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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER: Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

We have some special guests with us just for a few minutes this morning, and I would invite you to please welcome – I'm going to speak a little bit of Ukrainian this morning; it's a new language for me:

доброго ранку мої колеги,
Я радий представити - Його
Високоповажність посол в Канаду з України
– Andriy Shevchenko!

Dear colleagues,

I welcome you. This is the Ukrainian Ambassador to Canada: Andriy Shevchenko.

And it's a great honour to meet him this morning.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Shevchenko is a former legislator in the Ukrainian government. He's actually responsible having escorted some 60 pieces of legislation through his parliament, so he's very well familiar with what we're doing here today, and we've had a little tour and an excellent discussion.

I thank you again. (Ukrainian spoken.)

MR. A. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

Very nice to have you here, Mr. Ambassador.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 52.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to

resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (P. Parsons): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 52, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance.

A bill, "An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance."

CLERK (Barnes): Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question on the bill – the Student Loan Corporation, of course, is now defunct and the Student Loan Corporation produces an annual report, as is required to government.

I would ask the question: What mechanisms are now in place to ensure that the agency report will now be undertaken by the two departments that are looking after it?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: The new act doesn't directly respond to that, but I will find that information out for the hon. Member and I'll get right back to him with that information.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question for the minister opposite: Does the Department of Finance have the necessary staff to handle the increased workload of the collections division?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Very good question. The staff from the Student Loan Corporation was transferred over in, I think it was November, December, to the Department of Finance. Everyone was transferred, with the exception of two people that were left with the Student Loan Corporation for dissemination of the loans and two positions that were currently vacant at that point at a savings of about \$400,000.

So they do have the full complement. They believe that they can do the collections and get efficiencies based on having all collections focused in the Department of Finance for this particular area.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for answering one of my questions already in advance, about how much is being saved. As you know, this is dealing with students who are either looking for a loan or in default.

How are we communicating the information out to students or those who are in default as to where they have to go or what the new mechanism is?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Madam Chair, as we had said in my preamble to the act, when we brought the act forward in first reading – or second reading, sorry – there will be absolutely impact to students. They won't see any impact whatsoever. They will still receive the loans in

the same way they have. They will still receive calls on collections in the same way they have, mostly likely from the same people that were doing it before.

There's very little change in the legislation from that perspective. It's just going to provide us an opportunity to provide more efficient use of the public service, save money for government, but not impact the services to students whatsoever.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

A final question: Has the minister taken into consideration, or had conversations with the MUN Students' Union?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Madam Chair, I just wanted to let the Member know I have an answer to his first question that he asked about the report. Yes, they will continue to do the exact same report they were doing before.

With respect to the Students' Union, I will check on whether the Students' Union was contacted on this, but my understanding is that it was consultation on all fronts on this, but there is no impact to students. There will be no impact to the Students' Union in this area. The loans will still be disseminated in the exact same way they were before. They will be collected in the exact same way they were before.

All we're doing is a housekeeping item and moving the people in one area to another area within government to create a savings from a fee structure that was of \$220,000 and \$178,000 in savings for two vacant positions. It gives us an opportunity to get some economies of scale within the collections, and we think we can do a better job on collecting some of the funds that we have not collected in the past. We think we'll have the ability to do that a little bit better by having it all housed in the one area.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I ask the minister, under section 6, Financial Institution: “The minister may, in writing, designate the financial institutions that may be lenders under this Act.”

I ask the minister: Who is the actual lender today, and is there a need for that to change or will it change in the future?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: There will be no change to that, as it exists right now. As I said to the hon. Member that asked the previous question, there will be no change to how the loans are disseminated, how they will be collected. The only difference is the location of the people who are doing the collections.

So it gives us an opportunity to get some economies of scale by having the collections focused in Finance where they are good at that collecting side – not that our individuals weren’t good at it, because they were doing a very good job of collecting those loans as well, but we wanted to try to get those savings that we are able to administer based on what *The Way Forward* has talked about with respect to doing a review of ABCs and trying to reduce our ABCs, our agencies, boards and commissions. If they can be housed in government, let’s do it, it makes better sense to do that, and it’s an economic savings for the people of the province.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you.

Just to be clear, the definition of financial institution is defined as: “(i) a bank to which the *Bank Act* (Canada) applies, (ii) a credit union incorporated or continued under the *Credit Union Act*, and (iii) those other persons that are designated by the minister.”

My question is not so much about the consolidation and the issues in regard to the administration coming from the corp into two line departments but, more specially, there’s a

banking institution that is designated by the minister. The question is: Has that changed? Will it change? Who is the current banking institution that’s been designated by the minister?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: There has been no change, but I will double-check to get the information for the hon. Member.

Good question.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 to 33 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 33 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 33 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 Respecting Student Financial Assistance.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: I recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. COADY: I move, Madam Chair, the Committee rise and report Bill 52.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 52.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave and Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House.

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 52 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed her to report Bill 52 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

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

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, Order 4, third reading of Bill 52.

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that Bill 52, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance, be now read a third time.

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

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance. (Bill 52)

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

On motion, a bill, “An Act Respecting Student Financial Assistance,” read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 52)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Order 7, second reading of Bill 50.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to have some remarks on the bill that we’re introducing – or we’re doing second reading on today, the *Public Bodies Reporting Act*, Bill 50. Just wanted to explain why we’re making these amendments –

MR. SPEAKER: Require a mover and a seconder, Sir.

You need a mover and a seconder.

MR. OSBORNE: Sorry.

I move second reading of An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act, Bill 50, seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act.” (Bill 50)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resources Secretariat.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you.

So, Mr. Speaker, the act was introduced to ensure that government had access to workforce and compensation-related information from our agencies, boards and commissions. As all Members remember when this act was introduced, the intention of the act was to remove the barriers – our agencies, boards and commissions were indicating they wanted to co-operate with government in putting in place attrition plans and getting agencies, boards and commissions in line with what government were doing in terms of finding some savings as we did with core government departments.

The act facilitates the sharing of information and enables government to better work with public bodies. Since the introduction of the act, we’ve been having very productive conversations with our agencies, boards and commissions and it has removed the barriers that existed at the time, which were discussed during the debate on the bill when it was introduced.

After the act was finalized, it was brought to government’s attention that the definition of a public body, as introduced in the act, was so broad, or too broad, that it included some entities that are not funded by government, and that was not the intention of the act. We weren’t intending, for example, the Law Society or ARNNL or others – they weren’t intended. We didn’t require them to be part of the act.

This is essentially housekeeping, just to ensure the act is not so broad as to include entities that are not directly funded by government and salaries paid by government, for example. The act was only intended to address the entities that are publicly funded and part of the public service.

So it has come to our attention that the definition of a public body, as introduced in the act, included self-regulated industries outside of the public service. As that was never the intention of the act, this housekeeping bill today will clarify the definition of a public body under the act to

exclude self-regulated and non-public service entities.

Mr. Speaker, the current legislation has no negative impact on any entity. It just left a question as to whether or not government could compel self-regulated, non-public service entities to provide information, which is something we never intended to do and don't require.

So, as I stated when I introduced this piece of legislation initially, being responsible for managing the public Treasury, and part of that is having a complete picture of how the funds are used in both core government as well as our agencies, boards and commissions. That was the intent of the bill, but it was never intended for self-regulated industries.

So, we're making this change today to ensure that the act addresses only what it was intended to address and to ensure that there's no confusion regarding self-regulated or non-public service entities in the province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to comments by all Members of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 50, An Act to Amend the Public Bodies Reporting Act.

As the minister has indicated, this deals with the initial piece of legislation that was introduced by this government related to access to information related to whether it was a public body.

The act defines public body to include: "a corporation, the ownership of which, or a majority of the shares of which is vested in the Crown and its subsidiaries, and (ii) a corporation, board, commission or other body, the majority of the members of which, or a majority of the members of the board of

directors of which are appointed by an Act, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council or a minister."

So the bill looks at defining a public body. The minister has said, when he originally brought in the legislation, this wasn't anticipated. It wasn't understood in regard to particularly, I assume, professional organizations out there who may support – you know, support professions related to the public service; yet, in terms of definition of public body may not be a corporation, the ownership of which rests with the Crown, and or the majority of shares in that entity rests with the Crown. So, therefore, I assume there was some concern expressed in regard to government's ability to access that information and a debate on whether exactly it should be available based on this piece of legislation.

The reporting requirements of this *Public Bodies Reporting Act* gave the minister, who is responsible for Human Resource Secretariat, legal authority for the minister to request salary and related information from public bodies. They would include agencies, boards and commissions, and that's what the original legislation intended to do.

When you look at the Explanatory Notes in the bill, the amendment will "exclude self-regulating professions" as we talked about for the bodies which the minister can request that information from. So we're drawing a distinction here between the actual bodies and entities that the minister who is responsible for Human Resource Secretariat, who he or she can actually request information from and what that information is.

Through the legislative change we're talking about here this morning, the definition of public bodies is being amended and a particular section is being removed, which would read: "established by or continued under an Act of the Province."

When this act was originally written, we assume that was put in, sort of, as a catch-all to ensure there was no ABC that would be left out and it would be collective in terms of who would be seen or who would be directed by the legislation and covered by it. Our understanding since the legislation was passed, some of the self-regulating professions or organizations have

expressed some concern about that and gives the minister the ability to direct them to submit that information.

I guess the issue is, in regard to the bill and the overall intent of the bill, is to look at those entities and organizations, whether they're professional organizations, self-regulating, are they publicly funded or not, where do they get their funds from? And, based on that, do they fit into the category of public bodies, and that would go to any of those professional organizations, and, as well, go to those that are owned by government boards that are not appointed by government.

Those professional organizations may have boards or entities set up that are appointed by the membership. So government, the Executive Council, would have no input into those appointments on the board. That would be one of the distinctions we're looking at here in regard to the bill.

One of the interesting points in regard to the actual definition, it says: "a corporation, the ownership of which or a majority of the shares" So I guess in committee we can have some more discussion.

What happens when government does have funding that's directed out to an organization or group, but they may not direct the majority or have majority shares? What happens in that instance? Because in that instance there could be public funds that are being directed to an organization. It may not have majority control by the Crown – the Crown may not control that organization, yet there are public funds being directed into that organization. Is there a caveat there that there is accountability for those funds, even though it's not a majority? Because at the end of the day, it is still public funds that are being directed.

We know through line departments or through ABCs, there are often funds or grants directed out. So in doing that, and putting this amendment in, are we restricting the ability to government to reach out if there are funds in an organization – it may not be the majority of funds, it may not be majority shares, but there could be an involvement there of public monies.

Does this bill restrict in any way government's ability to find out how that money is being used, how it's been executed in that actual organization? Even though it could be self-regulated, it could be a board that the government has no authority to appoint, it doesn't go through Executive Council, it was done by a self-regulated agency or profession. They're appointing the board members, yet there could be public money or grants directed to that organization. So what's the accountability and is it restricted in any way by this bill today? We'd certainly like to hear the minister speak to that when we get to Committee and clarify exactly what that would mean.

Mr. Speaker, overall, the intent – we certainly understand that an error was made in the original piece of legislation and this is to correct it based on some of the concerns expressed regarding those organizations or professional designations and how they handle themselves and regulate themselves, either through that actual organization and/or through the appointment of board members.

Overall, we certainly understand the intent and some of the representations that have been made to government in regard to this, I assume. We certainly look forward to having more questions in Committee and certainly listening to debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further speakers to the bill?

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

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

I'm happy to stand and speak to this bill this morning. It's more than a housekeeping bill. I think it's a bill which clarifies a serious consideration. The bill, as the minister and the Opposition House Leader have explained, gives the minister authority to require agencies, boards – I mean the act that the bill is amending gives the minister authority to require agencies, boards

and commissions to provide information and documents relating to that public body.

In the act, as has been said, the ABCs – if I can say that for the public that I won't repeat agencies, boards and commissions every time – had a definition which wasn't clear when it came to bodies, for example, that are self-regulated bodies and that's been explained.

For example, the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association is a self-regulated body but is not included under our act. I think the important thing is the understanding of what the act is about, the act that's being amended by the clear definition of which boards, agencies and commissions are covered.

We supported the act when it came in because this act was meant to provide relevant information government needs about expenditures of agencies, boards and commissions. There seemed to be a problem existing when some agencies wanted to protect information that they deemed commercially sensitive and they also wanted to protect personal information, such as retirement projections. Because of this situation, a situation where ABCs were actually withholding information and using the ATIPPA as their reason for doing it, it actually forced the need for putting in this act about public bodies reporting, because that's the act that's being amended, Public Bodies Reporting.

There was never intention to prevent government from obtaining necessary information from ABCs under the ATIPPA. That was never intended. So when the *Public Bodies Reporting Act* was put in place, it was put in place to amend that issue, to take care of that issue.

We actually had a pretty serious situation in the province that this *Public Bodies Reporting Act* probably was put in place because of. In 2013, an investigation by the province's Auditor General showed that the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information – what was under ABC umbrella – a public agency was paying salaries completely out of whack with the government's pay scales. Employees made more money than any other government employees doing the same job, and jobs were reclassified to

higher pay scales more frequently than in the rest of government. It was only discovered because of the Auditor General doing an investigation.

So, that's the kind of issue that brought into play the *Public Bodies Reporting Act* so that public bodies would be required to be accountable to government and not use protection under another act such as ATIPPA to not give information.

Now that we have this amendment, it's perfectly clear from the amendment what public bodies are covered by the *Public Bodies Reporting Act*, and I think it's essential that this has happened. So now, with the amendment, public body includes ABCs. It includes "a corporation, board, commission or other body, the majority of the members of which, or a majority of the members of the board of directors of which are appointed by an Act, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council or a minister"

So, it's very clear now what we mean by a public body. The self-regulating bodies who were concerned that they were actually covered by the *Public Bodies Reporting Act*, they will not be included, very clearly – I don't think they were meant to be included anyway, but this clarifies it and makes it very certain.

Having said that, yes, we will be voting for this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take very long but I, too, will be supporting this bill. Obviously, when this legislation was originally passed, I think it was basically an oversight or, at the time, that nobody really considered the fact that this could impact self-regulating entities like the Medical Association, the Law Society and so on.

As the Member just said, I don't think it was ever the intent to do so anyway; nonetheless, the

way the legislation reads, it could certainly infer that they would be included. So we're just seeking clarity through this bill to say that self-regulating entities that are not in receipt of public funds and so on, that they would not be included, so I will support that.

I guess on the bigger issue of the public bodies, *Public Bodies Reporting Act* and so on, I can remember last year when we debated it, I said at the time I was astounded by the fact that it wasn't already a requirement, that we actually had to pass that legislation. Given the fact that so much of the public purse is actually administered through agencies, boards and commissions – the majority of it, actually – and the fact that they would not have a requirement to report to the minister on vital information, on taxpayers' money, that was astounding that that wasn't in place, so we all supported that at the time.

The only point I will make, and I made I think at the time, if we're talking about the reporting of information to government, we also had another bill come before the House last year. It was an amendment to the *Energy Corporation Act* concerning Nalcor. At the time I felt that it didn't go far enough to getting government, and the public, information that would be required from Nalcor. In particular, the issue at the time was on those embedded contractors. We were assured that this was going to do it, and of course we all know that after the legislation was passed, the public was still denied the information on the embedded contractors.

So, I brought that up during the discussion on the *Public Bodies Reporting Act* last year, subsequent to the other bill, and the Minister of Natural Resources at the time indicated that there was more to come, that it was under review and there would be more to come. So I certainly look forward, during this sitting of the House, to the Minister of Natural Resources standing on her feet and bringing forth another amendment to the *Energy Corporation Act* that will require Nalcor to fall under ATIPP legislation so that we can get information about what's going on in Nalcor, information such as what happened with embedded contractors and other vital information to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

With that said, I will certainly support this bill. It's just basically housekeeping and it clarifies an oversight.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, if the hon. the –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Sorry?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Cape St. Francis? No, okay.

If the Minister Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat speaks now, he will close debate.

The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was getting excited, I thought another Member was standing to speak and I –

MR. SPEAKER: I had the same thought.

MR. OSBORNE: I thank the Members opposite, and all Members of the House, that have contributed to this bill or provided information and direction privately when this issue came up initially, in order to protect non-regulated bodies such as the Law Society or the Medical Association, for example, or other non-regulated entities that are not intended to be captured under this.

The Department of Justice, when they provided the legislation, it was intended to be broad and capture all agencies, boards and commissions, but the intent to be broad captured those other entities which were never intended to be captured. So it's only those entities that are not intended to be captured now, that are not captured under this legislation. If the salaries or if the entity is truly an entity of government it will be captured under this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 50 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act. (Bill 50)

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

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

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 50)

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 50.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill, Bill 50.

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.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 50, An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Public Bodies Reporting Act." (Bill 50)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I spoke of this in second reading, I wonder if the minister could just address and give some insight into the fact that under the definition of public body it talks about: "a corporation, the ownership of which or a majority of the shares of which is vested in the Crown and its subsidiaries."

If there is a case where public funds are directed to an organization that's not within the control of the Crown or a Lieutenant-Governor in Council appointment and there is money given, it could be a small amount, is there any method or any – does this bill provide any restriction in regard to the government seeking information as to that expenditure, how it's used within that organization or group?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat.

MR. OSBORNE: Yes, it's a valid point, but it's also very complex – if government provides money to the Boy Scouts of Canada and Choices for Youth and other entities that are not intended

to be captured under this bill. So we're not looking to be broad enough that if government provides funding to an organization, the Cancer Society or likewise, that's never intended to be captured under this. If the salaries are considered – if the positions are considered to be public servants, such as they are at the Newfoundland Liquor Corporation or Legal Aid, for example, those are the entities that we are intending to catch here.

The intent of the bill, initially, was to help in attrition planning. Looking at the people eligible to retire; looking at – in some cases without any effect on existing employees, because you wouldn't want to be punitive, but as new people are hired, if there's an entity that pays considerably higher for an accounting clerk or a clerk typist, for example, then government does eventually – we're looking at bringing those in line so that those entities, in terms of – whether it's attrition planning or retirements and so on, we can work with the entities to ensure that it's more closely aligned with government.

CHAIR: Shall the motion 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 Public Bodies Reporting Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 50.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 50.

Shall the motion carry?

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: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 50 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 50 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted.
Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 48.

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

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.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (P. Parsons): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 48, An Act To Amend The Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act." (Bill 48)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. DINN: Has the minister considered the key stakeholders when looking at this bill in terms of the seafood producers, the Association of Seafood Producers and FFAW?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, Madam Chair, thank you for the question.

We have met with the stakeholders. All the stakeholders are in agreement with the intent of the legislation that came out of the panel. So, from that perspective, we're happy with where we are with this sort of housekeeping items from this legislation.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the bill we're changing the time period for the panel to review – actually, we're doubling it from 48 to 96 hours. What factors came into consideration with coming up with that figure of 96?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, Madam Chair, we talked with the stakeholders involved. There was some back and forth on the time frame, but we wanted to make sure we gave an opportunity for the panel to be convened, do their research, get the information, come back and put that forward.

Forty-eight hours wasn't enough time and it was causing a little bit of a problem for them to try to reach that. This allows them to give them a little bit more time to pull all the pieces together, to make the informed decision and make sure the parties are involved as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For clarification, Minister, the 96 hours, are they Monday to Friday or are they calendar hours?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Very good question. It is calendar hours; it is not business hours. It's from the start of the reconsideration report on.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the Explanatory Notes it speaks to “allow non-majority fish processors or processors’ organizations who have engaged in collective bargaining or appeared before the panel at the original hearing to apply to the panel to reconsider a decision respecting price and conditions of sale.”

A single licence holder of fish processing, are they entitled to engage in the collective

bargaining process and, as well, the appeal process?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: The panel has the authority to reconsider decisions issued upon a request from a certified bargaining agent, an accredited processor or an organization that way.

What we're trying to do is the intent of the legislation, when it was crafted, was to allow those that participated in the collective bargaining side as well as if they appeared before the panel, give them the opportunity to request for reconsideration. Not to say that the panel would hear the reconsideration; it depends on market conditions as dictated in the act prior to – in the part of the act above.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you.

My understanding was there were organizations that represented the fish processing industry and those were the ones that would make representation to the panel. What we're seeing here now, it's non-majority fish processors.

