That is not the issue. It is about spending money more smartly. It is about putting our investments where they can have the greatest effect. You cannot really say that enough. I think it was a special day in the House of Assembly here today. I think we all nodded our heads in agreement on that particular issue.

I am glad to be able to get up and speak on this bill and have a little bit more to say about that

because, as I said, we cannot talk about it enough in here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank members for their comments and contribution to the debate on this bill. I want to thank them all because all members who spoke said they were going to support this bill when we vote in a few moments.

During the course of the conversation and commentary, there were a few questions that were raised. I really want to respond to them, because they are important questions. They are critical issues, obviously. Everybody supports the thrust of the bill, but there are some questions around the financial operation and the governance and the management of Marble Mountain. They are fair questions because this is a Crown corporation. This entity is owned by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and it is important to understand how it has been run and how it has been governed.

There was one point that was raised with respect to the Auditor General's report and what may have come out of that and some of the commentary that the Auditor General made at that time about opportunities for improved efficiencies and a different focus for management. During that time, there were some twenty-one recommendations made in the AG's report. We understand now, from the board, twenty of those recommendations have been actioned and implemented. They are making progress on finishing off that final one.

The Auditor General's report was taken seriously. The people who were on the board of the Marble Mountain Development Corporation are dedicated and committed individuals who take their role seriously, and want to make sure they do a good job on behalf of the people of the Province. I just wanted to provide that information to the House.

The other question that arose was with respect to the insurance and several speakers raised that

issue. Several people have made comment about the AG's report and Public Accounts. Those who sat on Public Accounts and reviewed the financial statements of Marble Mountain Development Corporation would recognize that this is – as we described and everybody has acknowledged – a tremendous asset and a wonderful piece of infrastructure for recreation and sport in the Province. At the same time recognizing this is not one of those corporations like Nalcor, for example, that will pay huge dividends to the Province by way of an annual payment. The value we get from this is the economic development value and the contribution it makes to the economy.

The insurance premium paid by Marble Mountain Development Corporation is \$100,000 a year. That is given their cash flow. Cash flow is their ability to increase their revenue stream. They could jack up prices potentially, but people are price sensitive. They are now currently pricing themselves competitive with other hills of that same calibre. Another thing that happens of course to influence their revenue stream is the number of people who visit and the number of people who ski. They have spent a lot of money and energy into their marketing program to bring new skiers to the hill.

That issue of risk assessment that was referenced earlier is all in the context of what their capacity would be to cover the additional insurance premium. That was the decision that they made consciously in the context of where they were and the fiscal capacity they had, and the potential risk associated with having a lightning storm, for example, in the middle of August that was going to destroy the whole thing. It never happened before. What are the chances?

It may happen again, but risk assessments are just that. You look at the probability of an accident happening. What is my cost? What are the things I can do to mitigate? What risk am I prepared to accept? I think we will all acknowledge that whatever we do, you are never going to eliminate all the risk associated with it. They made a conscious decision that a \$100,000 premium was a significant premium.

What I can tell the House and I understand from the officials and the people who manage the hill, that once this new lift is installed – it is a huge

investment, it is a \$5 million investment – there will be full coverage on this particular, Mr. Chair, when it is installed. That will ensure that if something like this were to happen again, then obviously this lift would be fully insured. Some of it is a part of the installation by the supplier and some more of it is by additional coverage carried by the hill.

I think, Mr. Chair, there were many comments about many things that had, not little to do with Marble Mountain, but strayed really from the subject matter. I will not respond to any of those. I do appreciate the commentary made, and I do appreciate the support for the bill. I thank members for their contribution.

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, resolution carried.

A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 31)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 31 without amendment?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the resolution and a bill consequent thereto, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the resolution be now read a first time.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 31.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred, and have directed me to report that they have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and they have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall the report be received?

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I moved, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that the resolution be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this resolution be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

“That is it expedient to bring in a measure further to amend The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957, to provide for the advance of loans to and the guarantee of the repayment of bonds or debentures issued by or loans advanced to certain corporations.”