So an individual processor who's a licensed processor, my question is: Can they engage in the original collective bargaining process in regard to fish pricing and those types of things as an individual processor, as opposed to being part of a larger group? Is it now the availability of that single processor to engage in all of that, and as well, to engage in the panel and the appeals process as an individual processor?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: As I mentioned before, the original intention of the legislation was to provide a mechanism to request reconsideration for the panel decision if the currency or the market conditions changed. What we'll allow is the non-majority processors the ability to come forward and ask for that reconsideration.

This is what it's dealing with, only the reconsideration process. There's still the collective bargaining side that needs to be handled as well, and that's dealt with in the act as well, but not being changed here today.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I was wondering if there was any consideration given to timing, because a lot of times you'll see the panel will make its decision on pricing just days before the harvest actually starts. I know it puts harvesters in an awful predicament sometimes, especially with quotas like shrimp and crab that have been cut recently, and it's a huge effect that it has on the fishery.

So I'm just wondering if any timing was put into consideration that the panel has to make a decision before, say for example, crab season starts early April, if it had to be a week or two weeks beforehand when the panel would meet and to set the price so harvesters, rather than a couple of days, would have an idea of when the pricing – and it would mean a lot to them because it's set up for their fishery.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The amendments that we're talking about here today were brought forward through consultation with the former panel members, the FFAW, the other processors in the industry, the key stakeholders. And what we're trying to address is some knowledge continuity on the panel, making sure that we have a staggered approach in appointment dates, so that'll allow for us to keep some of the knowledge base within our panel to ensure that that's there.

Also to bring in line the alternate members as well so they can stay and serve until they're reappointed and/or replaced. And then the others deal with obviously the time lag to make a decision on a reconsideration, giving people the opportunity to pull people together, which 48 hours is a very short period of time, but we

understand it has to be a short period of time because the fishing industry is such that there are small windows where people have the opportunity to go out, and the hon. Member would know that very, very well.

We have to be nimble and able to move on those quickly, but this was made in consultation with the industry and the key players there. So what they proposed was what we're trying to implement that we can get agreement on with everybody, and it seemed to work very well for this piece of legislation.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just a point of clarification, if the minister could. Section 2 (1.1) says: "... a processor that does not produce the majority percentage of a fish species or a processors' organization that represents processors that do not produce the majority percentage of a fish species may apply to the panel"

They could apply to the panel to be heard based on a pricing and conditions of sale that have been set. So it further goes on to say: The panel would, then, at that time, "may reconsider its decision and may confirm or vary the decision taking into consideration the criteria it may establish and in accordance with the regulations."

So my question to the minister is just to confirm that in that particular case where a respective price may have been set and/or conditions of sale and a non-majority processor requests to be heard and is heard, and if the panel was to change the original decision, does that decision then be across the board for all species and all of the industry for that particular year?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The understanding is yes. After the reconsideration is heard, that would be the final

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I'm having trouble hearing.

MR. DAVIS: – decision of the panel, based on what the decision of the panel comes from after that reconsideration.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The minister opposite mentioned the staggered times in terms of allowing for flexibility and continuity. I just have a fairly simple question, I guess. How do you see that rolling out when you have a panel in place now? Who gets the short straw in terms of time, and how do you see that working out?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, very good questions today.

What we envision seeing this roll out, I would – by staggering it, they don't all leave the one time. So we don't have to replace the entire panel at the end of a three-year cycle. We can have someone – panel a person, go for three, 3½ years. We can have someone go for a little under two years.

So, to keep some continuity of knowledge base about the decisions being made, the processes that are in place, rather than having to, on day one, after three years, having a full, new panel come in having to try to get themselves up to speed, which is difficult in this industry because there is a lot of knowledge that – we don't want to lose that knowledge at the table. So it's important.

It's a very good question. It's going to be staggered so that you won't have to be replaced all at the one time. You can replace one at a time, two, and then go from there.

I hope that answers your question.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It did and it didn't. Just for clarification, Minister, I'm assuming what you're saying is when it hits the three-year period, from that period on we'll start to see changes. So there won't be any immediate changes. Am I correct on that?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: You're correct in that. We don't anticipate any changes. But what it will allow you to do is at the end of a three-year term, rather than having to replace all three panel members, have them all replaced the one time, you could replace one after the other over a period of time. So there's an ability to train the new people that go on the panel.

I hope that answers your question a little more clearly.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I'll just say that I never got to speak in second reading because it went through so fast. I actually stepped outside the House for a couple minutes to take a phone call, when I came back we were done.

I'll just say for the record that I do support the bill and the idea of staggering members of the board. That only makes good, common sense. I think that's what happens in most boards, actually, across government because – and even other organizations because it just makes all the sense in the world to do so.

In terms of the other piece about the non-majority fish processors and so on having the ability to appeal decisions, which I think with any board or organization like that there should always be an opportunity for anyone to appeal anything, really, because mistakes can be made. Perhaps there was information that was lacking or oversights or whatever. So, to have an appeal

mechanism per se, is a good thing. It makes sense in any case, regardless of what we're talking about, I believe.

First of all, I do want to agree with the Member for Cape St. Francis. Given the fact we do have such a short window to catch certain species of fish and so on, which would be allocated by the federal government, and, of course, we have to bear in mind weather conditions and everything else, and there is a lot of work to it. I would hope and I would assume, because it has gone through the FFAW and through the processors and so on, have all been consulted on this, that I would think there would be enough lead time, not just for the board to make the decision, but also an additional buffer that if someone wanted to appeal that decision, that there is sufficient time to have the decision made, have the decision also appealed or potentially appealed, and potentially a new decision rendered in lots of time prior to the actual fishery starting. I would think that's the case, and I would certainly agree with the Member for Cape St. Francis on that.

The only question I have, and I don't have all the original bill per se, just the amendment and what we have here. But it's talking about minority fish processors being able to appeal a decision. That's obviously something new. So does that mean that majority processors and, say, union, like the FFAW, they already have that right to appeal a decision? Because it doesn't talk about them, it just talks about minority processors, if you will, being able to appeal. It doesn't say anything about union or majority. So I'm assuming they must already have that right. Is that correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

Intent is paramount in the bill. The intent with any legislation is very important – in this case. I will take that under advisement what you're talking about for pricing side. But, yes, the panel has the ability to provide a mechanism to require reconsideration for people that have participated in the collective bargaining and or have appeared before the panel. So it gives that ability, like you mentioned before, that they

should have that opportunity. That was always the intent in the bill, but it was an oversight I think when they did the bill back then.

So the panel and the parties involved are all supportive of the intent of what we're trying to do here to make the ability for people to come forward. To your statement earlier, yes, the FFAW already has that ability.

CHAIR: Before we continue, could I respectfully ask those – just to keep your conversations down, or as the Speaker mentioned, to take them outside, respectfully, because Members can't hear the debate. So could we, please, keep quiet a little bit?

Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: I thank the minister for that.

Minister, the only other thing that came to mind in reviewing this is let's say a decision is made and – this is sort of a hypothetical now, the best way I can put it. So a decision is made, and let's assume that the FFAW perhaps and the majority processors or the main bargaining agent for processors, whatever, they have agreed, they have made their representation, a decision has been made by the board – or the panel, I should say – and they're in agreement with it but then a minority processor has some issue with it, for argument's sake. Whatever that might be, I have no idea. So that minority shareholder decides they are going to request a reconsideration of that decision.

So my question is, if that were to happen, would then the FFAW and the majority shareholder be notified of the fact that a request for reconsideration is in? Because if a minority person is coming forward and saying I want this changed, then, obviously, the others who already had agreed to it are going to want to know what it is they want changed and whether or not they agree with it. And they may want to say, well, if this person is coming to make this representation we want to be there to give our side to say, no b'y, we don't agree with that for whatever reason. So they can't just come in, one person,

and then change it for everybody, I guess that's the point.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

It's important to realize that the panel has the – currently, if we change that, yes, a non-majority would have the ability to come forward. But, there has also got to be two criteria met quite explicitly in order for reconsideration to even be heard by the panel. There has to be a significant market decline or a change in currency to be accepted.

That's not going to be the case in every case. So there are some stipulations there that doesn't allow that to happen, but yes, there will be a discussion amongst all of the players. I see the hon. Member from the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis smiling as well, because I guess he understands the system with respect to this.

So the ability for the panel to reach out to those that are involved will obviously be there. You made a great point that if they're coming to the table as an individual or as a non-majority, the other people that negotiated the deal as well would want to know, and they would for sure.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those in favour, 'aye.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 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 Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: I move, Madam Chair, the Committee rise and report Bill 48.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 48.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave and Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House.

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 48 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed her to report Bill 48 without amendment.

When shall the report be received? Now?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: When shall the bill be read a third time?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

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

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, Order 3, third reading of Bill 48.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour that Bill 48, An Act To Amend The Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act, be now read a third time.

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

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act. (Bill 48)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now 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 Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 48)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 2(a), a resolution relating to the advancing or guaranteeing of certain loans made under *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957*, Bill 53.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is the House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means to consider the said bill.

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.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now debating the related resolution and Bill 53.

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: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It gives me pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 53, An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee Act. On first digestion of this amendment, I was pleased to see that we, as a House, are giving consent to extend the loan guarantee, but it kind of confused me as to what the loan guarantee was for. In listening to my colleague across the way from Stephenville - Port au Port, it didn't take me long to realize that this loan guarantee is basically to cover the deficit that occurs on an annual basis at this particular site of interest.

This is a huge resource that we, as a province, never had to pay for to put in place. It was largely put in place by the Americans. We haven't really capitalized on the potential of that asset. From talking to people on the ground, there doesn't seem like enough support going into the facility to overcome these deficits.

We have to look at, as a government and as a Legislature, how can we support this facility so that one day we can say, okay, there's no need for a loan guarantee because you're able to pay your own bills; you're able to become

sustainable. We have to look at that at every entity that the government itself does provide a loan guarantee because, ultimately, when we provide a loan guarantee, we are shouldering that burden of loan onto the taxpayer and those who have voted for us to represent them.

We've seen some pretty alarming news coming out of the private sector today, and that was the report by Captain Sid Hynes that the volume of import traffic is down by 15 per cent on Oceanex. While we could always say, oh yeah, maybe that's because there's more product that we're producing here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but the commodities he highlighted are commodities that we don't produce. But they are key economic indicators of how an economy is working; the consumable goods like cars and ATVs and specialized construction products, and even products such as raw lumber which, of course, we could be producing here ourselves, but that's a story for a different day.

When we see a business leader like Captain Sid Hynes coming out and saying, look, this is a trend that has emerged this year that has never, ever been seen before; 15 per cent. You often see up and down 3 and 4 per cent as the ebbs and flows of all economies, but when you see such a stalling of imported products that we rely on to expand our economies, to get back and forth to work, that really tells me that there's a big, big problem that is just now coming to surface.

While I sympathize with the commentary back and forth about okay, well, there are a lot of problems that have emerged out of our control such as world commodity prices and the resulting lack of revenue, as leaders, we have to find ways that our economy can survive through that. It's not an issue of us not having resources, it's not an issue of us not having the energy to do it, because Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have provided energy in all other jurisdictions around the world to drive their economies forward, and a prime example of that is Fort McMurray. Without Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that would not be the boomtown that it is, and we have to be able to channel those energies back here to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Just to speak to the construction materials, why is it that we have to import lumber? Why is it that we have to import lumber when, at this very time in our history, we're going to have one of the largest forest resources in the province, on the Northern Peninsula, take perfectly good sawlogs that could be turned into high-value lumber, we're going to turn them into one of the lowest possible products of value, being wood pellets, and ship them across the ocean?

Why are we doing that? Why aren't we going and concentrating on taking the valuable sawlogs out of that resource and putting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to work, putting those sawlogs to creating further economies within our province?

That's a challenge that we've always had, not just this administration, past administrations have always been about big, wholesale announcements of the exodus of our resources. Yes, it looks great in the paper and that looks great on TV, but what actual economic activity does it create in the long run? Are we maximizing the value of our resources? That's where we, as a province, need to look.

We need to make sure that every spoonful of mineral that comes out of the ground, every cupful of oil, every tree that we harvest, every fish that pull out of the water, we have to make sure and examine ways to increase that value so that we as a province, we as a people, are getting that maximum value, especially in the areas of non-renewable resources. Yes, it's great to increase production, but basically all we are doing is we are pulling potential resource, potential revenue, from our future generations and exhausting that non-renewable resource. So, we need to kind of take a step back and look at how we can increase the value of those resources, not how we can exhaust them quicker.

Back to The Loan and Guarantee Act, in my industry – well, in industry that I like to call my industry, being agriculture, only because I'm involved in it, not because I own it, obviously – one element that we, as farmers, and agriculturalists are missing is our own specified farm loan board. This did exist years ago, but it was removed. In this time of the province's history where we are trying to expand our agricultural industry, there's definitely a facility

there that's missing and that is access to short-term cash, to be able to fund expansion, to be able to leverage to use against federal money or provincial money through programs, because a lot of these programs now – and this is especially compromising for new entrants, and one of the things is all expenses have to be prepaid.

For young farmers or small farmers, accessing that cash can really, over the short term, compromise an operation's financial viability. With conventional lenders, a lot of young farmers or new entrants wouldn't have the equity to put up to borrow this money; whereas a Newfoundland government-sponsored loans program would be able to extend credit to young farmers or new farmers or new entrants. Especially when we look at increasing the amount of immigrants that would be interested in farming – because as we all know, a lot of the immigrants that are coming to our country, they do come from farming backgrounds. But they lack the capital and security to start their own farms. That is essential to any farm development, you have to have access to capital, because farming is not such all of a sudden you open your door and, boom, you got sales and business.

Farming is a new – especially when you're talking raw land, you're talking at least four to five years before you see any sort of profitable return on your investment. We need patient working capital to be able to fund these new entrants, be they immigrants or be they young people, or be they people who are looking to change careers and contribute to our food supply.

That's something that is definitely missing, and that is something that could be tied into The Loan and Guarantee Act such that the provincial government guarantee the loans of new entrants and of land development. Essentially in our province, developing farmland is done on a provincial resource, a public resource. Because, unlike other provinces, most farmland that's being developed is done on agricultural Crown leases. Now, the lease does provide an extended tenure of 50 years, but technically it is still an asset of the province. So loaning money to develop and improve the value of an asset of the province, that's kind of a no-win situation – or,

sorry, a win-win situation for me and for anybody interested in agriculture and the people of the province.

In closing, I would like to say that yes, it's encouraging to see that this getting approval, and to the best of my knowledge we will be supporting this. But we have to look at beyond loaning money. We have to look at improving how we manage our resources and getting value out of them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

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

I'm happy to have the opportunity under the discussion around Bill 53 to speak this morning. As has been point out, this is An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee Act and it has to do with the ongoing support of the Stephenville Airport and the work of the Stephenville corporation by ensuring that government does guarantee loans with regard to the Stephenville Airport.

I obviously support this, and Members have spoken to it and spoken about the Stephenville Airport and how important it is for the economy on the West Coast, especially in the Stephenville area. Obviously, I support that, but I also, today, have the opportunity – because this is what we classify a money bill – to speak to other issues that are of concern in the province. So I do want to do that today.

We have so many issues, Mr. Chair, there are so many I could choose, but there's one that is so ongoing and so pervasive, one that I keep hearing about from my own constituents as well as people around the province, and it honestly eats at me. That is the issue with regard to the long-term care of our seniors and those who require long-term care. Sometimes it's people who have disabilities who aren't seniors.

The situation in our province is serious. We have a mixture. We have some small entities in the province under the health authorities that are doing really good work. They are using models

that are newer models that aren't based on huge facilities, huge buildings and they're doing very good work. But then we also have, in the province, an ongoing mentality that maintaining huge facilities, huge institutions is the way to go. Of course, the facility in Pleasantville is one, and what's being built in Corner Brook is continuing that mentality as well, and it's very concerning.

It's not pleasant to hear some of the stories that I hear on a regular basis. I have to think that other MHAs are getting these stories as well. Stories from families talking about the experience of their loved ones in facilities of long-term care. Stories that are horrendous. Stories that are happening not because the workers inside of the facilities don't care about the residents or the people they are caring for, but stories of situations that exist because we are not putting adequate resources, number one, into some of these facilities; and, number two, we're not even thinking about modelling facilities where people will really receive personal care.

I feel so helpless when I get a child – well, an adult child – who calls about their parent and talks about finding their mother or their father sitting with a tray in front of them, unable to serve themselves food, and a tray that has been left there maybe for an hour-and-a-half or more, food now cold, and walking in and finding their parent like that, or being there with their own parent and seeing other people in the facility in that situation.

Talking to a woman who went in to visit her aunt one day, and this was in the facility in Pleasantville – went in to see her aunt who has Alzheimer's, to find her sitting on the toilet with her – this is graphic but it's what's happening – with a diaper down around her ankles, not knowing what to do. That woman is day in and day out in a room with her door closed, nobody half the time knowing what's happening to her. These are the kinds of stories that I hear and I know other MHAs hear on a regular basis.

We are warehousing – not in every situation. I said we do have some good situations under our health authorities, but we do have awful situations where we are just warehousing our senior citizens. I know many people are going to the new Seniors' Advocate about this issue

because they've told me they're going, and I know the Seniors' Advocate has said publicly that this is the next issue that she was turning her mind to, the issue of the care of our seniors who require long-term care. We have got to start looking at this; one, from the issue of having enough resources for people to be taken care of, but even from a fiscal perspective.

If we have more people employed and taking care of people the way they need to be taken care of, we're also doing something that's good for the economy. It's part of fiscal policy as well. I get concerned when I see governments discussing social policy without connecting the social policy to economic policy, without seeing – for example, look at child care – without seeing that having good child care, public child care, that by having that we also build our economy.

I've used this example before in the House, and my colleague has used this example before in the House, it has been proven in Quebec by economists who have studied the situation, that their child care program, by putting in place the child care program that they have, which receives public funds, which is regulated by government, that their economy just improved; improved so much because of having child care. Number one, you had more people employed because their children were able to go into a child care centre; and, number two, you had greater employment within the industry itself, the industry of taking care of children.

It's a fiscal reality that more people working means a better economy. So if we take that and also put it into the situation of looking at what's happening to our seniors, looking at what's happening in our long-term care facilities, it makes absolute sense that by having more people employed, permanently employed, we are going to have a stronger economy, and by having more people employed in our long-term care facilities to really take care of people is also going to be fiscally responsible; not just socially responsible, not just good that you don't have senior citizens sitting and staring at a cold tray because they don't know how to feed themselves, or not just because of the fact people are being treated humanely, not just because we're taking care of them, but it's also fiscally responsible. Because by having more people

employed as personal care workers, as nurses, in our long-term care facilities that is also going to help our economy.

Also, taking care of long-term care patients also helps the economy from the perspective of they're not ending up in hospital, because that happens. Lots of times they have to leave the long-term care facility and go to hospital because they have developed an infection, for example. I've had examples of this as well brought to me – developed an infection that wasn't even caught in the long-term care facility until it was really too late and the person eventually dies. Why was it not caught? Not because the workers don't care, not because – nobody wants them to get an infection and die, but because there aren't enough people to really monitor, to take care of and to monitor our senior citizens in these long-term care facilities.

So it's a major issue. It's an issue we have to start looking at and it's an issue I'm really looking forward to hearing from the Seniors' Advocate, because she has said publicly that this is an issue she's looking at. She has said she's looking at it from a systemic perspective.

This is not just an isolated case here and an isolated case there, and an isolated case somewhere else. It's something that is happening because our system is not structured to take care, really take care of our senior citizens who find themselves, after years of being productive citizens, after years of being people who did volunteer work in their communities, after all of those years of giving to now be in situations where they are warehoused and not knowing from day to day what their life is going to be like.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's indeed a privilege to get up again today and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful of people in the District of Cape St. Francis.

First of all, I want to do, I want to welcome my colleague here behind me from Topsail - Paradise District. I want to welcome you to the House, and I'm sure you're going to enjoy it here. It's nice to have you on our team and I'm sure you're going to be a great asset to this side of the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I had the opportunity to do a bit of campaigning. I didn't know the gentleman very well beforehand, but knocked on a lot of doors in his district, and the respect that the people had for him was high and I guess expectations are high also. So you have big shoes to fill. The former member was a good friend and a good colleague on this side of the House also. So we're looking forward to you doing your work that you have to do here in the House of Assembly.

This bill today is a bill that I do believe that it's a guarantee that our government brought in place in our time in government. I listened to the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port and he talked about the bill and the importance it is to the area, especially around the Stephenville area. Again, I know it's something that is important, that anything – that we keep an asset like that, to make sure it does stay viable. It's important to that district, it's important to the people in the area and it's important to the province.

I could be corrected if the Member wants to, but I understand some of the runways in that airport are the longest and can be for huge planes and whatnot. It's a facility that can be used in times of crisis or in times of anything with the length of the runways and stuff like that. So it's an important thing to have in our province.

Any time we do a loan guarantee for such facilities like this, it's always good. Now, the Member for Mount Pearl North mentioned that we should be looking into what we can do to make that facility more viable so that some day perhaps we won't need to do this loan guarantee, and that's important.

I'm sure, whether it's that side of the House or this side of the House, people have looked into that to make sure that area is – anything that can be done, if there's an industry or – I don't know,

maybe it could be some flights that are going to Europe or whatever that can land there and stuff like that. I'm sure they are looking into that all the time, but it's important that we do this. It's important that we support the people in the area and we support this facility. I'm sure all Members on this side of the House will support this bill.

This bill, being a money bill, gives up an opportunity to get up and have a few words and talk about different things that we can talk about. Now, I wasn't going to speak about long-term care until my colleague just got up and spoke about it, because it's a big thing in my district, too. I went through it. It seems like today, maybe it's just that people are – their health is a lot better, people are living a lot longer than they did years ago.

Years ago, if a person lived until they were 70 it was a good old age. Today, it seems like it's 90, but as people live older – again, I went through it also, and I'm sure the Minister of Health will agree with me, we're seeing a lot more people with ailments like dementia and Alzheimer's. It's very, very difficult. It's so difficult on families.

Families try their best, no doubt about it. Some families maybe not, but most families will do everything they can for their loved one. The person that brought them into this world, the person that supported them, the person that fed them, housed them and did everything over the years. So you have that sense of family that people really want to do their best. But when you're dealing with people that have dementia or Alzheimer's, it's very difficult, and I know it. I went through it. I know it. The care that people need and what they actually receive in some facilities – and I've heard the stories too. I've heard the stories about people roaming and doing stuff.

The one thing that anybody wants when they get at that age is for their dignity to be kept. Now, sometimes they can't keep the dignity that they really want, but it's important that people in these facilities and families do their best to make sure the dignity of that person is kept. I agree with my colleague here on the side of me, we really have to be concerned about it. It's something we should be concerned about and

it's important to families. I know right now a lot of people that come to me with these concerns, they say we're after doing everything we can.

What you're seeing now, and I'm sure the Minister of Health can give us stats and everything on it. There are a lot of people going to our health care with different ailments, and the family can't take them home. The only thing the family can do is leave them there until a bed becomes available. That has an effect on our whole health care system. That has an effect on people who are waiting for surgeries, people that need that bed.

My understanding is, and I spoke to some social workers in the health care system, it's a huge problem. I know at the Health Sciences it's a major problem. When we look at people who are waiting in corridors on beds, waiting for surgeries, and surgeries are being delayed because the bed is not available, because the bed is taken up by somebody who's waiting to get in a long-term care facility.

So it's something we really have to look at, and that's not this party, that party or anything. It's something we should be looking at here as legislators to make sure the dignity that people deserve, they get it. And that's what we need to do.

We're doing our best in some cases with the long-term care facility in Corner Brook, and one is mentioned for Central Newfoundland, but in the St. John's area – I know in my district there are a lot of people who are waiting to get in these facilities, and it's so important that they do.

Again, it's the effect that it's having on the whole health care system, and the effect it's having on families. Because I tell you, it's very stressful when you're dealing with parents, or a parent, or a loved one. It could be an aunt or an uncle. It could be anyone, a family member that's going through this. What's happening is that person may not have the know-all of what's happening to them, but it's the person, it's the grandchildren, it's the sons, the daughters and family members who have to watch them go through what they're going through.

We need to do everything we can in this province to ensure that people with any kind – especially our seniors. Our seniors paved the way for us. They paid the price in a lot of different ways for every one of us who are here today, and we need to ensure that their dignity is kept.

Whenever I look at – and I talk about people with Alzheimer's or dementia or something like that, it's the biggest thing. I know with my mom and dad it was – the one thing that my mom always said to me, I want to keep my dignity. It's important to them, it's important to our family and it's important to who we are.

So I call upon government to do everything we can. It's very important that we, as a society, respect the people that did so much for us. That's just my little spiel on that. I didn't mean to get on it but when you mentioned it, it hit home and I wanted to talk a little bit about it.

Now, I only have a couple of minutes left but I really want – and I know in this session, it's a great session for us. We'll get an opportunity to get up and speak on a lot of different occasions – anytime there's a money bill. We'll have the budget and we'll have Interim Supply and we can speak on the Throne Speech and whatnot, but I really want to just say something this morning, and I only got a couple of minutes left. I want to talk a little bit about our economy.

I'm dealing a lot of times with people in my district, and they're tradespeople. It's amazing; I spoke to a young guy who is a plumber. He's a plumber six or seven years now, and it's the first time, with this company he's been working with, that he's laid off.

I know government is coming up – the Minister of Finance gets up and says we're on the right path. We're doing this right, we're doing that right, but you got to get out of that bubble and go and talk to the people that are out on the ground. Talk to our electricians, talk to our plumbers, talk to our tradespeople. It's not going as good as you're saying and telling people that it is. It's just not. I want it to go; I want our economy to thrive. I want people to be working, because that's good for everybody. It's good for everybody in this province, but we got to look at what's happening.

Every indicator, except for the GDP, is going this way. We need to get the government to realize it is and we need to make changes. My biggest thing, and this is what I've said here the last couple of years, it's the affordability for people to be able to live; it's the affordability for people to be able to live in this province. That's why people are leaving. That's why people are finding it hard to do renovations or build new homes or do what they got to do to make sure, it's because they can't afford to do it.

We need to find ways to make sure that people in this province have the money because, listen, once things happen, everything is a snowball effect. If people got money they spend money. We'll see stores being able to expand and hire people. That puts more money in our economy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Bonavista.

MR. KING: Boy, oh, boy, what you haven't got to listen to on a Wednesday morning.

I mean the doom and gloom that comes from the PC Party who takes no, takes no –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KING: Heckling now. I gave you the pleasure of getting up and speaking for 10 minutes, you won't do the same for me. No respect whatsoever.

The PC Party will take no blame for the previous 12 years that got us in the mess that we're in today. We actually have the province back on track, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Twelve years of making a mess and there's not enough Bounty paper towels in the province to clean it up. It's absolutely disgraceful when they get up and blame our

government for the mess they left us, Mr. Chair. It's ridiculous, it's shameful.

Just imagine, Mr. Chair, you're the Premier of the province, you take over government on the 14th of December, 2015, meet with the Department of Finance, they tell you you're not going to be able to pay all your public servants, two weeks before Christmas.

MR. PETTEN: (Inaudible) four years later.

MR. KING: Just imagine that – chirping over there. If the Member for CBS wants to get up and speak, he can get up and speak after me. Over there chirping and all that. That's all he does. He's got no answers for anything.

This crowd over there are breaking out the Chicken Little syndrome with their leader. The sky is falling on everything, everything's bad, everything's doom and gloom, which is not the case.

We've got the province back on track, Mr. Chair. We are back on track. We took a \$2.7-billion deficit that they left us and we have it down below \$700 million this year, and we're going to be back to surplus in 2022. That's the Liberal plan, that's *The Way Forward*. We've created jobs all across the province through our Cabinet Committee on Jobs.

The agriculture sector, the aquaculture sector, the tech sector, high paying jobs throughout the province. The mining sector, oil and gas, community sector. Where was their plan during their 12 years in power? They put all their eggs in one basket, Mr. Chair, in oil and gas; lived high on the hog at \$110 a barrel. Created the biggest boondoggle in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador in Muskrat Falls – and I'll talk more about that this afternoon when I get speaking – and then left us on the hook for it.

Then they bring out doom and gloom. We've lost the jump in our step. Oh, people can't afford this, afford that. That's your legacy. We are committed to not increasing, doubling power rates. We are committed to not putting the burden on the taxpayers of this province.

Where is the plan of the PC Party, Mr. Chair? Where is it? They don't have one. They don't have a plan. They get on the media and talk about lawyers speak for contracts. If you don't use this word or you're going to use another word it's going to make a big difference, to distract from the real issue that they got us in a mess – that we're trying to clean up and trying to get the best deal we can in the Atlantic Accord.

Where's their plan for the Atlantic Accord? To get up in Question Period every day and criticize. What did Danny Williams get us? He got us \$2 billion – we got it, b'ys, we got it. Do you know what it was? It was like me going up to get an advance on my paycheque.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bank of Montreal.

MR. KING: Yeah. It'd be like me going to get an advance on my paycheque. So I go to them and say, well, you know what, can you give me my paycheque for my next two pay periods? You don't have to pay me those, but I want to get them now so I can go down and walk over the steps of the St. John's Airport: b'y, I got 'er. I got 'er. I got \$2 billion.

That money was supposed to be allocated to Newfoundland and Labrador in the year 2015 and '16, when we certainly could've used the money, but he had to have a glamour shot. We got 'er, boys, we're going to tear down the flags, tear down the flags out in front of Confederation Building. It'd turn your stomach, Mr. Chair, the way they gets on.

Mr. Chair, they have no plan whatsoever. This is what they're doing now. They won't tell us what they're doing. They get on and criticize: oh, we've lost our step. Oh, people can't afford this, people can't afford that. Mismanagement – tell us about Muskrat Falls.

MR. LESTER: (Inaudible) four years now.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KING: Oh, look, the Member for Mount Pearl North wants to get up and speak. He wasn't here, so he can't be held culpable, I guess. That's their attitude, but they will not tell us what their plan is to get things back on track.

We have a plan called *The Way Forward* and it's working, Mr. Chair.

AN HON. MEMBER: Humber Valley Paving.

MR. KING: That's another thing, yeah, Humber Valley Paving. How'd that work out for us? Nineteen million dollars going to the half a premier that they had over there. Not even a full premier; got caught with his hands in the pocket and he couldn't serve. That's the PC legacy. This is the stuff they get on with, and they make out they're so great.

Mr. Chair, there are a lot of good things going on. Just take, for example, the District of Bonavista. We have an agriculture industry which is growing. We have young farmers getting into the industry. We have businesses popping up throughout the year, operating year-round, shipping all over the world. Things are booming.

We have a forestry sector. We have Sexton Lumber who is the largest producer in the province of lumber products. That's a success for you. He's investing in his business. So the doom and gloom that the PCs pretend that's going on in the province, it's absolutely ridiculous.

The tourism industry is growing; growing in the District of Bonavista and throughout the province. We haven't seen as many people.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Twenty-eight hundred businesses.

MR. KING: Twenty-eight hundred businesses, according to the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation that have started here. It is absolutely amazing.

You're seeing tens of thousands more people visit the District of Bonavista every year because it's the place to be, because people are out there working hard. The people who the PCs say are non-existent are actually in the District of Bonavista – the people who are eager to get this province back on track, people who are investing in this province, the people who are creating jobs. That's what's happening in Newfoundland and Labrador.

You look at PAL Aerospace; they just had a big contract the other day creating more jobs, because we helped them invest –

AN HON. MEMBER: Two-hundred-plus jobs.

MR. KING: Two-hundred-plus jobs – high-paying jobs. The tech sector – when we had the Cabinet Committee on Jobs, I was at that launch last year and it was a room full of young people energetic and excited about our province.

AN HON. MEMBER: And Verafin.

MR. KING: And Verafin, another 300 jobs.

Mr. Chair, those are the success stories that we can talk about in this province. The doom and gloom is not like they say it is. The polls show it today. There's higher confidence in our government than any time in the past 3½ years. Now, they'll come out and spin about polls and all that. That they don't matter, they don't count, and it's a snapshot in time. People are showing more confidence in this government.

So, Mr. Chair, when they get on with their doom and gloom like they always do, I'm only telling the people out there when you go around like Chicken Little and cry wolf, that only goes so far. You heard the fables though the years; people stop listening to you after a while. So, give us your platform. What do you stand for? We know what we stand for in the Liberal Party: *The Way Forward* document. That's what we stand for, and it's working.

You had yesterday talking about immigrants, how numbers were down. We haven't seen as good immigration numbers. It went up by 25 per cent in 2017 and 25 per cent last year. Where was the PC plan for immigration? They gutted it. We had to take 3½ years to build back up the infrastructure that was gutted by the PCs.

If it wasn't oil and gas, they didn't care about it. We've diversified the economy here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm proud of the work that we've done. I said early on I'd stand on my record every day of the week and twice on Sunday several years ago, and I stand on that record again today because we are moving forward. We are putting this province back on

track. Mr. Chair, I'm proud to be part of the Liberal government who has done it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

What an honour to be able to stand in this House to represent all of the people in our constituencies, all of the people in our province. I'm somewhat appalled – and I don't use that word often, Mr. Chair – but I really am somewhat appalled by the previous speaker, the Member for Bonavista. He said that my colleagues in the Official Opposition, the PCs, were talking doom and gloom. And then, my colleague from our caucus here, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi was telling the story – the story of people's lives. These are not abstract stories.

My colleague from Cape St. Francis was talking about his own mother and how she begged before she died that she would be able to that with dignity. We are here to represent businesses, we are here to represent the affluent, and we are here to represent those who are having a really hard time. And let us not forget there are so many people – there are so many people – having a hard time.

None of us in this House have to worry about whether we decide to have healthy food or heat – none of us. We're paid well. We have safe places to live. We have transportation that is reliable. We don't have to worry about our children, whether or not they can afford education. We don't have to worry about whether our aging parents will have enough to live on, or whether they'll have a safe place to live.

Let's talk about seniors in our communities who are living on OAS and GIS, because there are a lot of them. We have the highest percentage of seniors in the country – the highest percentage of seniors in the country – living on OAS and GIS. That means they live on approximately

\$1,100 a month. I've told this story a few times in the House and it is my hope that the Member for Bonavista will listen to this. This is the story of people's lives. These are the stories of the realities of people's lives.

So, how many seniors have I visited? These are not doom-and-gloom stories; this is reality. These are also the people that we are responsible for. These are also the people who we have to keep in mind when we make decisions. These are also the people who vote for us and say I need you to represent me.

How many times have I visited seniors in my riding, in my district, where they pull out the envelope that their cheques came in and every month they do the same thing: They look at how much their income is, and then they write down their expenses? They keep writing it down every month, thinking that maybe something might change, and the only thing that does change is their cost of living. Their expenses go up.

So, they write down rent. Because in order to have a safe place, a most modest place, it's at least – in my district – \$800 a month. Then they write down heat and light, and that's \$200 a month. Then they write down phone and cable and they decide, can I do without that, and they write that down. Their income is about \$1,100 a month. Already, rent, heat and light and phone come to \$1,100 a month. There is no money for food, there's no money for transportation, and there is no money for teeth because this government cancelled the Adult Dental Program.

There is no money for teeth. Is this what we have come to in our province? I don't think so and I don't think that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want us to make policies that mean that our seniors cannot afford teeth. Is that really what we have come to? And yes, there's been some really good work done, and yes we can celebrate, we can absolutely celebrate some of the work in the high-tech industry. We can celebrate what's happening in Bonavista, and that is happening in spite of government. That is happening because of champions in their own community and now government is possibly catching up on that. And that is good thing too.

So, we can celebrate some of the things that are happening in *The Way Forward* document, sure we can –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: – but we can also point out that there are many, many, many people in our province who are suffering. And that's not doom and gloom; that is the reality.

The Member for Labrador West, he's throwing up his hands and saying oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, let's not forget the number of workers in his district that lost their jobs when the mine closed down and they lost their homes. That's also a reality, and those are also people.

MR. LETTO: The mine is up and running again.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: The mine is up and running again, but let's not forget –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Yes, the mine is up and running again and that is a good thing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: That is a good thing, but it is government's role when the mines close –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: When people cannot afford houses, when they lose their houses and they can't afford groceries that is government's role to say: What can we do to help? And it's a good thing, and this government can take credit for the mine opening again. I'll give them that, but let's not forget when we have to raise issues that affect the lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We know the Gathering Place is bursting at the seams with people who are homeless, with

people who can't afford bus passes, people can't afford food and they can't afford heat. That is a reality, and this is a reality of some of our boom and bust economy. This is the reality of the fact that we had such a broken mental health and addiction system, and we're seeing the transformation of that. But that's because of the work that many advocates did in the province and also the work of all of us working together in the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Chair, I spent my Christmas Day serving dinner to people, who the folks on the other side are doom and gloom. People who didn't have turkey, and I heard stories of people saying: I can't afford tea.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: I can't afford tea. People who are saying they can't get around because they can't afford a bus pass because their income support – these are people who haven't got jobs, and maybe people who will not be able to work in paid employment, who are saying they can't afford a good place to live. They can't afford healthy nutritious food. They cannot afford tea. They can't afford bus passes, which means they're socially isolated. They can't even get around to the food banks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Members that the noise is out of order.

MS. ROGERS: Yes, I don't know why government's being so defensive like this and hostile. The thing is, this is the reality we're facing in our province.

CHAIR: I'm reminding all hon. Members, the noise level is out of order.

MS. ROGERS: Yes, absolutely.

This is a reality of many people in our province. And the thing is, it's growing. We know we

have over double the unemployment rate in the country here in our province. We do have that.

So the issues we are facing, the issues of increasing poverty are a reality and they're growing. We have to do something about it, and we have to talk about it. To ignore it and not talk about it means we are not doing the duty we have all been elected for, to ensure that no one is left behind.

I will be the first one, Mr. Chair, to celebrate the successes that we do see, but we cannot say to talk about the issues, the life stories of people, is politicizing doom and gloom. We cannot say that. We have to say, what can we do to work together to alleviate the suffering that many of our people are experiencing?

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me take us back, and I'll just take a few moments to do so.

Mr. Chair, today we are debating Bill 53, An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee Act. This bill is vital to the importance of Stephenville Airport.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Mr. Chair, this bill will guarantee a \$900,000 loan guarantee to the Stephenville Airport Corporation. For 40 minutes we just sat in this Legislature and the PC Members and the NDP Members chose not to speak to the significance and the importance of this piece of legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Mr. Chair, I can tell you, I have been a tireless advocate for Stephenville Airport. Its significance to the Southwest Coast, to the region of the West Coast and to the entire province –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. FINN: – given its position, its location –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. FINN: – its use of alternate sites –

CHAIR: Order, please!

I recognize the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, on a point of order.

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

I would like to point out to the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, that in speaking to the bill I supported the loan and guarantee bill. I supported the money supporting the Stephenville –

CHAIR: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will not belabour the subject. This bill is extremely important. I recognize that Members have the opportunity to speak to things that they wish that are pertaining and relevant to their district. Mr. Chair, they'll have that opportunity come Interim Supply.

Today is Bill 53. This is about Stephenville Airport. For 40 minutes we had to listen to our Opposition Members with no support, no acknowledgement of the significance of this piece of infrastructure.

Mr. Chair, again –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. FINN: – I will reiterate its importance. I have worked tirelessly with our Minister of Finance –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. FINN: – with our Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation –

CHAIR: Order, please!

Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi on a point of order.

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

I would like you to bring to the attention of the Member that Bill 53, An Act to Amend the Loan And Guarantee Act, is what we call a money bill, and we confirmed that before we got into the discussion, and he has not recognized it as a money bill, and it is.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly appreciate the words from the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. I do recognize that Bill 53 is pertaining to the finances relating to this province. Again, I am merely pointing out the relevance of this. Regardless of which you wish to speak about, this bill is important to the Town of Stephenville, to the entire West Coast, to the entire southwest coast, and to the entire province, and I wanted to make that point very clear, and I believe I've done that.

With that, I will ask that we adjourn debate for this afternoon.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you.

I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 53 and related resolution.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have made progress and ask leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means reports that the Committee have made progress and ask leave to sit again.

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.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you.