On motion, resolution read a first time.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I moved, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the resolution be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that his resolution be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

“That is it expedient to bring in a measure further to amend The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957, to provide for the advance of loans to and the guarantee of the repayment of bonds or debentures issued by or loans advanced to certain corporations.”

On motion, resolution read a second time.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I moved, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957, Bill 31, and that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved, and seconded that the Minister of Finance shall have leave to introduce a bill and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion that the said bill be now read a first time?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance to introduce a bill, “An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957”, carried. (Bill 31)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 31)

On motion, Bill 31 read a first time.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 31 be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved by the hon. the Government House Leader that the bill be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 31)

On motion, Bill 31 read a second time.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I moved, seconded by the minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 31 be now read the third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 31 be now read a third time.

It is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 31)

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

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957”, read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 31)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 1, Address in Reply.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my pleasure to rise in this House today and speak to the Budget of earlier this year, but first I would like to take the opportunity to welcome my colleagues, the newly elected MHA for the District of Conception Bay South to the House, as well as the MHA for St. George's – Stephenville East who join us on this side. It is a pleasure to have them working with us and I look forward to working with them for many, many, many years to come.

I would also like to welcome soon, two new MHAs who will be joining us, Steve Crocker and Stelman Flynn. I am looking forward to next week, their swearing in and getting them in the House of Assembly here to join us as well. It is important that the people of the Province, in every single district, have representatives in this House. We look forward to having all forty-eight seats filled in this House next week when Mr. Crocker and Mr. Flynn join us.

I think we are all no doubt honoured to stand and represent the people of our district in this House. I am certainly privileged to represent the over 11,000 people in my home District of Virginia Waters. I also have to take a moment to say how pleased I am to stand in the House today as one of the six elected women in the House of Assembly and, no doubt, all forty-eight members of this House bring a unique lens to our roles, but I think it is fair to say women bring an additional lens that is a valuable one that is needed in this House of Assembly.

I stand to address the Budget of earlier this year that was titled: Shared Prosperity, Fair Society, Balanced Outlook. At the time of the Budget, the price of Brent crude was forecasted in the Budget at \$105 oil. This morning, oil sat at \$67.30. Times in Newfoundland certainly have changed. Not only in the last twenty years, they have changed in the last ten years, and they have changed even further in the last few months.

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to focus on six areas that relate to the Budget, and not where we have been yesterday but where we are today. Those six areas include labour force, skills mismatch, our have status as a Province, our reliance on oil, our population, and our GDP.

Where are we today from a labour force perspective? Currently in Newfoundland and Labrador the unemployment rate is amongst the highest of the provinces. It sits at 12 per cent, hovering around 6 per cent in St. John's and over 17 per cent in the rest of Newfoundland.

While nationally employment was up in October of 2013, here in Newfoundland and Labrador employment was down. There were 7,500 fewer jobs compared to last October. That is a loss of 8,300 full-time jobs offset by an increase in 800 part-time jobs. As a matter of fact, this government itself has predicted that our labour force will shrink by over 11,000 positions by 2017.

Where are we today with regard to a skills mismatch? I think it is really difficult, Mr. Speaker, for folks to reconcile our high unemployment rate in the Province with the inability to find workers. Yet, that is the situation we find ourselves in. In my role as the MHA responsible for finance in the Official Opposition, I have had the chance to speak to representatives of almost 2,500 organizations throughout the Province. Labour market and skills mismatch comes up in every single conversation.

There have been substantial pieces of work done around the Skills Task Force and Outlook 2020. I am sure we will all recall the statement that over 70,000 job openings are anticipated between 2011 and 2020 as a result of new job growth and attrition. The reality is that data is now outdated.

We have many apprentices who are stalled in their plans of training, while multinational companies like Vale have looked outside the Province for workers. The apprenticeship system comes to mind as a definite system that needs improving. Despite the Skills Task Force and Outlook 2020, Newfoundland and Labrador and the people of the Province are not – and government was not prepared to maximize the potential of the megaprojects for our people.