Considering the hour of the day, I suggest the House recess until 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: This House stands in recess until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

First of all, I'd like to welcome everyone back for this afternoon's session. Also, I'd like to compliment the MHAs in this Legislature for participating in the Moose Hide Campaign.

For those watching at home, we started with breakfast this morning and then we gathered here on the floor and we had Inuk elder, Emma Reelis, present the Members with a moose hide pin, so we are fasting for the rest of the day. Hopefully, everybody is in a nice, good mood and looking forward to supper. But I'd like to thank all my colleagues for participating in this very important stand against the issue of violence against women and children.

We have some great representatives today from the town council of Port aux Basques. We have the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Todd Strickland, Councillor Melvin Keeping, Councillor Jim Lane and Town Manager Leon MacIsaac.

Welcome to you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we will hear from the Members representing the Districts of Cape St. Francis, Humber - Bay of Islands, Stephenville - Port au Port and Mount Pearl - Southlands, starting with the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate a young student from my district, Brooklynn Nichols from Pouch Cove. Brooklynn is a grade four student in Mrs. Collins's class at Cape St. Francis Elementary.

For the past 14 years, Heritage Newfoundland has sponsored a poster contest, highlighting heritage places in our province. Students from grades K to 12 are to create a poster to show why the local heritage is important to them. This year, Brooklynn was the Overall and Elementary Winner. Her poster was of a boat launch in Pouch Cove, which has been photographed and painted many times. I have to say that Brooklynn's version was one of the nicest I've ever seen.

As a winner, Brooklynn received an iPad and her school received \$500. I am sure that her family and friends are very proud of her. She has an obvious love for her community in which she's growing up in.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me in congratulating Brooklynn Nichols for winning this year's heritage week poster contest.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, February 28, 2019, the music scene in Corner Brook lost a vibrant, talented member of the community as Ed Best passed away at age 61.

Ed came from a background of music and his late father, Cleve Best, was well known throughout the area and the two often performed together for many years. Ed was passionate about music, whether he was playing in clubs or sharing his music at fundraising events to help people less fortunate and in need, or just jamming with a few of his buddies.

Most recently, Ed was concerned about others with cardiac care conditions, and true to his personality, he became a strong advocate for better cardiac care in Corner Brook, wanting to make sure that those people in worse situations than him would be looked after. This is the Ed Best that I always knew and when someone was in need, would always rise to the occasion. Ed's memory will be carried on through his family and those whose lives he touched.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join with me in extending our deepest sympathies to Ed's wife, Linda; his children, Christa, Shannon, Sara and Stephanie; his six grandchildren; and to his many friends and fellow entertainers.

The music in heaven today just got a bit better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today to acknowledge one of the newest inductees into the National Academy of Canada's Outstanding Principals. On January 29, 30 principals from across the country were chosen by a National Selection Committee to be named one of Canada's Outstanding Principals.

The only Newfoundland and Labrador recipient of this award this year is Mr. Gerald Morgan of Stephenville Primary school. He will now join the ranks of over 500 administrators who have received this honour since its inception 15 years ago.

Stephenville Primary is a K-3 school with 330 students, and while it is an English school, it boasts a very successful French immersion program and exceptional extracurricular programming. Mr. Morgan has been an administrator in Stephenville for 28 of his 29 years in the education system.

In a recent visit to Stephenville Primary School and in conversation with Mr. Morgan, I can tell you he is truly one humble individual. When asked his thoughts about the award, he immediately acknowledged and credited this prestigious achievement as a testament to the team effort from his tremendous staff and students at Stephenville Primary, as well as the community as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating Mr. Gerald Morgan, one of Canada's most outstanding principals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps 284 Marconi was formed in September 1981 with three officers and 30 cadets. Since that time, the corps has had a total of 15 Commanding Officers, has trained hundreds of cadets at its local headquarters in Mount Pearl, and has produced a significant number of top National Sea Cadet Award winners. This cadet corps prides itself on its community involvement, participating in several parades and events and volunteering with the Knights of Columbus, First United Church, community cleanups, food drives and other worthwhile charitable causes throughout the year.

This past fall, 284 Marconi was named top Sea Cadet corps for Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking 284 Marconi for their tremendous contribution to the community and congratulate all members of this wonderful organization on this latest honour, including cadets: Daniel Keats, Rebecca Keats, Tristian King, Claudia Matchem, Brody Brenton, Jodee Morrison, Donil Nolan, Quinn Parsons, Edward Vokey, Caleb Connors, Dominic Krone, Nathan Pearce, Logan Pike, Ryam Ricard, Nicholas Smith, Daniel Stokes, Cole Taylor-Lewis, Marcus Young, Rickey Bennett, Kietan Cross and Thomas FitzPatrick; Officers: Kevin Martin, Anthony Lewis, Jenelle Carter, Zack Leshane, Barry Sullivan, Andrew Spearns, Jennifer White and Lisa Penney, as

well as civilian helpers and instructors: Hope Matchem, Eileen Parsons, Mike Parsons and Alden Spencer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time is up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of Team Newfoundland and Labrador at the 2019 Canada Winter Games.

Congratulations to gold medallist Melanie Taylor of Conception Bay South, who shone in Special Olympics Level 2 figure skating and was named closing ceremonies flag bearer for Team Newfoundland and Labrador. Congratulations also to Emma Mullett of St. John's on her bronze medal in judo.

Mr. Speaker, the road to the Games provides a tremendous experience through training and competing at the elite level. A number of our athletes and teams achieved personal best and achieved the goals they had set for themselves at the Games. For example, our women's artistic gymnastics team finished first among teams from Atlantic Canada for the first time. Also, our men's curling team finished 4th overall, losing by a single point in the bronze medal game.

I also congratulate the Newfoundland and Labrador mission staff team, who received the Claude Hardy Award for the second consecutive Canada Winter Games. This award is presented to the mission team that best exhibits leadership, co-operation, integrity and the spirit of the Games.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to witness many of these athletes and other team members in action in Red Deer and I commend them for their commitment and dedication.

Our government is pleased to continue its support for amateur athletes. In 2018-19, we committed over \$6 million to support and advance sport, recreation and physical activity initiatives.

Please join me in congratulating all of our athletes, as well as coaches, managers, administrators, volunteers and parents who do so much to ensure our youth have opportunities to represent Newfoundland and Labrador at this level, including at the 2019 Canada Winter Games.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for an advance copy of her statement. We, on this side of the House, join the opposite Members in congratulating the 2019 Team Newfoundland and Labrador. As has been said, the Canada Winter Games provides tremendous opportunity for our athletes to showcase their leadership and their spirit of competition.

The Canada Games is the culmination of often many years of training, many years of effort by coaches, managers, administrators, volunteers, officials and especially the parents, who help support and guide their athletes along the journey. A special congratulations to the medal winners, Melanie Taylor and Emma Mullett, who won gold and bronze respectively.

Mr. Speaker, our province is continuing to make our mark in competitive gymnastics, finishing first among the teams in Atlantic Canada for the very first time, as stated by the Member opposite. Our men's curling was another highlight. Again, just finishing outside the medal round. Very special thanks to our mission staff who won the Claude Hardy Award for the

second consecutive time, as again noted, and thanks to the mission staff, thanks to the volunteers.

I have one last thing: I had the opportunity to recently play basketball, wheelchair basketball last month with wheelchair athlete Cassandra McGrath, and let me tell you, it's not easy.

So thank you, and congratulations to the team.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy. It's a pleasure to congratulate Melanie, Emma and all the athletes who represented our province at the 2019 Canada Winter Games.

I'm also really pleased to join with the minister and my colleague in congratulating all the staff, volunteers and especially family members who helped our athletes shine on the national stage. As has been pointed out, they represented our province well, and I congratulate our mission staff on winning the Claude Hardy Award for the second consecutive year. It doesn't surprise me, knowing our culture here in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. BYRNE: You got it.

Thank you much, Mr. Speaker.

Our wild Atlantic salmon resource in Newfoundland and Labrador is a shared heritage that we should protect, promote and all be very proud of. The greatest salmon conservationists in the entire world are the 30,000 fly fishermen from this province who are the true stewards of

this resource, along with all the many other people and communities that are directly connected to our salmon rivers.

The proof of this profound statement is found in the fact that over half of all wild Atlantic salmon produced anywhere on the entire continent of North America are produced in one place: Newfoundland and Labrador.

To make this point better understood and to celebrate our shared heritage, your government is joining with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization, NASCO, to celebrate the international year of the salmon.

Recently, I joined young, enthusiastic salmon conservationists from Roncalli Elementary at the Fluvarium to kick off a full year of events. This included youth poster and essay contests, mobile exhibits, a permanent exhibit at the Salmonier Nature Park and a provincial salmon fly design contest.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to inform the House that four eminent jurists have been selected to lead this fly-tying design challenge. Darryl Reardon of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Judith Guy of Mount Pearl, Bruce Andrews of Grand Falls-Windsor and Colin Burrige of Corner Brook will volunteer their time to confer bragging rights to the designer of Newfoundland and Labrador's salmon fly.

Mr. Speaker, beyond the public outreach, your government is also engaged in leading-edge research on salmon ecology and in quantifying the effects of hook-and-release angling practices on fish mortalities. We are moving forward on robust, smart regulation of our aquaculture industry and we are engaging with the federal government on ensuring Canada fulfills its full responsibilities in managing the salmon resource.

No other province, no other place is celebrating the International Year of the Salmon like Newfoundland and Labrador. I encourage everyone in this province to join in the celebration.

Thank you, very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for advance copy of his statement. We certainly appreciate the value of our wild salmon and support conservation and protection of this wonderful resource. It is important that future generations have the same appreciation and it is imperative that we encourage our youth to understand the value of this resource as well.

I commend the individuals who have agreed to volunteer their time to judge the fly design contest. I look forward to seeing the work that will be put forth by the fly-tying enthusiasts, and maybe even try it out myself. I am certain that everyone will be eager to see the design that is ultimately selected for the provincial salmon fly.

In saying this, I would like to remind the minister about the dysfunction of last year's salmon angling season in this province and I certainly hope he has taken pre-emptive action to ensure this season runs much smoother.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the copy. These events, along with the fly contest, are a great way to commemorate the year of the salmon and salmon anglers in this province.

I note the minister talked about provincial research on salmon ecology. Recent federal DFO research links salmon aquaculture with the steep decline in wild salmon in South Coast rivers. I urge the minister to make sure aquaculture doesn't destroy the wild stocks in Placentia Bay as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Yesterday, multiple ministers opposite dismissed concerns about the state of the provincial economy, and today the chairman of Oceanex is in the media saying that the drop in shipments of consumer goods to the province is nothing like what we've seen in recent times.

I would ask the Premier: How does he reconcile this evidence with the rosy condition the government claims for the economy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I think I will start my response to the question from the Member opposite, when he mentioned multiple ministers yesterday, I would suggest that there were multiple leaders of the PC Party that took the same approach. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, we could not even get information about where the economy was going. So if you look at the economic indicators back in 2015 and go back that far, you would see then that the PC government at the time was actually indicating, looking at the economy, that's what they were predicting and forecasting.

So it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that we've had to deal with, but we have put in place *The Way Forward* which is our vision for growth and sustainability for Newfoundland and Labrador, and this includes economic diversification. We're starting to turn this economy around.

Newfoundland and Labrador will lead the country in GDP in 2019.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I confess to wondering over here whether the hon. Premier might be happier as a history professor.

According to Captain Hynes, the slowdown started last summer and has continued into 2019. The number of vehicles shipped to the province by his vessels is down 15 per cent, January and February, and freight is down by 10 per cent.

Will the minister admit that this is a solid indicator that consumer confidence is depressed?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the challenges that we've had to face within Newfoundland and Labrador over the last number of years were given the financial situation and the fact that we've had three megaprojects that were coming to a close. A lot of people, when putting in place the scheduling of these megaprojects, actually suggested phasing some of them in. That advice was not taken by the prior administration.

But, given the fact that he mentioned about me giving a history lesson, Mr. Speaker, the priorities also for Newfoundland and Labrador in 23 sessions in Question Period, 527 questions asked by the Leader of the Opposition – the number one priority facing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is electricity rates. The Leader of the Opposition did not ask one question on electricity rates. That's a priority for this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: They say lawyers are paid by the word; I can assure the Chair that Opposition Leaders are not paid by the question.

I will give the Minister of Transportation and Works another opportunity to correct the record. Was anyone in his department ordered to sell land located at Mews Place to 80521 Newfoundland & Labrador Limited?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member were to take some time and go down to Elizabeth Avenue, he would find that the land at Mews Place is still government property. If there was a direction for an employee, for somebody in the department to sell land, I can assure you it would sold.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: The minister's answer was that the land was not sold.

Next question to him would be: According to an ATIPPA document, a supervisor in the realty division sent an email on November 21, 2017 stating: I have been ordered to have it sold to 80521 Newfoundland & Labrador Limited by Wednesday.

Does this document lie?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, the email that the Member opposite is referring to is an email from a non-management level employee. This was a bargaining unit employee, Mr. Speaker. I have no idea where that direction came from. I can assure you it did not come from anybody in the executive level of my department.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: May I ask the minister then, for his assurance to the House, was anyone in his department ordered to sell the land in question or not?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. Member opposite that if the land was ordered to be sold, it would have been sold. The land still exists as government-owned property. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, the land, in all likelihood, is going to become a catch basin. The reality is here there was an interest in a piece of land – which we have all the time, Mr. Speaker. Interesting enough, since Christmas, I've had interest in land around this province from people in this House.

The reality is we always have interest in land sales. If we can sell land for the best value for taxpayers in this province and get the market value, we will sell it, Mr. Speaker. In this case, we were unable to sell the land and there was never any direction from anybody in my executive to sell the land.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I've read the documents in question, and I recommend that to the minister.

According to an ATIPPA document we received from the department dated November 23, the same supervisor in the realty division sent an email stating: The sale of the 15 acres at Mews Place to the numbered company is on hold until Team Gushue Highway drainage issues are dealt with. However, I have now received orders to sell the 25 acres, as per the attached, to the numbered company. The attachment is an aerial photograph of land located on Snows Lane.

How does the minister explain this email if no orders were given?

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

MR. CROCKER: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member should, I guess, do a little bit of homework around how land is actually sold in our province.

If he were to research the land on Snow's Lane, he would realize that the Department of Transportation and Works can't even sell the land on Mews Place. The land on Mews Place is expropriated land, and in order for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to sell expropriated land it requires LGIC approval.

Mr. Speaker, there was never any movement of the land on Snow's Lane. My understanding is this company is building a big building in the White Hills.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister to explain the following – another ATIPP document – in that an assistant deputy minister in his department told public servants don't panic, with regard to the urgency of selling the land at Mews Place. The supervisor for the realty division replied, quote: I was supposed to have this sold by tomorrow.

How does the minister explain this?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I think it was self-explanatory. Once this issue came to the level of ADM, the ADM said: Don't panic here, this land has another purpose. Let me go and check it out. There was a 10-minute conversation subsequent to that email where the ADM responsible said to the company, or said to the engineer for the company: This land it not for sale. We're keeping it for a catch basin.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: May I ask the minister: Did John Allan, president of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador contact him, anyone in his department or anyone in the Premier's office concerning these parcels of government-owned land?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, year of the salmon fishery, I know, but the Member opposite is fishing.

I have not, or did I ever have any conversations with John Allan or anybody related to this parcel of land, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where the hon. Member is coming from with this information.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order!

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I would submit that the answers given by the hon. minister contradict the written record; answers given today and answers given last November.

In light of this, I'd ask the Premier: What does he plan to do about the question of whether the minister has misled the House? Will he suspend the minister until an investigation is carried out?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when you think about the politics of what's happening in this House of Assembly, I got to say, in the years that I've spent here, it's kind of reaching a

bit of an all-time low. I've sat on different chairs in this Legislature. I've served under a number of different premiers.

Mr. Speaker, this Leader of the Opposition has never reached out and asked questions for a meeting on the issue that he's talking about – which is a very serious allegation, I would say. I'll be speaking to the minister. And I would encourage you, if you want to have a chat with me about any of this stuff involved, I'm willing to do this.

Mr. Speaker, we must keep the integrity in this House of Assembly. I'll have a conversation with the minister and the department, and the allegations that the Leader of the Opposition is making on this issue, and I'll certainly get back to the Leader of the Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there have been significant changes to the ferry service on the South Coast, specifically South East Bight, Rencontre East, and the Gaultois and McCallum ferry runs.

I ask the minister: What consultations were conducted with the ferry committees and residents of the area when making these changes?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, this is the same tender that would have went out under their administration with the same qualifications, the same request and the same needs. The only difference would be this time the tender included accessibility.

Mr. Speaker, last year we were actually able to go out and do an RFP for newer vessels on the

South Coast. What we heard from the proponents in our meetings after that RFP was that they needed more time. So what we've done in this case is we've done a two-year contract for these services so that it enables us the time to actually do a new RFP so that we can procure, likely, newer vessels for these runs, but it gives the proponents opportunity to actually go out and either procure vessels or build new vessels.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister just alluded there would be no changes from the previous tenders that were issued back in 2009-2010, and I certainly beg to differ. I was part of that with the ferry committees and with the town councils, who were very actively involved in what the tender spec should look like back then.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, there have been significant cuts to the new tender. The passenger capacity has been reduced, cargo space has been reduced, cargo capabilities have been reduced and vessel sizes have all been slashed. There is a significant reduction in services as per the Liberal government tender spec.

I ask the minister: Why does he continue to sell out the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is this is the same specifications that would have been used in the previous tender. The reality here, Mr. Speaker, is any time we do a tender we have to do the best value for every single taxpayer in the province.

Some of these runs that the Member opposite refers to have as little as five-person averages on these vessels. These vessels are 20-passenger

vessels in most cases, Mr. Speaker. These are the same specifications.

Mr. Speaker, what we did see in the RFP last year were costs up to \$16 million for what we had asked for. Mr. Speaker, that is not responsible to every single taxpayer in this province. We have been able to achieve almost \$3 million now in savings on these runs, and that's important for the people of the province.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would be happy to table the tenders from both 2009 and the recent tenders that were issued, and there are vast differences.

Certainly, if we can afford to give \$45 million to a multi-millionaire for Canopy Growth we certainly should be able to afford \$3 million for our own rural residents to have safety. The new contract for the ferry to Gaultois does not require the vessel to be crane certified.

I ask the minister: Why did he make this dramatic change which will cause problems in transporting essential goods to this community?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have to do when we look at ferry runs around this province – if you see the great progress we made, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the ferry on the Straits and the new ferry for the North Coast of Labrador, we're investing in these runs.

What we've done with this new tender, it's a two-year tender, the reason being the proponents that were involved in the first RFP back last year told us quite clearly they needed 18 to 24 months to either procure used vessels or to build new vessels. That's why we went with a two-year tender, so that we have the opportunity now to go back with an RFP and get more of a

commitment to a longer term commitment to newer or – used or new vessels.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Member opposite, this was the tender that was issued. It's done in the best value of every single taxpayer in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The new ferry for the Strait of Belle Isle has been a disaster, and it's been unable to make a crossing now for 14 straight days.

I ask the minister: How many total days the vessel has been tied up and unable to make its crossing since it was brought into service?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely delighted to stand on my feet today and answer a question on the Strait of Bell Isle. Because, Mr. Speaker, I sat over in Opposition in 2013, in 2014, in 2015 when we were plagued with vessel issues, when we had people stranded and staying in hotels for nine and 10 nights at a time, and every time I went to the government of the day, the PC government, and said: why won't you put on some flights so that people can get moving? Well, they're not stranded; they're not stranded. They can drive down around. They can come in through Lab West. We got nowhere, Mr. Speaker. We had increasing capacity issues.

This government, Mr. Speaker, in a fiscal, tough climate have brought in a new ferry, increased passenger capacity, increased vehicle and we're putting on flights every three or four days when the ferry doesn't move. A heck of a lot more than was ever done by the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're 14 straight days now. I think the minister missed that part of the question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: And I live in the present; I say that over and over again. They live in the past, we live in the present. So, I'm going to say it again. The new ferry for the Strait of Belle Isle has been a disaster. It has been unable to make a crossing for 14 straight days.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Works: How many total days has the vessel been tied up and unable to make its crossing since it was brought into service? A simple question.

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, if the environment critic opposite were to look at the ice conditions in the Straits this year, or even the ice conditions on the Northeast Coast of this province, they are severe. The boat has not been tied up for 14 straight days, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly get the exact number for the Member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, as the MHA for the region just said, they were an abysmal failure. They could not get new vessels for Labrador. They couldn't do it, Mr. Speaker. They couldn't get out of the barn door. We delivered. These are great vessels. The people of Labrador are very proud of what we've done.

I'm looking forward to launching a new service on the North Coast of Labrador this coming June, Mr. Speaker. We've delivered. We've delivered for the people of Labrador, and I would invite the Member opposite to go and view these vessels that we've been able to procure.

Mr. Speaker, they take (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The response time is up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the minister might be –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Conception Bay South, please.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the minister may be actually stuck in that barn; we're not. So I'm going to ask another question on the issue because we actually have talked to people. We know what's going on.

The Strait of Belle Isle crossing is a lifeline for the people in Labrador. The new vessel has less capacity and is smaller than its predecessor. Due to this, it's far more susceptible to wind and ice conditions.

I ask the minister: Why didn't you ensure the vessel was appropriate for the crossing, as you leave the people of Labrador stranded?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, this is how we clearly know that they are seriously lacking on research. We have increased vehicle capacity, we have increased passenger capacity.

Mr. Speaker, when the boat can travel – for anyone who watched the evening news last week and someone says we're gone back in time, we are gone back in time; 30 years since we have seen ice conditions like we have now. Ice operations was talking about seven foot walls of ice.

We have a vessel there, Mr. Speaker, state of the art that is 1A ice class. But we are dealing with

some heavy ice, Mr. Speaker, in the Strait of Belle Isle, and heavy wind and pressure.

Mr. Speaker, today, we will get back to him but he is seriously wrong on all of this, and I would say you need a better researcher. We're quite pleased with what our government has done –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: We'll talk to our researcher, but maybe they need a better minister. So we'll trade off.

Ice breakers, which are under federal jurisdiction, have been virtually non-existent in aiding the Strait of Belle Isle ferry in its crossings.

I ask the minister: Where is your cozy relationship with the federal government and our federal minister on this issue?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, honestly, I'm astounded and I'm a little bit disappointed in the Member opposite making personal attacks. I thought he was better than that.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is the ice breaker is there every day. She does an ice assessment first thing in the morning. So that's working for us.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is now we have ice conditions where we have to actually break the channel to Fogo every morning. So we also have an ice breaker right now on the Fogo run.

The reality is this Member, the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, has delivered more for the people of the Straits when you think about ferry service than their previous administration could've ever dreamed of, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is the minister makes sure that after three or four days of no service, we put flights on. They would never do flights for the people of –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Your time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to point out to the minister, I'm talking about the boat, not the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair – two different issues.

Mr. Speaker, there have been multiple instances this winter where ambulances have had difficulties travelling and have even become stranded on the province's highways due to inadequate snow clearing.

Minister, why is your government putting lives at risk?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we take these instances very seriously. The situation around these; the first circumstance was an ambulance returning. It wasn't an emergency situation. It was returning back, which is no less important, but the realities here, there were some improvements.

We are continuing to make improvements, Mr. Speaker, because – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I can hardly hear myself from the chirping across – but the reality is here we've now been able to work with the Department of Health and Community Services to make some improvements to the protocols for this. But when it comes to safety, for any of our first responders, Mr. Speaker, it's important for us to make sure we get it right. We have 700 of our

own employees who are out night after night doing this work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, this has happened on the West Coast, it's happened in Whitbourne and also near Trepassey.

Why are you doing nothing to address the situation that continues to happen over and over again? I hear what you're saying but you're not answering the question.

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

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

I thank the Member for the question. Some of the things that we have done that were never done before; we've now integrated some of our senior staff with the Department of Health and Community Services and we're using their vehicle locators. For example, if we were to find ourselves in a situation this evening where we had to close a road or issue an advisory, one of the things we can now do is our officials can go on to the Health and Community Services ambulance vehicle locator system and actually find if there's an ambulance out on a particular road.

We used it just last week, actually. We were getting ready to close a road on the West Coast because of extreme conditions – because one of the things we also always have to do is take the safety of our own employees into account. So what we do now, if we're going to close a road we will reach out, we will log on to the system available through Health and Community Services and make sure what happens if you're on the road –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Your time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

In 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau said that he was committed to a smarter co-management of our fisheries and oceans. Since then, he gave our fishery fund to Atlantic Canada. He's put the Ocean Frontier Institute headquarters in Nova Scotia, and the surf clam quota almost went to New Brunswick for processing in Nova Scotia.

Why isn't your government standing up for our fisheries in this province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out to the hon. Member that the location of the secretariat to the Frontier Institute was established by a consortium of universities with the secretariat being established in Nova Scotia, effectively, September of 2015. That would've occurred on that government's watch.

So, with that said, Mr. Speaker, we have had tremendous success in dealing with key issues of our province. As the hon. Member may know, the surf clam decision was rescinded. We had some other issues with sea cucumbers, for example. They were rescinded. We've had a much better engaged relationship with the federal government.

We don't always get what we want. We agree to disagree sometimes, but we have a relationship –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis, please.

MR. K. PARSONS: I'll remind the minister that the decision on the institute was made in 2016. And only for the ethics commissioner decided to have a look into the surf clam, that

would've never changed – something that you never did also.

Joint management was a commitment in the Liberal red book. It was a directive the Premier gave in his mandate letter: an all-party in this House to the unanimous motion supporting joint management in 2017. That's almost two years ago.

Minister, what is the delay, and tell us what your government has done since then?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of engagements with the federal government. For example, he says the decision on – certain decisions in surf clams were taken because of the ethics commissioner. What I can say, there were no decisions that were taken because of the intervention of that hon. Member, because that hon. Member chose not to say one word about surf clams. The decision was taken by the federal government in August of 2017. There was no interaction whatsoever until the dying days of the House in Christmas of that winter, until they first – first – stood up to say that they believed there might be a problem.

Our government was engaged with the federal government long, long before that which brought us success.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis for very quick question, please.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the minister – it was your cozy relationship with your good, good friend Minister LeBlanc who got threw out the portfolio until it got straightened out. And what did your government do? Absolutely nothing.

MR. SPEAKER: Very quick question, Sir.

MR. K. PARSONS: I ask: Have you got a commitment from the federal government that no surf clams will leave Grand Bank?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources for a quick response, please.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, Mr. LeBlanc is not only my friend, he's my very good friend indeed. In fact, I would consider the hon. Member opposite my very good friend; however, we often disagree with each other. Unless he's saying that you cannot be friends if you ever disagree, then he should stand up and say that, because I would consider him a friend but I often disagree with him.

So with that said, Mr. Speaker, you will engage with federal government –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Your time is up.

MR. BYRNE: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Your time is over, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

At her February 19 press conference on the PUB interim report, the Minister of Natural Resources mused about the potential for rate mitigation in electrifying public buildings, noting work on this option is already underway.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will she provide a list of the public buildings identified for electrification and the analysis for economic viability of converting each one?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

This is a very important topic for the people of the province. The rates that they will be charged for hydroelectricity, if you go back to when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned, all – all – of the

cost of Muskrat Falls was going to be borne by ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. This government has taken the view that we will find a path forward to pay for Muskrat Falls that will not impact in any new or serious way ratepayers and taxpayers of this province, Mr. Speaker. It is very, very important.

The thing that it will, of course, cost is us is an opportunity lost. To address the question, Mr. Speaker, there are three ways we will be addressing the cost of paying for Muskrat Falls. It will be through cost reductions, it will be through managing the mortgage and it will be through increasing the opportunity for revenue and that is (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Time is up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I say to the minister she did not answer my question, in actual fact. My question had to do with the electrification of buildings. So let's see if she can answer this one.

Can she tell the House how much money government anticipates saving by converting public buildings to electric heat to give some hope to the people of the province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I simply ran out of time, unfortunately, in addressing this very serious issue. Yes, the conversions of buildings, we are looking at buildings through Transportation and Works, we're looking at buildings through the health care corporation, we're looking at multiple ways of converting buildings. We're doing the cost-benefit analysis of that. We're talking to our federal colleagues about same, Mr. Speaker.

We really do want to ensure that the savings that we might accrue – and, of course, driving the revenues of utilization of electricity will be used to defray the costs of paying for Muskrat Falls – something that I'm going to say again is critically important to the people of this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, we're looking for concrete information. The PUB suggests conservation and demand management as one way to mitigate power rates, and our party has been asking for that measure since 2012.

I ask the Minister of Natural Resources: Has government done any analysis on the role these measures could play in rate mitigation and, if so, will she table this analysis?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In September of 2018 this government did engage the Public Utilities Board in this very important discussion. Mr. Speaker, as the people of the province know, the Public Utilities Board was not even allowed to discuss, really, Muskrat Falls, or how we're going to pay for it. And this government, after we were able to put the Muskrat Falls Project on a better path – and I'll remind the people of the province that it took a Herculean effort to clean up the mess that was left on Muskrat Falls. Now, in the last year and a half, we've been turning your attention to how we're going to pay for Muskrat Falls.

We do have a plan for it. I've outlined the three major categories. We've engaged the Public Utilities Board, there's work underway and, in due course, all that work will be able to be seen by the people of the province.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, they waited three hours to engage the PUB. Nalcor has been shown –

MS. MICHAEL: Three years.

MS. ROGERS: I mean three years to engage the PUB, and Nalcor has been shown to be a costly and rogue Crown corporation, operating without effective oversight. This government has been in power for 3½ years now and has still not addressed these issues.

I ask the Premier: Given Nalcor's abysmal record, why is it allowing it to continue on as usual instead of taking steps to address this?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I take umbrage to what the Member opposite has said. We have been very focused over the last 3½ years on this project that was left, that we inherited, Mr. Speaker. We had to put it on a better course. We were able to have a world-class leader join us as a CEO, with incredible utility experience. We expanded and included expertise on the board of directors that is led by Brendan Paddock – one of the foremost CEOs from this province.

Mr. Speaker, we expanded the Oversight Committee, we added expertise, expanded it and put independence on that Oversight Committee. We've done an awful lot to bring that project in control and we are also addressing how to pay for it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The time for questions has ended.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

Tabling of Documents

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

In accordance with section 19(5)(a) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, I hereby table the minutes of the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting held on November 7, 2018.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to answer a question which the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune had raised in Question Period, because she continues to make reference to \$45 million. It's very misleading to the House and the general public, because the government is not providing Canopy Growth any up-front money or any tax credit. Canopy only receives a reduced remittance on product that is sold in the province. It's a performance-based agreement, so the more the company sells, the more the province gets in terms of revenue.

I'd be more than happy to provide her or any Member of this House with a briefing to answer questions. But continuing to put out that government gave any company \$45 million is not true.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just remind the minister his government has called it a tax credit. Today, he's apparently not

calling it a tax credit. They have changed their mind.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, single-use plastic bags are polluting our natural environment. They litter the streets, parks, green spaces and forests throughout our province and create serious health risks for our wildlife. They are also littering our oceans and waterways, thus endangering marine and other wildlife because they ingest and become entangled in plastic.

We have a social responsibility to protect our province's environment and its wildlife and, given the fact that Newfoundland is surrounded by the ocean, we also have a social responsibility to protect the marine environment and marine life as well.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We the undersigned call on the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reduce litter and plastic pollution and reduce the impact on wildlife by introducing a complete ban on the supply of lightweight, single-use, retail-style plastic shopping bags. We also call on government to urge consumers to use reusable when shopping instead of single-use plastic bags, and to keep a reusable bag with them so they're always prepared.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition which I similarly presented the day after the EU placed a ban on single-use plastic bags, that was October 25, and at that time I challenged the administration to take the lead on this, be the first province in Canada to ban shopping bags.

As a government, we've consulted, as people, with businesses, with citizens, with environmental groups, even with the

manufacturers of plastic bags, and everybody is giving resounding support for a plastic-bag ban.

As of yesterday, the minister announced further consultation. I think the only further insult he could've said is he was going to hire a consultant to let us know what we're going to do with plastic bags.

Mr. Speaker, I call on the government right away to implement the ban and protect our environment for future generations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment for a response, please.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for his petition because it's completely in line with what we're doing. We've started the process, and one of the things that came out of a meeting with all stakeholders last fall in September was that we needed to do further consultations with the public. That was one of the recommendations that came out of that meeting with the stakeholders and that's exactly what we're doing.

We started a consultation process that we launched yesterday that will be there until March 27 to do just that. We want to hear from the public because not everybody agrees with it, despite what you may think, there are people who disagree.

So, Mr. Speaker, after that consultation is over, we will meet with the stakeholders again. We will be making a decision. We're doing it the right way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Your time is expired.

Further petitions?

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS the successful proponents for the new hospital in Corner Brook are scheduled to be announced this spring, with construction anticipated to begin in the fall, and this is estimated to be a four-year construction period, and there are experienced local tradespeople and labourers in the area.

THEREFORE, we the undersigned petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage companies that are awarded the contracts for the new hospital to hire local tradespeople and labourers at no extra cost to the taxpayers so that they can work in their own area, support the local economy and be able to return home to their families every evening.

Mr. Speaker, I was very encouraged from what the Minister of Transportation and Works said, that they have to meet with a lot of associations in Newfoundland and Labrador; they're working with the local tradespeople.

Just on a note, last year, when I was involved with it in June, Mr. Speaker, the Ironworkers made a commitment, whatever the difference between what they had to bring people in to whatever the cost for the union, they were going to put the money up.

So, this is not a money grab, this is wanting their unions, the tradespeople unions, especially the Ironworkers who I've been dealing with, and all the construction businesses that I've met with, to hire local people and there's an opportunity for it.

I'm very encouraged and I thank the Minister of Transportation and Works for taking the lead on this to explain and have this seminar in Corner Brook, what's available to the local companies, what we can do.

I know TradesNL is very much proactive in meeting with companies and potential companies that may get some of the work, so I'm very confident that there will be local people hired on the long-term care hospital because it is a four-year project. These people on the petition are from Corner Brook, are on the north shore, they're from Meadows to Frenchman's Cove,

Gillams; they're all over Western Newfoundland, the people that are signing petitions.

I thank the minister, again, for being proactive. I thank TradesNL and all the construction companies because it would be great to have all these tradespeople and labourers spend four years at home, earning a decent wage for the people and being top-rate workers for productivity and their workmanship. I think it would be great for the area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Glad to rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents. I'll read it in: An extension was announced to the Robert E. Howlett Highway in March 25, 2014;

WHEREAS the environmental assessment, design and engineering of the project is completed; and

WHEREAS continued residential and commercial growth has increased traffic on the southern Avalon.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We the undersigned call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to continue with this significant piece infrastructure to enhance and improve traffic to the Southern Avalon.

As I said, this is a significant piece of infrastructure that's been worked on for an extended period of time, and in 2014, after significant work being done in terms of traffic volumes to the southern Avalon and the need to enhance infrastructure outside of current Route 10, which now flows through a watershed area, Bay Bulls Big Pond, and proceeds on through several residential areas, including Middle Pond, determination was made to proceed with this piece of highway, which was 9.6 kilometres.

As I said, engineering design and work was done, there was consultation done on it as well, but in the 2016 budget the current administration cancelled this particular project. Now, we're calling – recognizing the continued growth we've seen on the Southern Shore, certainly in Bay Bulls, Witless Bay, Tors Cove and then on farther down towards Cape Broyle, we're seeing a number of increases in traffic, that continues.

We continue to hear from residents in regards to having that piece of infrastructure that would bypass the actual watershed and connect into Bay Bulls and the city limits. It's an extremely important piece of infrastructure. I call on government to revisit this, get this restarted. We hear about all the great connections with the federal government and monies available through federal funding, it's time to restart this project, certainly connect with the region, and get this piece of infrastructure done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands for a quick petition, please.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There have been numerous concerns raised by family members of seniors in long-term care throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly those suffering from dementia, Alzheimer's disease, other cognitive debilitating conditions, whereby loved ones have experienced injuries, have not been bathed regularly, have not received proper nutrition and/or being left lying in their own waste for extended periods of time. We believe this is directly related to government's failure to ensure adequate staffing at those facilities.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to instate legislation, which includes the mandatory establishment of an adequate ratio of one staff to three residents in long-term care and all other applicable regional health care facilities housing persons with dementia, Alzheimer's disease, other cognitive debilitating conditions, in order to ensure appropriate safety, protection from

injuries, proper hygiene care and all other required care. The law would include the creation of a specific job position in each facility for monitoring and intervention as required to ensure the safety patients.

Mr. Speaker, I realize I'm on a time crunch, that's why I'm reading so fast, but we have several signatures here again today from all throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. And, basically, as the prayer of the petition speaks, it's about seniors, particularly seniors with Alzheimer's and dementia in long-term care and ensuring that they have the appropriate staffing ratios to ensure their safety and that they're looked after properly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I now call on the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi to introduce the resolution standing in her name, Motion 2.

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

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

I'm very pleased to move, seconded by the Member for St. John's Centre:

WHEREAS the PUB has confirmed when Muskrat Falls power comes online in 2021, electricity rates will double to 23 cents a kilowatt hour, but alternatively, keeping current rates will create an estimated annual budget shortfall of \$744 million, restricting government's ability to provide the public services people rely on; and

WHEREAS the Muskrat Falls inquiry is revealing that past and present governments made disastrous decisions leading to this financial crisis; and

WHEREAS government efforts have not resulted in practical solutions other than to direct the PUB to examine rate mitigation options; and

WHEREAS the PUB can only address part of what needs to be done, and experts have advised government of the work it must do immediately; and

WHEREAS the people of the province have lost confidence in government's ability to solve this crucial and complex problem, and need and want all Members of the House of Assembly to work together;

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge government to immediately strike an All-Party Select Committee to work in an open, transparent and collaborative manner on behalf of the people to identify all possible solutions for rate mitigation and the future of Muskrat Falls.

I'm very pleased today, Mr. Speaker, to have the opportunity to bring this issue forward as a private Member's resolution.

Today, we are debating this resolution –

MR. SPEAKER: If I may, I would ask the Member, I need a mover and a seconder. I'm not sure if you did that.

MS. MICHAEL: I did at the beginning. I moved, seconded by the Member –

MR. SPEAKER: Okay, thank you for that.

Confirmed.

MS. MICHAEL: – for St. John's Centre.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

I apologize.

MS. MICHAEL: Okay, sorry. I did make it clear.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, please proceed.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you.

Today, we're debating this resolution on an all-party select committee to work in an open, transparent and collaborative manner on behalf of the people to identify all possible solutions for rate mitigation and the future of Muskrat Falls.

The rate shock the people of the province will experience, if nothing is done to mitigate Muskrat Falls rates, will be immense. It must not be allowed to happen. I think everybody knows by now that our rates will double in 2021, or the rates will double.

It was the PC government who worked hard to push this untried, untested and unproven project through when Danny Williams was premier. As the Muskrat Falls inquiry unfolds, we are learning more and more of the irresponsibility of those who were supposed to have the people's best interests at heart.

The current Liberal government has waited until this late date in their term, their fourth year in power, to decide to try and come up with ways to mitigate rates. Primarily, with tasking the PUB – and I'm very happy they've brought in the PUB – but tasking them only in September 2018 with looking for solutions, and the PUB has said it will not be finished its work until January 2020. We do have the interim report that came out in February, and in that they pointed in some directions they are going, but made it clear they wouldn't have a final report until 2020, which is after the general election for this year.

The election is coming and people want and expect us, the elected MHAs, to work on finding solutions to this looming economic crisis. You know, I find it very strange, government, even today here in this House, is talking about how they're studying options and how they're going to have a plan in place, and they've tasked the PUB to help them with it and the PUB won't have a report until January. So the promise of this government to have a plan in place before the general election looks pretty slim to me, and I think to the people of this province.

An all-party select committee is the way to go. It would be open, it would be transparent, non-partisan, and it would be a way of involving many people in this discussion.

Our Standing Orders allow for standing and select committees; though, they haven't been used a lot in the recent past, and I say that deliberately. Standing Committees, right now, the Resource, Social Services, and Government Services Committees, have been used in a very limited way, only for scrutinizing the budget once a year, what we call Estimates.