The highly touted Journeyperson Mentorship Program launched in 2012 was supposed to train between 120 and 200 apprentices a year for new jobs. In the first year, five people were trained. There is no doubt that we need an aggressive

homegrown training strategy for our youth and others who are willing to be trained. We owe it to our youth to give them the options to stay, and many of them will. The default issue that tends to come to mind when we talk about workforce these days though is skilled trades, but the reality is government's own report in Outlook 2020 referred to many, many trades and jobs that were going to become vacant if training did not happen.

Literacy is another contributor to one of the reasons why Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are not able to take advantage of the opportunities that may be presented to them. I was stunned to discover that one in two adults in our Province, one in two, do not meet the desired proficiency level in language or numeracy. Does our workforce match our economy's needs? How do we better support people to take advantage of opportunities when 50 per cent of the adults in our Province lack levels of literacy that are greater than three? This stat actually remains unchanged since 2003.

Level III means that people can function well in today's knowledge-based society. This means they can read and write well enough to understand everyday documents, use a bank machine, surf the Internet. Literacy is an issue that affects everyone in this Province, and if half of the adults are not functioning well in society, this has a tremendous implication with regard to our labour force, our health care system, and the education of our children. We have been waiting seven years for the Province to release its promised adult literacy plan. Would anyone consider this lagging creating the conditions for businesses to succeed? I think not.

Where are we today with population and immigration? The reality is not only do we need to retain our youth; we need an equally aggressive immigration strategy. We see the very real challenges, Mr. Speaker, that many businesses are facing across the Province in finding and retaining employees.

We have one of the worst records of any Province in Canada of retaining immigrants in our community; yet, this government cut the budget for the Office of Immigration to half since 2011. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, and this government itself has admitted

in its much touted and much anticipated population strategy that we have no choice but to grow our population. That means engaging in global competitions for a skilled and professional workforce that can come and work right here, but we continue to wait for a population strategy.

So here we are today, have status. The Province currently today has have status, but that is not felt by everyone. We have the highest food bank usage amongst any province. It is twice the Canadian average. In March of this year almost 27,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians went to food banks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, 10,000 of them was children. I was stunned to learn that we have over 150 communities in our Province in Newfoundland and Labrador without adequate drinking water.

Where are we today with our reliance on oil? The baby boom is not the only boom that is affecting our economy. Over one-third of our revenue comes from oil and gas. That is about \$2.4 billion annually. One-third of our revenue is sourced from a non-renewable resource. That is, quite frankly, an unsustainable revenue source.

In the 2014 Budget, then Finance Minister Charlene Johnson said that the Province was forecasting oil prices to average \$105 US. Today, that price is around \$67. We have seen oil production continue to decline since 2007, and further declining this year, again impacting the revenues that are going to be available to the Province.

Oil is not policy, it is a resource. It is a non-renewable resource that we must leverage to ensure a more stable and diversified economic future. People of the Province expect government to generate new revenue streams, and these new revenue streams must grow from existing industry sectors. They must be new revenues by diversifying our economy, growing export markets, and bringing new money into the Province in other forms.

Where are we today with population? We have the oldest population in the country at 44.2 years. Deaths are outpacing births. Our birth rate is the second lowest in the country, and we continue to lose people to other provinces every day.

In the past five years we have lost 4,600 of our youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four to other provinces. Having the oldest population in Canada has a tremendous impact on health care dollars. As the Auditor General pointed out in this year's report, there are huge concerns about our population makeup, and about the stress on public services created by the population that we have here today.

Employers face considerable challenges in meeting the workforce needs, especially when the baby boomers stop working. Let there be no mistake, an aging population, which is what we have in Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, an aging population equals a declining workforce. Older workers are more likely to move out of the workforce from full-time positions and work part time, especially if they are seniors on low income who cannot afford the things they need. This would explain why we have seen the increase in part-time work in the month of October.

Part of contending with an aging population is succession planning. We have an estimated 70 per cent of business owners who are going to retire from their businesses in our Province, Mr. Speaker, in the next ten years. What happens when no one in the family business wants to carry on that business, when the business dies?

To give you some perspective on how our population has changed, let's look at grade school enrolment and how it has plummeted. In the 1971-1972 school year, there were 163,000 children in school. In 2013-2014 there were 67,000 kids in school. It is not just about growing the population. It is about growing productivity and creating innovation. That is key to combating a declining workforce.