Right now, they are not being used regularly for study of legislation, for example, which Standing Orders do allow for. That use of these standing committees happened only during a short period of time in the history of this House. Between 1996 and 2002, the standing committees that I've just named were used regularly to deal with legislation.

It is also interesting to note that between 1949, when this Assembly was formed, and 2001, there have been dozens of select committees set up. As a matter of fact, the last one dealt with the recovery of tobacco-related health care costs. That was in 2001. But in 18 years since 2001, with all of the major issues that have faced this province, there has not been one select committee. Though, we have recently had two successful all-party committees, one on the Northern shrimp issues and the other on mental health; however, they weren't done under our select committee format in our Standing Orders.

Other committees of this House include: The Public Accounts Committee; Privileges and Elections Committee; Standing Orders Committee, and Miscellaneous and Private. Right now, I'm happy to say, at least the Public Accounts, the Privileges and Elections Committee and Standing Orders Committee are quite active.

The importance of having the standing committees and select committees involved is that they have powers within our Standing Orders, powers that other provinces use as well, powers that Ottawa uses as well. Standing committees can regularly hold public sessions. Standing committees can call in experts to testify and propose laws or about important issues. These public sessions would be here, we already do it, and in other places they would be broadcast, reported on by the media, and help inform people about important policy issues,

including the implications of new laws and the activities of Crown corporations.

Had standing committees been working and effective when the Muskrat Falls Project was being considered, or a select committee had been put in place, they would have been able to examine reports, listen to opponents and proponents, bring in witnesses and weigh the merits of Muskrat Falls in an open, transparent and factual environment. Imagine if that had happened. But it did not happen, and now we are saddled with a serious financial crisis that is set to impact the people of this province.

The Premier is assuring us as late as yesterday that his government is taking the issue of the doubling of electricity rates in 2021 very seriously; though, he has not yet brought anything concrete to the floor of the House, and neither has his minister, they ask us to be patient because they will have a rate mitigation plan in place to take to the people of this province that will not shoulder the burden of Muskrat Falls on ratepayers or taxpayers. I've indicated, how are they going to do that when they haven't got anything concrete yet and the PUB won't have its report ready until January 2020?

So today we are calling for a select committee of the House to deal specifically with power rate mitigation. This government says it is open to what others have to say about it, the Premier said that this week. We say put a select committee in place with all the powers allowed, so that the whole province can become involved in finding the answers to rate mitigation.

Under the current Standing Orders of the House of Assembly, standing and select committees can take evidence, they can hear witnesses and they have all the powers they need to be functional and relevant. The rules are there to invoke so let's, today, decide to do that.

Some of us in this House – not all, but a number of us – have sat through the history of Muskrat Falls. It has been especially problematic from the moment Bills 60 and 61 were tabled in the House, when Danny Williams brought forth those bills and was so determined to go ahead with the project.

Prior to that, in August 2011, the NDP announced it would support the Muskrat Falls Project only if it were economically viable, environmentally sustainable and beneficial to the people of the province. But government's lack of transparency makes it impossible to assess whether it was being financially responsible.

We know now at that time we thought there was evidence, we thought there was information and we kept asking for it. We know now, especially thanks to the inquiry, that the information was there and that we were bang on. All of the Opposition were bang on on this one, I have to say. It turns out that the government who kept trying to tell us this was so good for us and refusing to answer our questions, they themselves were going through blindly, accepting unproven information from people.

It's unbelievable what we've been through in this province, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Muskrat Falls. And here we are now, people facing the possibility – not only the possibility, the fact that our rates are going to go up and without anything concrete to hear from government.

What we have right now is a government across from us who, in Opposition, really questioned the government who was in power, really asked for answers and didn't like being told trust us. What they're doing here themselves at this moment is saying to people yes, we know the rates are going to double. Yes, we know that you're concerned but you're not going to have to worry, you've got to trust us. We're taking care of it.

Well, you know what? If nothing else, I would hope that the people in this province are at a point where they're starting to say we can't just trust anymore. We trusted you. We trusted government back in 2010, 2011, 2012. We trusted you and look where we are

The government managed to get a vast majority of the people on board, thinking Muskrat Falls was the best thing. People trusted, and where are we? So the day of a government saying "trust us" is over. Let's have an all-party committee where everything is out in the open, where the discussion is out in the open, where experts in our province and experts from outside the

province will come in and will present ideas; will present the options; will help with the kinds of things that the PUB is talking about; will help with ideas that many, many people in this province are talking about, publicly and in meetings. I was at a meeting myself a couple of weeks ago where they were looking at Muskrat Falls – very knowledgeable people in that room over in the Holiday Inn, Mr. Speaker.

So I say to the government: You have got to wake up. You have got to realize people are watching you and the half answers that we're getting in Question Period are not satisfying people. It's all pie in the sky for people right now, the talk of electric cars and the talk of electrification of buildings. All fine and dandy, but that's not going to be in place in 2021. So what can happen between now and 2021 to bring the mitigation that's going to be needed? That's what has to be talked about. That's the debate right now. As I said a couple of minutes ago, people are not going to be fooled again. I certainly hope they're not going to be fooled again.

I'm asking this government and I'm asking the Opposition Party: Let's do the right thing. Let's put the debate out in the open. Let's not hide what's being said. Let's not hide the ideas that people have. Let's be realistic. If we're talking about electrification, how far down the road is that going to be in order to really mitigate rates?

If we're talking about electric cars, what is the cost-benefit analysis that shows us the degree to which that is going to help with the mitigation of rates? Even when it comes to one of the points in the PUB's interim report, the whole thing of the renegotiation of the loan guarantee agreements, for example, even the PUB says that is not going to be something that will really come up with a lot of money to help when it comes to the mitigation of rates.

I put all the forward, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to hearing my colleagues in the House give their opinion on this. I hope we're going to have people agreeing that we need to now be open and transparent and accountable to the people and having a select committee set up – the last select committee in 2001 had to do, as I said, with the effects of tobacco on people's

health. We still have a court case pending with regard to that.

Let's put in place a committee that will come up with some options.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this very important issue. I say it's a very important issue because everywhere I've travelled in this province and people I meet, two questions come up: What are you doing about Muskrat Falls and how we've been able to get that project under control – we did inherit quite a mess, Mr. Speaker. But as the people of this province know and as everyone in this province is aware, I would say, we've been able to put that project on a better track.

I will say I'm a little disappointed today in reading the preamble to this motion that really does speak a lot of political points. I'm going to say to this hon. House and I'm going to say to the people of the province that this is not an item that I think that we need to do – when we're talking about the rates of the people of the province, I think we have to be respectful of the fact that people are very concerned of how they're going to pay for Muskrat Falls.

When the Muskrat Falls Project was sanctioned, Mr. Speaker, the government of the day, the PC government of the day, did determine that the cost of Muskrat Falls was going to be borne 100 per cent on the backs of ratepayers.

We have been quite clear in our deliberations over the last number of years that we do not think that is even possible. We have said quite clearly, I would say quite repeatedly, assured the people of this province that we are working on a plan to ensure that the people of the province, the ratepayers and the taxpayers, do not have the burden of Muskrat Falls. The costs of Muskrat Falls and the additional burdens of the overruns,

the additional burdens that have been placed on the people of this province will not be borne by the taxpayers and ratepayers.

Now, a lot of people quibble with me and say: Well, someone is going to end up having to pay for it. And I say: Absolutely, there is an opportunity cost here. But what I can say to the people of this province and in particular to those that are really concerned about their finances, those that are really concerned about some of the discourse that has been said in this House about the doubling of rates, kind of the fear that that could happen, I will say this: We will be providing details of how we're going to pay for Muskrat Falls. It does come due in 2021.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member said we've got to wake up. Well, I say respectfully to the Member opposite, we've been wide awake – wide awake – since we came into this government and I can tell you, quite sincerely, that we've put a tremendous amount of effort into ensuring that the project called Muskrat Falls was put on a better state.

People in this province know that we were able to attract a world-class utility expert in Stan Marshall, and he came out in June of 2017 and said this is the cost of Muskrat Falls, there's been no schedule slippage and no cost slippage, none.

Now, pretty much every other day under other leadership there was challenges, but since that time, Mr. Speaker, we've been working with that budget and working with that schedule. We're getting pretty close, within the end of this year, early next, we're pretty close to setting some conclusions to that project, but we will have to pay for it, Mr. Speaker, and how we pay for it is critical

That's why, I think, it was very, very important that we engaged the Public Utilities Board in this process. It wasn't late to the game. We had to have some surety of how that project was going to finish. We had to ensure that our attentions were placed on getting that project on a better track and a better place, and then we asked the Public Utilities Board to come and assist with ensuring we can pay for Muskrat Falls.

Now, Mr. Speaker, everyone in this province knows, I don't have to remind the people of this province who know that the Public Utilities Board was frozen out of the Muskrat Falls Project, but because we wanted their expertise, we wanted their knowledge, we invited them back in in September of 2018.

I'm going to remind the Member opposite that when she spoke during the filibuster, I believe it was 2012, I wasn't in the House at that time, I know the Premier, who was the Leader of the Opposition at the time, spoke on his feet for many, many, many hours and I know the Member opposite spoke for many hours. I'm going to quote something that she said, and this is what she said during the debate: Who, for example, would look at the rates that are going to be paid for Muskrat Falls if it is not the Public Utilities Board?

That was her quote. She is right, so that's why we've asked the Public Utilities Board, and it's very valuable and important work. I thank the board of commissioners of the Public Utilities Board, they've been very diligent; they've been very considerate in their deliberations. They have the expertise, they have the knowledge in rate mitigation options and they are looking very closely at this. They've engaged experts and they will – remember this, Mr. Speaker, the Public Utilities Board is going to go out and ask the public how is best to pay for Muskrat Falls. They have said that publicly that they will be having hearings this fall.

Now, I'm going to remind this House and the people of the province what the Public Utilities Board is. It is an independent, quasi-judicial regulatory body appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council and operates primarily under the authority of the *Public Utilities Act* and it was established in 1949. It is responsible for the regulation of electric utilities in the province to ensure that the rates charged are just and reasonable and that the service provided is safe and reliable.

Mr. Speaker, who better than to assist in ensuring we have a plan to pay for Muskrat Falls than the Public Utilities Board?

We already have an inquiry which is investigating, and the Member opposite did

mention this in her deliberations, they're already investigating why the project was sanctioned, they're already investigating what went wrong, why the costs have doubled, why apparently the former PC government did not have all the full details of what they were committing to and why they continued with the project even after the reports were coming in from SNC-Lavalin saying you're off track, over budget, behind schedule almost immediately.

Mr. Speaker, the mortgage comes due on Muskrat Falls in 2021. That's when payments are going to begin: 2021. We have to have all of our details in place. We have to have our plan in place. We have to listen to what the Public Utilities Board – and I'm going to tell you, I was reassured, I really was reassured when I looked at what we've been able to do, as a government, with getting the Muskrat Falls Project on track. As I said, world-class utility leader in the CEO Stan Marshall, we have an expanded board of directors, a knowledgeable board of directors.

Something that keeps coming up over and over in the inquiry is the role of the board of directors and the fact that the previous administration didn't have a full board. We have one of the foremost business leaders in our province heading that in Brendan Paddick. We've expanded our Oversight Committee.

Another major issue that's coming out of the inquiry is around oversight, and we've expanded our Oversight Committee. We have independence on that Oversight Committee, learned people who are assisting and ensuring and reviewing and discussing the outcomes of what Nalcor is doing, and on a regular basis, they're putting information out there to the public.

I think it's very, very important, now that we have done all those things, to ensure that the project is in a better place; including, for example, getting a second federal loan guarantee. That's really keeping costs down as well.

One thing I did read, and one thing I was reassured by the Public Utilities Board when I read the report – and I encourage everyone, it's a fairly easy read. Mr. Speaker, as are the reports of the Liberty and Synapse who were experts to

the board, I would encourage everyone to read those reports.

I was reassured by – there are solutions to pay for Muskrat Falls. There are ways in which we can pay for Muskrat Falls. It is going to be challenging, there is no doubt, but what I was reassured is, it is not impossible. And I say again to the people of this province, it is not impossible.

I can assure you that this government and the actions we've taken, including the Public Utilities Board, we've had also an internal committee comprised of people from Newfoundland Hydro, from Nalcor, from Natural Resources, from Finance. A number of experts from around our government have come together and they have been doing analyses. They're also informed more by the Public Utilities Board, but the options that the Public Utilities Board have come out with really do align with what our internal experts have been working on.

I'm going to remind the people of the province, as I have in the last number of weeks, of how we're going to pay for Muskrat Falls. Again, it is challenging, but it is not impossible. Here's how we're going to do that. First of all, I want to remind everyone that we did allocate \$200 million in the budget on an ongoing basis to help defray costs. That's number one. Number two – and this really does fall out of the Public Utilities Board report, when you look at: How are we going to pay for it?

So, the first thing, we're going to increase revenues. I've talked about this publicly. I've been very, very forthright in my discussions. The Public Utilities Board has put information out there. So we are all informed of some of the things we're doing.

We have talked about increasing our export sales opportunities. Right now, we sell on the spot market. Is there a way we can have firm power increase our opportunity for better income from export sales? Is there a way of increasing electrification in the province?

That does two things. One, it decreases the amount of diesel we're using; increases the number of megawatts that are being sold within

the province, which helps defray costs. So increasing that revenue – and there are many other ways, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to use a few because I only have three minutes left.

The second big thing is: How do we contain costs? If you read the Public Utilities Board report, a lot of work – what we're doing is looking at: How do we ensure our operations and maintenance that is being done by Muskrat Falls – how do we do that better to save money? What's the best process to save money?

We know that Nalcor, for example – and Public Utilities Board talks about this. Nalcor will be changing. Once the project is complete, of course, we won't need the number of people that we have. How do we make sure there's less duplication between the efforts of Hydro and the efforts of Nalcor and make sure we are streamlined and as efficient as we possibly can so that we lower costs? Lower costs means we can take that money and put it towards paying for Muskrat Falls.

The third major component of that is also around paying for Muskrat Falls. In that, what's the mortgage of Muskrat Falls? Pretty much all of us at one time or another in this House had a mortgage on our home, and you know and I know that when we go to the bank and we're talking to the bankers about our homes, we say: well, tell me, if I pay every two weeks I can save how much money on my mortgage? My amortization rate now is 20 years. Should it be 15? Should it be 25?

We know there are a number of ways within our own financing that we can actually save some money. We know that, and we are going to have conversations with our financiers to say, how best do we do that? So the combination of the money that we've already allocated, the money that we're going to save, the money that we're going to – increased revenues and the mortgage of Muskrat Falls is going to allow us to pay for Muskrat Falls. We believe it is challenging but not impossible. The report of the Public Utilities Board is very informative; very informative of that.

I say to the Member opposite, and I say it with sincerity, I think the Public Utilities Board is the best pace for, I'm going to say all of

Newfoundland and Labrador, not just an expert committee of this House but all of Newfoundland and Labrador. They're going to be doing hearings in the fall, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is incumbent upon all of us to have conversations and discussions around the best path forward.

We have already taken the opportunity to put the Muskrat Falls Project in a better place, to finish the project firmly and strongly under better leadership – I would say, Mr. Speaker, stronger leadership – and making sure that the project is in a better place. Now we're taking all of our time and our expertise and our deliberations – and we've been doing this as a government for quite some time.

And the Member is right, we did in 2018 ask the Public Utilities Board in because we were getting closer to a finish line. We knew, we had some solid numbers and information in which to go to the Public Utilities Board. They are experts in their field, Mr. Speaker. They are experts in their field, and we've asked them there.

Now, the Member opposite is correct. Their final report is not required until January of 2020. They're going to have some time now to take all the information that they've done and do some further analysis, but the government too has done further analysis.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise today on the private Member's motion by the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. Her motion deals with Muskrat Falls and dealing with how we mitigate rates and the process for doing that, and calls on an all-party committee to deal with that particular issue and talking about consultations.

The Minister of Natural Resources, I caught her in her comments in regard to the work being done by the PUB now and how an interim report has been made public. My understanding is there have been consultations later in the year and a final report after that.

In particular, this is good for the debate and the discussion talking about the overall rate mitigation for Muskrat Falls. This gets back to a public policy decision. I recognize the PUB is doing considerable work, has brought in considerable expertise, but, at the end of the day, the recommendations or the direction given from the PUB evolves into a public policy discussion by a government of today in regard to how you mitigate those electricity rates, if that's the decision, and how you do that and where that money is extracted from. Whether it's from the Treasury itself, the annual budget process, or whether it's from the assets and the revenues generated through Nalcor, and, in particular, through the Muskrat Falls Project itself.

There is also the consideration to, where do you mitigate rates from. Right now, currently in the province it's about 11.4 cents. The original project for Muskrat Falls at \$6.2 billion looked at projected, at that time, based on the information that the rates at the completion of the project would be somewhere in the range of 15.5 cents. Since then, some of the information that we have from Nalcor in regard to new projections and costs, put it much higher at over 20 cents.

So, do you mitigate at the rate from the original project, or are you mitigating from the overruns of the particular project? Those are public policy decisions that need to be made. We've had certainly significant information that has flowed over the past number of years in regard to that.

Other variables that we look at, and also are significant, is the Holyrood facility and recent legislation that was brought here to the House, specifically related to greenhouse gas emissions and a management plan, and talked about a performance-based system for those facilities that are over 30,000 metric tons of emissions. Within that, within the province, you would be designated as an industrial user and be in that performance-based regulatory framework.

So within that, the facility at Holyrood, we'd be part of that because its emissions do exceed what the threshold is. From that actual legislation here in the province now, in a previous discussion we have when this legislation came in, the savings for that, just in terms of emissions, are not included.

I think at the time we were told that, based on the credits that could be produced from a facility like Holyrood when it's shut down, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, there would be somewhere in the range of \$125 million as well that could be used, at that particular time, to offset cost. So they would flow back to Nalcor in terms of credits. There's an avenue there. I'll get into these and others as I speak to these as I go through, and some of them are identified in the PUB – the interim report that's been made public.

So that is one dealing with mitigating rates and ability to do it and what may be available to do it. This is a smaller one but still significant when you look at Holyrood and tax credits or emission credits related to shutting it down. This wouldn't include the roughly \$100 million to \$150 million per year that's used for bunker C oil and others that's used to run the operation there. Taking that out also allows for some of that to – obviously, it wouldn't be required anymore, depending on how many units they're taking out and if all of them are taken out over a period of time. So those are areas that you would look at again in regard to options to mitigate rates.

Again, I get back to this is a public policy that needs to be made by a government of the day. Some of this information has been available for the past three years and even earlier in regard to the information and what's available to make that public policy decision.

I know the Minister of Natural Resources, over the past couple of years, I've certainly written here and she's been obliging in regard to providing information related to things like the sale of excess energy, what's available in regard to revenue generation, in regard to excess energy. I know back in 2016, in the summer of 2016 I think we wrote the minister at that time and asked for information in regard to forecast and excess energy.

Now, I will note that the original forecast was adjusted; the minister talked about the new CEO coming in and the new board of directors. The new CEO would have been in place at that time when this information was relayed to us, so this would have been under the new CEO at Nalcor and what was presented to us, as I said, in November of 2016. At that time, there were a number of pieces of information asked for.

One of them we have here is the forecasted excess energy and it looks at the amount and the total sales export from that. The information starts in 2020. It begins with \$153 million and goes to 2040, and continues to grow in regard to excess energy and what will be available from Muskrat Falls.

That amount cumulatively for that 20-year period exceeds probably \$3 billion; it's about \$3.4 billion that would have been available. So, some of the information that's in the interim report from the PUB certainly confirms that. I guess my point is that this information has been available, has been there, and we've often asked about it here in the House in regard to rate mitigation and asking, we know there's excess energy, we have the data from Nalcor in regard to approximately what that would be, why aren't we letting the public know that these are options that we can pursue.

So when we talk about the availability of data, information that's available while – I'll get to that shortly in regard to the interim report of the PUB. There has been information in the public domain in the last few years in regard to options and what would be available. I just spoke to another one there, we talked about Holyrood, the amount of fuel that's not burned there if that's shut down, as well the credits related to greenhouse gas emissions and the reductions in those and what those would mean.

I will just specifically reference the Public Utilities report, the interim report; it was released on February 15, 2019. There were two prior discussion papers of two consultants, prior to this being released, that goes into detail and talks about options and various initiatives related to rate mitigation.

When you look at this document from February 15, it does talk about projected rate increases, if

nothing is done, up to almost 22 cents, and the two consultants that were used were Liberty and Synapse. Liberty talked about in their review and what they had done, looking at the interconnected system; looking at the total revenue required to recover cost; looks at things like the structure of Nalcor and its subsidiaries; examining the forecast operational and maintenance cost; the impacts of various rate mitigation options; looked at things like industry best practice related to external markets. That was the Liberty report.

The Synapse report looked more in detail at the amount of energy and capacity required to meet load on the interconnected system; looked at the amounts available from Muskrat Falls Project to serve existing and future Island interconnected system load; and examined the impact of increasing prices on elasticity demand and the impacts on the interconnected system, which is tied to obviously rate mitigation, as you don't want to price electricity at a range where it's a disincentive for people to basically use electricity. So you have to strike that balance.

The report overall looks at a number of things: cost savings, the revenue opportunities; they talk about the two loan guarantees, the first and second, and the amount that's been invested; and looked at the Nalcor and province equity funding is projected to be about \$3.7 billion at completion of the project. These equity contributions by the province and Nalcor would earn substantial returns under the current terms of the financing arrangements. So the PUB and the analysis they have done, they're looking at certainly these as an option in regard to revenue opportunities.

It also talks about the financing in particular, and the requirement for sinking fund payments of the Muskrat Falls debt principal, interest on the Muskrat Falls Project debt payable to bond holders, and as well Nalcor dividends produced by its return on the Muskrat Falls Project capital cost equity component. So I guess the point is there are options here that have been identified and are significant that we've talked about over the past couple of years. Again, I get back to there's a public policy decision that needs to be made, with that data, of how we use it to mitigate the rates.

The report also talks about changes to the financial structure, and I spoke about the sinking fund. The sinking fund in one perspective, for those out there, is that basically you take out a loan, you take out debt. As you accrue over the amortization period, you put money away so when the debt becomes due, you have an ability to pay that debt. So that's significant for the long term. We look at our long-term financial viability, certainly if you go down that route and you pursue that avenue.

The other issue that was identified talked about interest payments. Additional opportunity there to reduce the revenue requirement related to reducing or referring interest payments on the project to debt payable to bond holders.

The other one they talked about is project debt structure, issuance of – again, we get into new debt, which I don't know if that's where we need to go. If we have the option through other revenue generations or cash sources at Nalcor to divert that today to mitigate those rates. I think some of the information from the PUB when they looked at ascent of mitigation, there are various amounts talked about, but usually it's between the \$60 million to \$70 million parts.

The other very significant one in all of this was the returns and dividends. Liberty noted that, while Nalcor will receive returns largely equivalent to what an investor-owned utility has the opportunity to earn, the actual costs are much lower since the debt portion of the project is much lower than an investor-owned utility would have and there are no outside equity providers. So there is a significant amount here. They go on to say, "Liberty noted that substantial returns of over \$6 billion to Nalcor are forecast in the first 20 years of operation."

So that's almost over \$300 million per year based on what the PUB has recently said in regard to \$6 billion in the first 20 years of the project. So there are definitively options here to pursue, in terms of mitigating those rates and giving the people of the province, which are looking for a comfort level, that there are options here and they should be made aware of it. But, as I said, the government of the day needs to make that decision and let people know how they will do that.

Again, the consulting firm, “Liberty noted that the returns and dividends will be small in the early years after commissioning but very large annual growth expected which will eventually offset more than half of the expected increase in rates in later years.”

There was also a reference to exports and the net dividends, which now include a return based on Newfoundland Power’s equity return, as set by the board, are estimated to be \$27 million to \$33 million per year from 2021 to 2025, and the suggestion is also made that there’s availability there for the rate mitigation.

So, all of these and the ones that I’ve talked about, we’ve gotten the information from the minister in prior years, to give information on excess energy sales, dividends, return on investment, return on equity. We talked about the reduction at Holyrood, taking that out in regard to the sale of fuel and also in regard to greenhouse gas emissions and what that would mean for reduction.

The important thing, I think, in the debate is to recognize that there are options available. The PUB has done a tremendous amount of work. There are all kinds of data at Nalcor. The information is there. It’s time to act now and to alleviate some of the concerns for the people of the province in regard to a rate mitigation structure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s an honour to rise today and respond to this private Member’s resolution. Let it be known that our government has long believed that the prospect that electricity rates may double because of the PC legacy of Muskrat Falls Project is untenable and will not stand.

The former PC administration has put the good people of our province in a terrible position. They promised without Muskrat Falls our rates would double. Now we have the prospect of our rates doubling because of Muskrat Falls. Talk

about being sold a bill of goods. I’ll get more into that later.

Right now, I want to discuss the language of the NDP PMR that’s being debated here today. While I agree that the people of the province deserve rate mitigation options that offset the expected increase in the price of energy when Muskrat Falls comes online, I disagree with many inaccuracies within this motion.

Further, I take exception to certain language in the motion that’s derogatory, inaccurate and misleading. The second clause reads: “... the Muskrat Falls inquiry is revealing that past and present Governments made disastrous decisions leading to this financial crisis.” Let that sink in.

The language “present government” is not true. And because of this, the NDP undermined the accuracy and relevance of their own motion, Mr. Speaker.

It would seem to me that the NDP are not watching the same inquiry that I am. What I see is a steady stream of former PC ministers and decision-makers giving testimony about all the things they didn’t know or didn’t try to know. We see former civil servants giving testimony into the behind-the-scenes workings of the Nalcor-PC administration.

Last fall, Todd Stanley, a former senior solicitor and deputy minister, appeared at the inquiry. Mr. Stanley is a reputable lawyer and well respected for his work in government. While testifying, Mr. Stanley tried to walk back some of the language he used during his initial interview with inquiry co-counsel. He described his own language as too flowery. That being said, it’s important to recall the exact language used during that first interview, language that gives a candid look into the inner workings of the Nalcor-PC government relationship, and the language that regardless of where you place on the scale of flowery to technical seems to be increasingly accurate as the inquiry unfolds.

Mr. Stanley called Nalcor a fiefdom, a runaway train, a classic example of the tail wagging the dog, Mr. Speaker. Is this a proper way for a Crown corporation to behave, or is it a complete opposite of what we can expect from a Crown corporation that is supposed to have the best

interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? You can judge for yourself.

We learned that under Premier Dunderdale, Nalcor was allowed, and perhaps emboldened, to circumvent normal decision-making processes and deal directly with the premier's office. This was a way to get around checks and balances. We have PC Members in the House of Assembly today that were part of the Dunderdale administration. They could've come forward, come out publicly to explain why they used questionable information and logic to push for this project for sanction. They had plenty of opportunity to explain themselves but they have not. Instead, Mr. Speaker, they remain silent. What is being revealed at the inquiry are the failures of the former PC administration.

Another important theme to consider with this project is the federal loan guarantee. When the loan guarantee was signed, that marked the point of no return for the Muskrat Falls Project. Let me repeat that again: When the loan guarantee was signed in 2013 that marked the point of no return for the Muskrat Falls Project. The loan guarantee that was signed provided no out provision. This would've allowed us an option to withdraw from the guarantee without incurring significant loss. When this document was signed, there was effectively no way out of this deal.

To summarize my point here, the ill-informed PC administration put Nalcor in a position to run roughshod over our institutions and run around the Public Utilities Board. That set us on a path of no return once the loan guarantee was signed. I agree that the former PC government made disastrous decisions that have led to the need for rate mitigation.

Our party, on the other hand, has worked hard and diligently to solve the problems of this project. And my friend, the Minister of Natural Resources, explained things very eloquently in her statements. My colleague spoke about the work being done to ensure the people of the province are not burdened by the doubling of electricity rates.

Mr. Speaker, we are a party of fixers. Let me say that again: We are a party of fixers. That's what we've done from the first day of forming

government, and we will continue to fix the mistakes and make a better future for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The second clause I take issue with is: "AND WHEREAS Government efforts have not resulted in practical solutions other than to direct the PUB to examine rate mitigation options." Now, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the NDP would have you believe, it was only two weeks ago that government released the interim report on Muskrat Falls from the board of commissioners of Public Utilities. This report has already addressed some practical solutions for rate mitigation. The options identified are worth repeating so that the public can know what practical solutions are already being considered. Whatever is decided, we can assume many of these options will be used simultaneously to address rate mitigation.

One option is to attempt to change or renegotiate the project financing. To quote the report: "Changes to the financing structure, specifically the sinking fund payments, interest payments associated with the federal loan guarantees and the project debt structure, and the returns and dividends associated with the project were identified as areas which could reduce costs to be recovered from ratepayers."

A second option based on organizational and operating efficiencies – this specifically relates to restructuring at Nalcor and streamlining Hydro operations. It may be possible to reduce duplication of services and find cost savings, Mr. Speaker.

A third option relates to electrification. The interim report says, "... electrification is likely to offer the single greatest opportunity to increase revenues to reduce revenue requirement associated with the Muskrat Falls Project." The areas for electrification include: transportation, residential and commercial heating.

It's no secret that many parts of the world plan on replacing gas-fired engines with those powered by batteries and electric motors, and technology has certainly come a long way through the years. The European parliament has set a goal that by 2030, 40 per cent of new cars and vans will be zero or low-emission vehicles –

40 per cent, Mr. Speaker – an ambitious but achievable goal in my opinion.

One of the knocks against electric cars is their batteries do not perform well in cold weather, and this is an important consideration in the climate that we experience here in Newfoundland and Labrador. When batteries are subject to cold weather, the effective range of an electric vehicle is significantly reduced. While considering this point, it's important that our government answers questions like this. We must show leadership and be bold in our embrace of the future. Until electric car battery technology is developed specifically for cold climates, there are options that have been available for many years. Hybrid vehicles offer a great alternative to traditional vehicles. You can drive using battery power in most cases and utilize the gas-fired engine in times of extreme cold.

Some people tell me that's all well and good, but you can't buy an electric or hybrid truck. Trucks are vehicles that many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can't get by without; it is certainly true in my district, Mr. Speaker. Well, based on the demand and improvements in technology, I wouldn't be surprised if electric trucks start coming to the consumer market soon. A new company backed by Amazon is already promising an electric truck and SUV to be ready for delivery by late 2020.

Another issue with electric vehicles is the lack of charging stations on the Island. This is a concern and something that could delay the sale and usage of electric vehicles. I look forward to working with all Members in the House of Assembly to see what can be done to increase charging stations and to help with electric vehicle infrastructure across our province.

The second part of electrification relates to heating. We have long encouraged electrification of home heating for consumers, where it makes sense. In 2017, we announced the new Home Energy Savings Program and the Energy Efficiency Loan Program to specifically help households with an annual income less than \$32,500. We encourage and spread the word of takeCHARGE NL to our constituents as we show there are already financial incentives for those who wish to switch to electric heat. The

website takeCHARGE NL has information on heat pumps, a heat pump savings calculator and the Energy Efficiency Loan Program, a program that is making it easier to save energy and money.

As for electrification for commercial heating, we can be confident that our hard-working public employees will identify public buildings or complexes that will be in the position to transition to electric heating. Our government has shown time and again that if there are savings to be found, we will find it. That's certainly true over the last 3½ years, Mr. Speaker.

Moving on, I take great exception to the fifth clause in the motion. Here they make statements based solely on fantasies and not facts. The people who approached me have realized that the financial nightmare that we inherited was caused by the PCs and believe that our Liberal government continues to be the best-suited group to get out of the PC mess.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Not only do they use insincere language about our government, Mr. Speaker, they go further and propose to bring Members of the former PC administration, the very administration responsible for Muskrat Falls boondoggle, onto the proposed all-party committee. This would be irresponsible and this underlies a problem that the NDP has with remembering history. It's important to remember things that were said by the PC Members across from me when they rose in 2012 to endorse and subsequently vote for Muskrat Falls.

The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune was a big supporter of Muskrat Falls, so big she accused the critics for not being able to see the forest from the tress – imagine that. She said, on December 4, 2012: "... some very intelligent people fail to see the larger picture and the bigger picture of what Muskrat Falls means for Newfoundland and Labrador" Well, Mr. Speaker, those critics were looking out for the people of the province, unlike the Member opposite.

During Question Period today, she talked about selling out rural Newfoundland. Well, the PC government did a great job of that with Muskrat Falls.

So this leads to my conclusion: Our party cannot and will not support this motion. What we are concerned about is ensuring ratepayers will not be saddled with a burden they did not ask for, a burden completely created by the former PC administration. We have brought the PUB back into the appropriate role, we have tabled their interim report and we are working on all options to solve the issue with rate mitigation.

All-party committees have their place. When used correctly, it can be effective. However, the public should not be made to wait years to hear the work of an all-party committee. We need solutions much sooner so we can work towards having things ready for 2021.

I would like to thank you for an opportunity to speak to this PMR today. I certainly look forward to our way ahead when it comes to rate mitigations.

Thank you.

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'm happy to stand and speak to this private Member's motion, which is a very important private Member's motion for our party, for our caucus, and it in and of itself was a collaboration private Member's motion. We came together to look at really what needs to be done around the issue of not only rate mitigation, but the future of Muskrat Falls, and what are the potential economic benefits, how do we make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is perhaps one of the most disastrous decisions ever made in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that decision was made a number of years ago and we are still dealing with it, and we will be

dealing with the effects of this decision for a very, very long time.

What happened and how Muskrat Falls was sanctioned is a clear indication of the failure of our democratic institutions and a failure of our democratic system. It was so bad that we had people who were desperate to be heard, desperate to be heard about the issue of methylmercury, desperate to be heard about their concerns about the North Spur, desperate to be heard about why did this go through without proper oversight, so desperate that in fact they risked their liberty and their security and they ended up in jail. We, as a province, imprisoned some people who had the courage and the conviction to question how this decision was made.

Land Protectors, Grand Riverkeepers, people from various Indigenous communities were actually imprisoned because they were not heard. What all-party select committees are about is ensuring that the best possible decisions can be made based on evidence, based on the will of the people, and that's not how Muskrat Falls was sanctioned. That's not at all how Muskrat Falls was sanctioned. It was rammed through. I was here in the House when it happened. I attended the filibuster, many of us in the House did – some who were on different sides of the House than they were during that time. We saw, Mr. Speaker, how our democratic process was being abused. We saw the deficit of our democratic process.

I would invite everyone here in this House to imagine would it be different, would it be where we are today, would it be different had we had an all-party select committee on Muskrat Falls where all of us would have heard from experts, where everyone who had concerns and/or expertise was truly heard, was listened to with the intention to really hear that the decision then would not have been simply a decision of arrogance and hubris on behalf of the ruling government at the time. Because that's what happened: They refused to listen; they wouldn't hear.

They refused to listen to the Land Protectors, they refused to listen to the Grand Riverkeepers, they refused to listen to some of our really experienced citizens: Dave Vardy, who has

written extensively about this; Des Sullivan, who in his blog has had guest writers in his blog because he was providing what the government of the day wouldn't do and that was to hear from different experts, to hear from people who had experience, people from all over the world; Ron Penney – all who had been really dedicated public sector workers, public servants, who only had the best interest of the people at heart, who only had the best interest of the province at heart. They had no political agenda. They were dismissed outright. Not only dismissed, Mr. Speaker, but demonized, ostracized, totally, totally ignored.

Imagine, though, if we'd had an all-party select committee at that time, maybe the same decision would've been made; maybe the decision would've been made differently. I can remember being interviewed by CBC and it was David Cochrane's half-hour live radio program on CBC and it was a Friday afternoon and he wanted three rookies. I was a rookie at the time. He wanted a rookie from each party. And we got on to Muskrat Falls. And I said: David, I've got my dancing shoes right here. I've got them right here with me in the studio. If it can be proven that Muskrat Falls is economically viable, environmentally sustainable and good for the people, I'll be the first one to put those dancing shoes on and I'll be out dancing in the street and celebrating. But we kept asking those questions and could not get satisfactory answers.

Later on I also said to the folks there, because I'd been reading – many of us were doing our research around Muskrat Falls. I'd been reading and I had read in a number of places that major hydroelectric dams, major hydro projects, came in at least double in cost. So at that time it was \$6.5 billion. I said: I believe it's going to be at least \$12 billion. People looked at me, rolled their eyes and laughed. And here we are; we're going beyond \$12 billion.

But what does this tell us? How does that relate to us today? Because we have incredible challenges facing us, incredible challenges around Muskrat Falls and the effects on our economy, on our people, on our programs and services, on our environment. We still have unanswered questions. If I were government, I'd want to share the burden of responsibility; I would want to share the burden of how we're

going to solve this problem.

Every one of us here in this House has been elected to make sure that decisions that are made in this House are in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. And I believe that government probably wants to make decisions that are in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but I also believe that the decisions that were made around sanctioning of Muskrat Falls were heavily, heavily influenced by partisan politics.

I also believe that will be a possibility in the solutions that come up. I am happy that the PUB is involved and helping come up with rate mitigation plans. That's important. They should have been involved from the beginning. We continuously pushed for that, as did the current government. We all pushed to say we needed to have the PUB to be an oversight in this project. Why didn't this government, the new government, the Liberal government, why did they not bring in the PUB the moment that they were elected? Because they were pushing for it at the time as well.

The Premier of the province said at around 3:20 this afternoon, out in a scrum when he was asked about will he support this private Member's motion, he said: No, we will be voting that down. We have a rate mitigation plan. We've put a lot of work into putting a rate mitigation into place. An all-party committee will do nothing but kick the answers out past an election date. This is the Premier of our province – this debate started only at 3 o'clock this afternoon, and at around 3:20 or a few minutes earlier he said no, we're going to vote it down. This is egregious. This is total disrespect for the process that we are undertaking this afternoon.

We are here to debate this private Member's motion and what he is saying – it doesn't matter what's happening in a debate; we are not listening. It's the same as when the Conservatives wouldn't listen to anyone before the sanctioning of Muskrat Falls. Here again, we see now the Premier of this province, who is having to deal with the disastrous effects of Muskrat Falls, is saying you know what, I'm not going to listen either because we have all the power and I'm not going to listen. We're voting this down.

So, we really shouldn't be here. We're wasting the taxpayers' money. Obviously, it doesn't matter that we're having a debate. In fact, what's happening, maybe we should just be writing each other letters. What is the point of debate?

This Premier has said exactly what previous premiers with the PC government who earned power before sanctioning and after sanctioning, he said the same thing: We're not listening; you will not be heard. He said that clearly today at around 3:20. He said: No, we're voting down that. He's not listening. And so the beat goes on and history repeats itself.

I asked the Premier: Does he have any respect at all for the process that we are doing here in the House? I asked him that. I'm curious as to how he can justify that statement. Again, showing the disregard and the democratic deficit that is exhibited and practiced by both the previous administration and the current one.

So people were imprisoned, Mr. Speaker. Then also we know that what we see here is that our democratic institutions are failing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador by not looking, by not really considering our options because, again, this is so incredibly important in terms of how it affects programs and services for our people, whether we'll be able to afford teeth, whether we'll be able to afford the best education possible to give to our children, whether we'll be able to afford the best possible and most effective health care and health care system for the people of the province.

People have lost confidence, and Muskrat Falls is an extreme example of how people have lost confidence. They lost confidence in the method in how Muskrat Falls came to be and they're losing confidence in how we're going to deal with this.

A lot of people have already left the province saying: It's over. They feel that Muskrat Falls is going to bankrupt the province or they feel that Muskrat Falls, in fact, that the rates are going to be so high that they're not going to be able to afford to stay here.

This is all because of disastrous decisions, because of hubris and arrogance. This is an opportunity to do it differently. We can't forget

the legacy that this has left us. The fact that people who were so desperate to be heard about their concerns about Muskrat Falls were imprisoned, because they were knocking down the doors desperate to be heard. They didn't know what else they could possibly do.

All-party select committees are about making sure that people are heard. It's also about making sure we get the best possible information, where we can get information from experts all over the world. It was my private Member's motion, Mr. Speaker, that brought about the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. Because I was listening – I was listening to the people in my district who were talking about the suffering and pain that they were experiencing because our mental health system and addictions system was not responding in the way that they needed. That there were incredible deficits, that this system was broken.