Where are we today with GDP? Government's forecast of the GDP in 2017 is dismal. The Conference Board of Canada is predicting Newfoundland and Labrador will be the weakest performer nationally in 2005. We went from having the highest GDP growth to the lowest. We went from 8 per cent to 1.7 per cent. Our economy is boom and bust because government has grown reliant on megaprojects, has not invested, and not made economic diversification happen.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I believe what the people of the Province want, I believe what the taxpayers of the Province want, and what the 67,000 kids in school today need is a government that is going to do things right. In other words, they expect good management. They expect a government that is not only operating in good management, but doing the right things with good leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the people of the District of Virginia Waters for providing me the opportunity to stand in this hon. House and represent them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: Someone once said democracy is not a spectator sport. That is very true.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage even more people, even more women to step out and offer themselves for public office. I think my colleagues in this hon. House would agree that good governance happens when these seats are filled with talent and passion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, that is the only way – after listening for the last fifteen minutes, I would

expect that the Member for Virginia Waters must have her passport filled out, got her ticket booked, and she is ready to leave the Province. She has to be ready to leave the Province.

Mr. Speaker, without any notes I just heard that we are the most illiterate people – I would almost say the most illiterate people in the world, the most stunned people in the world, and the most unemployed people in the world. This place has to be the worse place to live in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you I was just blown away by the member's commentary on where we are as a Province. I was sitting here just fidgeting. Anybody who knows me knows that I operate from a positive perspective, I have to. That is the only way I can be. If there is a problem in front of me I look for the solution. The member just presented spiel, after spiel, after spiel as to what I thought was why somebody would not want to live here.

I was just thinking to myself as she spoke, I would like to hear presentations from students in our school system. I would imagine, Mr. Speaker, if she got up and spoke to a group of students in our school and presented what she just presented, all I could see is 200 or 300 young people in our gymnasium and in our library leaving and saying yes, it is time for me to go.

Now, she wonders why in about the 1970s there were 160-something students, and there are 67,000 in the school now – isn't that what she wondered?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

MR. JACKMAN: Well, let me just give her a little simple message of mathematics, Mr. Speaker. I am going to speak to my father and my mother, one of my uncles and my aunts, and another one of my uncles and my aunts. Just listen –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: – and I would ask the Member for Virginia Waters to just listen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: Just listen. Mr. Speaker, one of my uncles and aunts had sixteen children. Another one of my uncles and my aunts had fourteen – thirty. There were ten in my family, Mr. Speaker. There were forty children in three families. You search anywhere in this Province to see where that has happened within the last twenty or twenty-five years. Well, Mr. Speaker, with those population stats – and I do not need to be an economist or a businessperson to tell you why the population in our schools have gone done.

So you get up and you can tout – I do not know what word to describe it. I have some words in mind, but I will not say them here in the House because I have too much respect for this House. What I have just heard – I can spout off the stats to her. We have fewer Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on Income Support now than ever before.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest unemployment rate. In 2013, it was the lowest unemployment rate since it was recorded starting in 1976 – since 1976.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we have challenges; there is no doubt about it. Who is going to say there are not going to be challenges? There will always be challenges, but I guess the perspective that the member has taken is one of defeatism. I cannot operate that way, and no one on this side operates that way. No one operates that way on this side.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, it seems the new member has found his voice.

I have been in this House for almost eleven years now. I value what happens in this House, but I do take exception from time to time when a

member gets up and brings to the people who are listening – and it would be a message that you pass on our youth of hopelessness, because that is what I just heard. What I just heard is that there is no hope for this Province. Mr. Speaker, make no doubt about it, it plays over the airwaves. So, Mr. Speaker, I will say to you, I will take this from a very positive perspective.

I have to say something to the Member for St. John's North. I have to; I cannot pass it up, Mr. Speaker. When he was talking about the Christmas tree – I thought he said Uncle Mar. I thought of the show that I watch. Every Christmas I watch the black and white version of *Scrooge* – Alastair Sim, who plays in it.

I was thinking to myself, Mr. Speaker, Uncle Mar, Christmas tree, five or six – it reminded me of sometimes when I would go out and cut the Christmas tree and bring it home, I had to put it up in the corner for my wife to take a look at it. I would bring it out and that one was not right. After the sixth one, what I would do is I would go up to the neighbour's house and get the one that his wife had not approved of and I would bring that one down and we would put it up. In the end, I went and eventually bought an artificial one, Mr. Speaker.

I thought his comments about our Christmas tree – Scrooge has arrived, Mr. Speaker. He is in the House across the way. I am certainly hoping, and I look forward to it – I live out of town, of course. Whenever my grandchildren come in I always take them in the car and I drive them up around the building and up around Prince Phillip Drive to see the lights because it is a wonderful thing. It sets the tone and the spirit for Christmas.

For anybody who is watching, if they are from out of town and they come in, take a cruise down around Confederation Building because all of the lights do add to the spirit. There may not be snow on the ground, but it can bring the spirit about.

AN HON. MEMBER: The tree is from Lord's Cove.

MR. JACKMAN: Pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: The tree is from Lord's Cove.

MR. JACKMAN: Oh, yes, the crowd from Lord's Cove.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to take my last ten minutes to be rather serious. Over the last couple of days I have been to three sessions where I have seen the good work – and I am going to say the good work and when I say government, I say government from our side, from the people who work in the system, and to the people who volunteer for organizations and whatnot.

Mr. Speaker, it started out yesterday morning. There were members from every side of the House at the session. Yesterday was the UN Day of Persons with Disabilities. There were members from the NDP there, members from the Liberal Party, and members from our party.

We listened to a gentleman by the name of Randy Lewis. Randy Lewis is a retired senior manager with Walgreens, a major chain in the United States. What he did in his tenure in management was he took on a focus to hire people with disabilities. Anybody who was in that room yesterday, I can assure you they left with I would say, first, a knot in their stomach; but, secondly, I think they left with a new insight into what we as parliamentarians, people out watching as businesses, we in government can do to support people in the disabled community.

His message was that when you employ people with disabilities, you do not only advantage the person with the disability, you advantage your entire workforce because everyone appreciates and supports that individual in the workplace. It was simply, simply amazing.

Mr. Speaker, that was a gentleman from the United States who came to speak to us about his experience. Now let's take it to our local level. Yesterday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock I went to Government House and myself and the Lieutenant Governor presented four awards to people in this Province who have done things to support the disabled people in our Province. Awards were handed out to an employee – and I will say it, Target. An award was handed out to a young gentleman who provided support to

people in the disabled communities. These people came up and accepted their awards with pride.

We listened to a speaker who was very motivational, to our own people who were presented awards for the work they have done on behalf of the disabled, and I think all walked away yesterday feeling proud. I think there is a renewed focus on our work as a government as to what other things we can do to support those who are disabled.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to speak at an institute that was organized around homelessness. Last week I had the privilege of joining with a federal minister in announcing some funds to increase affordable housing within the Province. We announced almost \$700,000 for some homelessness initiatives within the Province. I believe now we are at a really good place to take addressing the homelessness issue even further.

I spoke this morning about a report that was commissioned through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing around (inaudible) code. I said to them, I hope we can have that out very soon, because that will establish a direction as to where we need to go.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the joint partnerships between government and the groups that operate within our community, because many of them were represented there. We held our event last week at Choices for Youth. When you see what they have happening at their site, Mr. Speaker, you can only think that it is wonderful, we are addressing the issue, we are getting on with doing things, recognizing always – as everyone always reminds us in this House, and we remind ourselves, and the Minister of Health spoke about it today, there is always work to be done.

There will always be work that we need to address. There will always be people who face challenges who we need to support. I think we have an opportunity here, through these organizations, with government, with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing – which is an integral part of this – that we have the opportunity to make a huge difference in

addressing the homelessness issue in this Province.

We can always look at the glass as being half full or half empty. The way I am, I have to operate in that positive world. I said if you present me with a problem, then I am going to work to find a solution.

If the Member for St. John's North says the tree is not big enough and he does not like it, I will go off in the woods with him with an axe, Mr. Speaker, and we will cut down a tree that will be suitable to him.