There's incredible work that has been done, and people were willing to do it because they know that they were being heard. And government and all of us worked together, we listened, we gathered expertise, we gathered information, and we came up with recommendations that are revolutionizing our mental health and our addictions system. And that's what we are offering here today. We are saying let's put our partisan differences aside, it is not too late to do this, and the PUB is important, but a part of the solution.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of issues that I want to raise regarding this debate. Before I get into responding to some of the comments made by the Members of the Third Party, I want to go to Moody's report on the province's credit rating, because I think it's important for the

people of the province to understand exactly where we are and why we are where we are.

One of the questions is: Why has the outlook remained the way it has for the past two years? We've received accolades from all three bond rating agencies for the work that government has done to get the fiscal situation that the province was facing under control. But why has the outlook remained the way it has? They go on to say: Nalcor's financial pressures increase the risk that government may need to provide budget support.

So it's a very real risk, Mr. Speaker, and I think the people of the province need to understand the full picture that the Nalcor project, which we inherited, is the greatest downward pressure on our province's credit ratings. They go on to say: The province has used much of its available fiscal flexibility to reduce the deficit that was \$2.2 billion from 2015-2016. Now that deficit, as we know, was left by the previous administration. Mr. Speaker, it goes on to talk about the fact that one-third of the province's debt is directly related to Nalcor and Muskrat Falls.

Just to give an indication as to where we are – it's easy for the Official Opposition, the PC Party, to criticize what government has done to clean up their mess, but the reality is it was a mess. It's recognized by the bond rating agencies that 35.6 per cent of the province's total debt is directly attributable to Nalcor and Muskrat Falls. They say that eliminating or reducing the deficit that was left from 2015-16 puts pressure on government, and that Muskrat Falls itself is the biggest contingent liability and downward pressure on our province's credit rating. All three were left to the people of this province by the former administration, left to this administration to clean up.

Now, in addition to this, I just want to talk about a couple of things. In the 2015 budget Estimates, the last budget by the former administration – because I've studied that budget and I'm going to have a lot to say in this session about that budget. We're actually ahead of where they projected we'd be, but they complain about where we are. We're ahead of where they projected we'd be.

But some of the interesting facts: To be clear – in their own document from the PC Party, the PC Party's budget of 2015 – Nalcor will bring long-term revenue to the province. They go on to say government's last equity injection into Nalcor will be 2017-2018 – not true. That's from the PC book, and it's not true.

Over a total investment period of 10 years, the provincial government will have invested \$3.1 billion in Nalcor. Again, not true – not true. That's a PC promise, but it wasn't true. Every penny of that money will be returned to the province by 2025-26. Again, not true – not true. PC promise in 2015: not true. From that time on, the dividends will continue to increase to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Again, not true.

Mr. Speaker, they go on to say that between 2026 and 2042 Nalcor will contribute to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador dividend payments of over \$12 billion. Over 17 years, on average, \$700 million to the province. Again, not true – not true. We know now, based on the Public Utilities Board's review of this, that it's more in the line of \$300 million.

Now, we promised in *Budget 2018* \$200 million towards rate mitigation, so it chews up almost everything that we're going to get over a 20-year period, but what we're going to get is only half of what they promised.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's from *Budget 2015*. I'll be clear; there was a private Member's resolution in 2012. I sat as an independent Member at the time. I met with ministers in the government who assured me – and, in fact, I've got a binder full of PC propaganda on Muskrat Falls. I read the binder. It looks all fluffy and good. I actually went to visit Ed Martin.

Now, let's keep in mind that Ed Martin was appointed by the PC government, not by through the IAC because it didn't exist at the time, but a direct appointment by the PC government. Oh, and while I'm on that thought, the board of directors at Nalcor, each and every one of them was a PC government appointment.

So, let's have some thought now, Mr. Speaker, on what we know from the testimony at the Nalcor Muskrat Falls Inquiry. We've had the

former premier of the PC Party say she didn't know but if she had known what the project was going to look like or turn out to be, she wouldn't have supported it on her watch. We had minister after minister from the former PC government testify and say they didn't know the details.

AN HON. MEMBER: They should have.

MR. OSBORNE: They should have because not only were they government and they were responsible for the oversight of Nalcor, but they appointed the head of Nalcor and they appointed the board of Nalcor. They said they didn't know the details. They weren't provided with the details.

Well, the Official Opposition today, the PC Opposition, will stand and talk about reports that government are doing, but they had their own reports, Mr. Speaker. And the interesting thing from what we've learned from the Nalcor inquiry is that their reports, they provided to the consultants incomplete information and, in fact, inaccurate information. We learned that from the Muskrat Falls Inquiry. So we also know that.

Mr. Speaker, if you go back – and today in two or three occasions, it's a common theme now with Members of the PC Party: We're not interested in history; we're interested in today. Well, of course they're not interested in history because history doesn't look very good to them. The reality is if you look at what happened, there was polling done and the majority of people in this province supported Muskrat Falls, based on what was promised.

Today, if you did a poll, I can absolutely assure you that the vast majority of people in the province, I would say almost everybody in the province, wouldn't support that project, Mr. Speaker, based on what's happened, because it is the biggest downward pressure on our province. It is the biggest contingent liability on our province, and that's the reality.

I'll say that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands knows what I'm talking about because you were given the same binder of propaganda. You believed them. You think you could believe the government, Mr. Speaker, but we got a binder full of propaganda, is what it

was. The reality is today that we're left to deal with that.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition today, the PC Leader, today, will say his solution to fighting electricity rates is to declare war on Ottawa. He said he'd get tough with Ottawa. Now, does he honestly expect the Government of Ottawa to bail him out for their party's mistake? Does he honestly expect that? But he'd declare war on Ottawa, that's his policy.

Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about this private Member's resolution, part of the reason – and the Third Party said it's shameful, what a waste of the taxpayers' time because we started out by saying we weren't going to support this private Member's resolution. Well, there are a number of reasons why we're not. One of them is we've made a commitment to the public because this is a very real issue; it's a very serious issue. Electricity rates is a very serious issue for the people of this province, and we understand that, and we've spend a great deal of time trying to clean up the PC Party mess on this issue so that electricity rates will not double.

We've been working; we've tasked the Public Utilities Board to look at it. The Third Party said: Why didn't you do it as soon as you got in power? Because we were still evaluating the project and the project was continuing to spiral upwards in cost. Now, having said that, if it was sent to the PUB immediately by the PC government, they would've had some oversight into the project, and probably would've told the people of the province what they didn't want them to know: The project shouldn't be done.

While we're on that, by the way, it was also revealed in just recent months that the Department of Finance advised and warned the government not to proceed with this project. Now, they didn't release that to the public, by the way. They did not release that to the public, but the Department of Finance said the province cannot afford this, it's too big a risk – the officials in the Department of Finance.

Now, you get the Opposition House Leader: Why aren't you releasing reports? Well, they didn't release that, so they're pretty picky and choosy over what they're going to release to the general public. And that's a fact, because the

very well-qualified individuals within the Department of Finance who looked at this said don't do it. But the binder of propaganda that they provided painted a completely different picture. So I'm actually upset. I'm angry; I'm disappointed at the information that was provided by the PC Party to convince the people of the province that this project was good, and none of it was true.

Now, to get back to the Third Party – the private Member's resolution in and of itself is derogatory; it's very political. They blame us for the mess of Muskrat Falls. It's very derogatory. So we stood and said we can't support this. Part of the reason: We have promised the people of the province that because of the work we've done, the internal committee of government officials, very well qualified, looking at this, we've tasked Nalcor to come up with solutions, we've gone to the PUB for their solutions and we've been working diligently on coming up with a solution, and we've indicated that that policy, our rate mitigation strategy, will be released to the general public well in advance of the election.

We don't know what the strategy is from the PC Party who created the mess. We don't know what the strategy is from the NDP, Mr. Speaker. Part of the reason the Third Party want an all-party committee is because they haven't come up with a strategy themselves. Well, now both parties have the information from the Public Utilities Board on which they can base a strategy, but the NDP want an all-party committee because they haven't released anything publicly on what they would do to mitigate electricity rates.

We haven't seen a policy by the PC Party, but we're going to release our own policy, Mr. Speaker, on rate mitigation. We're still working on some of the details, and this has many layers in solutions. We know the answers to some of those layers; some of them we're still working on. We're still working on some of these issues, but we have committed that we will release our rate mitigation strategy to the general public well in advance of the election. I challenge the other parties to do the same.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The resolution – I agree with my colleague across the aisle – is couched in derogatory terms: "... past and present Governments made disastrous decisions" This is rather inflammatory for a resolution that's seeking to get general support.

If further states: "... Government efforts have not resulted in practical solutions other than to direct the PUB to examine rate mitigation options." Just to pause on that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CROSBIE: Just to pause on that item, the PUB examining rate mitigation options, that's a very important step that this government took, although late in the day, after recommendations from me and from the Opposition that the government take that step. It was initially rejected by the Premier on the basis – and I quote – that he doesn't take advice from Ches Crosbie. Well, it seems that he did eventually take advice from Ches Crosbie, and we have the current reference to the Public Utilities Board.

This is an important process, but it began too late in the game to avoid the unfortunate result of the loss of confidence, generally, in the people of the province in the future of the economy of this province. As a result, people are taking private economic decisions such as the installation of insulation in their homes and the installation of heat pumps and mini-splits, which involve people in private expenditures which may or may not turn out if, for example, the government's goal of not reflecting Muskrat costs in rates at all is achieved and there will be a lot of people wondering why they installed mini-splits. If we'd begun this process, at least – that's the PUB process – a year before it was begun, we wouldn't be in that position.

That reflects on the part of the resolution that speaks to: "... WHEREAS the people of the Province have lost confidence in Government's ability to solve this crucial and complex problem

...” They’d have more confidence if the government had acted on the reference to the Public Utilities Board well before it eventually did.

I’d go to an interview that the Minister of Natural Resources had with CBC and it was back in February 19, this year, and the hon. minister was asked by Anthony Germain, the journalist: What are the differences between rate mitigation and a subsidy? The minister replied: That’s an interesting question. But I don’t believe she actually landed on an answer to that. But it does get at something important.

Rate mitigation is what the Public Utilities Board and the consultants it has hired and, as well, the government taskforce or taskforce of government officials, which has met Nalcor officials, periodically, that’s what that process is designed to get at: What are the optimal solutions to achieve rate mitigation? A subsidy is something different. A subsidy is a matter of government policy.

So, my problem with the resolution is that a select committee of this House simply lacks the kind of expertise and access to resources that the Public Utilities Board has. They have been tasked with rate mitigation solutions, and that’s the correct body to be tasked with that.

I can’t see what a select committee is going to be able to achieve, beyond what the Public Utilities Board will be able to achieve using its resources, its expertise, and availing of the expertise of the consultants that it has hired to help us in this project of mitigation.

On the other hand, the other side of it is if subsidies are being considered out of general government revenues, there are only two governments that can possibly help with that: one is federal; the other is, of course, provincial. I can’t see that a select committee is going to have much influence or much to say to help the government decide, as a matter of policy, whether and to what extent to subsidize rates out of general government revenues. So, my bottom line with this is that it’s an unnecessary and redundant machinery which is not going to add value to the task of raising the confidence of the public of this province that there is a solution to the Muskrat Falls rate dilemma.

I note that the hon. Minister of Natural Resources seems to have set, as the government’s target – she says again in answer to Mr. Germain: What we’re saying is ratepayers and taxpayers should not be burdened with Muskrat Falls. It goes on to talk about without burdening taxpayers or ratepayers. So, as the Public Utilities Board has said, we’re finding ways of making that go to zero.

She repeats, making it not a burden; she repeats, various methods of mitigation; again, not making it a burden on taxpayers and ratepayers. The hon. minister speaks of making the plan – that is the government’s plan – finalized after the PUB is finished with their work, but we’ll certainly be detailing everything that we can do, making sure the people of the province know how we’re going to make that happen.

The point here is that whatever plan the government, we’re told, will be announcing prior to the election, can only be a preliminary plan. So the request in the resolution is to establish a select committee that could only consider a preliminary plan, and the reason for that is the PU Board won’t be finished its work until after the next election, and that, of course, is designed into the reference by the government.

So we fail to see what will be achieved by having a select committee established which will die when this Assembly is dissolved in a general election and never get to finish its work. The most they could do is comment on a preliminary plan for Muskrat rate mitigation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I’m only going to take a couple of minutes – that’s all I have. I do thank the Member for St. John’s East - Quidi Vidi for giving me the opportunity to say a couple of words.

Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate where my colleagues in the NDP – I appreciate where

they're coming from. I think that it would a process that, had it happened perhaps in year one of the mandate or year two of the mandate when there was lots of time to actually do some work, and had the PUB been engaged earlier than what it was, then I could see some value in it; but I have to agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition in terms of the timing of it and the fact that by the time this committee would ever get set up, and, of course, depending on when the general election is going to be, I fear that it's really not going to have time to be effective and do what needs to be.

So, I don't support it in that regard, but I have to say that I do agree with the spirit, certainly, of what's being suggested and I think it should have happened earlier.

I'd also say – just to echo to some degree what the Minister of Finance said – as someone who supported Muskrat Falls at the time, that what has come out of the Muskrat Falls Inquiry to date has been absolutely shocking, to say the least. As someone who supported it, based on what I was told and what was provided to me, I'm very, very angry about what has come out. And I think anybody who voted for it at the time, certainly in the caucus of the day, I can't understand how they wouldn't be angry given what has come out, whether it be false information, hidden reports, lack of oversight by the board, lack of oversight by the ministers of the day and so on, which has been revealed in the inquiry, how anyone who supported this couldn't be angry over all that, would be beyond me.

Unfortunately, it is what it is at this point in time and we have to make the most of it. The Minister of Natural Resources is quite right when she says that this is probably the – well, it's not probably; it is the number one concern of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. They are concerned about how they are going to pay for their electricity bills. So there has to be mitigation solutions. I think that, again, based on the timing of it now, it's incumbent upon the government, as well as any party who wants to form the government next time around, to come forward to the people with a plan or at least a preliminary plan, as the Leader of the Official Opposition has said, to bring to the people and

the people will decide whose plan they think is the best plan, I suppose.

Anyway, I could speak for hours on the Muskrat Falls Inquiry and what's coming from that, but I don't have time right now. Again, I do thank the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi for giving me the opportunity just to at least bring my point forward. I do appreciate and agree with the spirit of what she's doing, I just think the timing is wrong, and because of that I won't be able to support the private Member's motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: I now call on the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi to close the debate on her motion.

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

I'm happy to stand again and wrap up this debate that we've had. I'm very appreciative of the fact that all parties did take full time in speaking to the resolution that I brought forward. I thank the Members for St. John's West, Ferryland, Bonavista, Waterford Valley, Windsor Lake and Mount Pearl North for taking the time to put their thoughts out and supporting in some ways – I appreciate what the Member for Mount Pearl North said about –

MR. LANE: Southlands.

MS. MICHAEL: What?

MR. LANE: Southlands.

MS. MICHAEL: Yes, that's right, sorry – Mount Pearl - Southlands said about supporting the spirit.

I would like to speak a bit more not just to the spirit, but to some concrete things of why I think what we are calling for is different than what the PUB is doing. It actually flows from the interim report of the PUB. As we know, they were given their terms of reference in September 2018 and, in February, so very timely – I mean, they certainly did a lot of work – they issued their interim report.

They confirmed, of course, what people already feared. I don't think there was anything new in terms of what the electrical rate will be, for example. It wasn't new, the figure they came up with in order to keep rates at the current level. Government would be looking at a deficit of \$744 million, which would mean that in any annual budget government will have to come up with savings of \$744 million, if that was the way they were going to go to take care of the cost of Muskrat Falls. So, you can't do that without deep cuts; cuts to services and programs.

I have to say, we have an awful lot of services and programs that are below par right now. Today, in the House, I spoke to the concerns around our senior citizens who are in long-term care and we have questions being asked all the time with regard to the educational system as well. There are just so many things that we're below par. So, there's nothing to cut without really hurting the people of this province.

Of course, there are some people – we have experts out there, Mr. Dave Vardy, who is known to all of us, saying that they have proof that it would cost more than \$744 million a year.

What I find interesting is that the PUB did come out with the areas that they're identifying as areas to pursue for possible rate mitigation and they were also clear in saying that these aren't thing that can happen overnight. It identified potential initiatives, which relate to financing, returns and dividends, Nalcor restructuring, the transfer of certain responsibilities to Newfoundland Power, operating and maintenance costs for the Muskrat Falls Project, electrification and export sales revenue. And they point out that a lot of work has to be done in studying every single one of these areas. Some would bring bigger returns, financially, than some of the others. Some could be done in the short term, not many could be done in the short term but most would be long term.

I think what's important, and I'd like my colleagues to think of this because this is why, I think, the all-party committee would be important. The PUB noted that the work is far from done and their final report will not be ready until January 2020, as we know, after the next general election, but in its conclusions, the PUB reminded government of work it can do in the

meantime. "While the Board continues its work Government may wish to consider policy issues related to Muskrat Falls Project financing, the planned treatment of returns and dividends as well as export sales revenues, Hydro's return, and regulatory oversight with respect to Nalcor and the Muskrat Falls Project."

I believe that an all-party committee, the three parties working together on these policy issues, is what we are about in this House of Assembly. We are here as decision-makers and we're here as people who form policy and work together, and I think the APC could have followed this recommendation from the PUB.

I'm also noting that in its conclusions, the PUB quoted a submission by the Island Industrial Customer Group, a submission, obviously, that the PUB is supporting. The Island Industrial Consumer Group said they "request that the Board, by its interim Phase 1 report, emphasize to the Provincial Government the urgent need to initiate its own analysis and to begin negotiations with the Federal Government, and with other stakeholders" – with other stakeholders – "as necessary. The IIC Group respectfully submit such analysis and negotiations at the government level need not and ought not be delayed until the conclusion of Phase 2 of the Reference."

So there is work government has to do. Government is telling us that they have an internal committee, an internal committee of government officials, an internal committee that includes Nalcor. What I'm saying and what we're saying is enough of this internal stuff without openness. Why can't we have open discussion on the policy issues that are being identified, both by the PUB and by the IIC Group? Why can't policy discussions be happening out loud?

I've heard the Premier explain why he can't give any details about what's going on between the provincial government and the federal government. We could have discussions about what are the things that they should be talking about. We don't have to get the details of what's happening, but what are the things that are being talked about? That's a policy discussion, and an all-party committee could have that policy discussion.

The parallel that I'd like to make, because it has been made by the government, is regular negotiations, for example, in contract talks. Well, if I'm a negotiator for the NLTA, my members at least know what it is I'm pushing at the negotiating table for them because they've told me what their concerns are.

You wouldn't be giving details of what happens at the table but you'd know what you're fighting for, you'd know what you're presenting on behalf of your members. That's a kind of discussion that could happen with the APC, the discussions that are policy discussions, and listen to people out there who can help with those policy discussions. It's a different expertise but it's what we are supposed to be doing.

This is why I think the all-party committee is needed. It's needed in order to make the whole process open and transparent and it's needed, too, because if we are going to move forward, I don't want a piece of legislation coming into this House that an internal committee has worked on, and we, all of a sudden, get to see it within 24 hours, have to discuss and pass, assuming that government, in all its wisdom, knew exactly what they should be saying and knew exactly what was right. I'm sick and tired of getting pieces of legislation like that, and a lot of us are.

There is a role for an APC. There is a role for having those policy discussions. Not behind closed doors, not just government in its own little groups with the people they choose, but all of us out there together working on the issues.

Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed that the government chose to announce, before we even got into the presentation of our argument, that they were voting against it. I guess I'll find out where the Official Opposition is. They haven't fully indicated. Well, I guess the Leader did say he doesn't think the APC will be doing anything different. I definitely differ with him on that opinion.

However, I do thank the House for taking the time for the discussion, and I will continue to speak to these issues that we've raised here today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

All those in favour of the motion, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

I would invite all Members of this House of Assembly to please join me in the corridor, we are going to be able to break the fast.

It being Wednesday, and in accordance with Standing Order 9, this House does now stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock.

Thank you.