All I have said is we all have our roles to play in this House, and I certainly do respect all people who step foot in this House. There is no doubt about it, but sometimes I have to wonder about the message that we deliver. We have to operate from the positive perspective, Mr. Speaker, we have to. If we do not operate from the positive perspective, who are the ones we are preaching to? If I took a negative outlook on life, I can only expect that my children will take a negative outlook on life, and that is just not the way I operate and I do not think it is the way that most of us operate.

Mr. Speaker, I came across this interesting thing in one of the articles last week and they were talking about child poverty. It looked at the stats, 2012 compared to 2006. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you we were well up there in 2006. If anybody wants to see this one: Quebec City, Calgary, and St. John's are right down at the bottom in terms of addressing child poverty. The only mistake is they wrote in: Toronto is tied with Saint John – and they had Newfoundland and Labrador. Of course, they had not recognized Saint John, New Brunswick, but they had Saint John down there.

The article clearly points out the work we have done and the difference that the Poverty Reduction Strategy has made. If you want to see pride in government, Mr. Speaker, go and speak to some of the people who have worked on the Poverty Reduction Strategy since 2006. Don't take my word for it; speak to the people who have been involved in it from day one. These are the people who worked to develop the strategy, brought it forward to government, and, Mr. Speaker, they live by it. They take extreme

pride in the documents they have developed, but more importantly than that, they take pride in the accomplishments that have been made. I will qualify it again by saying, and they recognize as we do, there are always additional things that need to be done and they continue to do the work.

Of course, we have the second round of consultations around poverty reduction. There has been 500 e-mails sent to various organizations and groups across the Province seeking their input. The most important part of those consultations, I say to you, Mr. Speaker, is the contacts that have been made with the people who live this day in and day out, so that in private sessions we will have some people who will sit and speak to these people and say to them, you tell me what it is we need to do; therefore, we are getting it right from those who are most impacted by it.

Mr. Speaker, I think the people in the Poverty Reduction Strategy who are working on that recognize the importance of doing that. We are looking forward to that being concluded, I think it is around January 19 or 20. Within a month from that, we should have that second strategy developed. Then we will start to roll out what we feel needs to happen as the second part of our Poverty Reduction Strategy.

My time is getting towards the end, Mr. Speaker. I have to say, I know it is two or three weeks away, but with the tree lighting – and I think this evening when I came over the sun was shining. I know it will be dark out, but hopefully the weather will be clear tonight for the lighting of the tree.

I would certainly encourage everybody who is around to come out and join with the Minister of Transportation and Works and the Premier as we light the tree and we listen to some songs and some Christmas music. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, it can put a little bit of spirit into – I know a lot of us have the spirit already, but I just hope that a few others of us can get the spirit. We have to carry it for another two or three weeks, I know, until the House closes.

Mr. Speaker, I feel very confident that a few of the members over the way who I know want that message – that takes me down. It drags me

down, it drags me down. I am just hoping they can get a little bit revived. When they look down the Parkway tonight they will be uplifted and see that this is not a Province of doom and gloom.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: This is not a Province of doom and gloom. How many of us get up in this House day after day and say, what a place to live?

Mr. Speaker, I know all of us take pride here in this House, but I would encourage everybody on every side of the House and every party, while we face challenges, there are solutions. If we do not work towards a solution, we will forever be in doldrums. I for one will not be there.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am very happy to stand today to talk about the wonderful District of St. John's Centre, right smack dab in the heart of it all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the District of St. John's Centre is such an absolutely diverse district. We have schools. There is Bishops high school, Booth high school, Holy Cross Junior High, Bishop Abraham Elementary, and the new St. Teresa's elementary. Although, we have lost a few schools in the last few years and it seems that we are about to lose this year Bishops high school and Booth Memorial High School, which is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because we do know how important communities schools are. They make such a difference in their community. It makes such a difference in the lives of students.

We have churches. We have the Salvation Army. We have the Roman Catholic Church. We have grocery stores. We have many, many,

many non-profit organizations in St. John's Centre. As a matter of fact, I do believe that the majority of non-profit organizations in the City of St. John's are actually in St. John's Centre. That is why I like to call it the heart of it. That it is in the heart of the city. It is sort of the heart of the city in terms of these non-profit organizations are doing such incredible work. Some of them are doing lifesaving work, often on minimal budgets.

In the past few years a number of them have seen their budgets reduced in the last two Budgets that were delivered by this government, which is unfortunate because we see more and more work that has been downloaded onto them. There is CHANNAL which works with mental health issues. It is a consumer peer support group. There is Thrive who does incredible work with young people, particularly young people who are disadvantaged, who have left the regular school system, young people with particular challenges. They are working with kids who are sexually exploited. They are working with kids with addictions and mental health issues. Mr. Speaker, they are doing a fantastic job.

There is the hub, which is the hub for a number of programs for people with physical disabilities. Mr. Speaker, we know how important it is to have these special places to serve the particular needs of people with physical disabilities, but also how important it is that we ensure any service we provide in our Province is open to the needs of people with physical disabilities because inclusion is such an important value in our society, or should be. We must always keep that in mind. That our buildings must be accessible, our workplaces must be accessible, that all programming and services that are delivered by this government, that they have to look at it with the lens of the needs of people with physical disabilities.

Buckmasters community centre and Froude Avenue Community Centre are serving the people of St. John's Centre and also serving people outside of that centre. They have a healthy baby club. They do afterschool programming with kids, particularly kids who are having a hard time at school, helping them with their homework, doing tutoring. They have

special programs for seniors and, in particular, people with really low incomes.

Buckmasters and Froude Avenue both do incredible work for people who are living in social housing, but also people who are economically disadvantaged. Vera Perlin has programming in St. John's Centre. They also have the Button Shop. I know that many of the members here during times of elections get their buttons made at the Button Shop. It is a great service to the community.

There are two – not one, but two separate Boys and Girls Clubs in St. John's Centre; one is in Buckmasters Circle and the other one is at Mews Place in the Mews Centre. The Mews Centre is a recreational facility that belongs to the City of St. John's. It does great work as well.

We have a legion, Branch 1, the first Royal Canadian Legion ever in Canada, and that was Branch 1. They serve veterans. They also serve a lot of seniors in our community and people outside of St. John's Centre. They service a lot of needs of seniors. There are dart games, card games, and dances. I am lucky to be invited to a number of their events. It is an example of community, Mr. Speaker, and how important that is to so many people.

I cannot remember if I mentioned that there is a bowling lane. We have St. Clare's Hospital. We have a brand new fire station in St. John's Centre. All of these are serviced by unionized workers. Workers who are taking care of the people of St. John's Centre and who are taking care of the people in the broader St. John's region and even the Avalon region.

There are daycare centres. There are food banks. There are artists who live in St. John's Centre, unionized workers, students, and a lot of immigrants. We have Purity Factories. I know everybody here in this House and people who are at home know about Purity Factory; biscuits and syrup and nobs, all the things that remind us of Christmas. When we have lived away or when we have family who live away, how many of us have sent care packages of Purity products to our loved ones?

Mr. Speaker, aside from how wonderful and vibrant St. John's Centre is, there are also issues

that need to be addressed in this House. Among those issues – and I will not be able to get to many of them now as I see that the time is beginning to run out here for today. Some of the issues that we need to look at are the issues of poverty among our seniors, poverty among our young working families, and the lack of a full comprehensive public child care program.

The increasing, increasing debt of housing – housing and mental health issues are among the two largest social determinants that push people into poverty. We have the highest percentage of people in the country, Mr. Speaker, who spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. That affects seniors, affects young working families, and that affects people with mental health issues. Also, there are some fantastic groups dealing with people who are coming out of prison, people who have addictions issues, mental health issues. It is called Turnings. It is run almost entirely by volunteers. Today we talked about how important volunteers are.

Mr. Speaker, I can see that it is now 5:28 p.m. I will have a lot more to say about St. John's Centre, and particularly the issues that we really have to face – the hard ones, because I know that there are solutions as well.

So I make a motion now to close debate for the day, and I look forward to picking up and talking about some of the particular issues in St. John's Centre.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The motion is that debate be now adjourned.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, debate adjourned.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given we are towards the end of the day, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Monday.

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