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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin this afternoon, I'd like to welcome in the Speaker's gallery, former MHA Kevin Aylward and also former MHA and MP Roger Simmons.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery, I'd like to welcome Abby Farrell-Powell, Patricia Farrell and Samantha Farrell. Abby will be recognized in a Member's statement this afternoon.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by Members for the Districts of Mount Pearl North, Placentia - St. Mary's, St. George's - Humber, Placentia West - Bellevue, St. John's Centre and St. John's East - Quidi Vidi with leave.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Speaker, the Mount Pearl Marconi District Girl Guides are getting ready to celebrate 65 years of Guiding. Their current district commissioner, Melanie Lane, is super excited about this. She hopes to keep Guiding in our community going for another 65 years.

Girl Guides love being involved with the community, be it selling cookies or volunteering at city events, all the while developing their skills by earning badges in a variety of activities including outdoor

recreation, writing, arts, finance, first aid and other skills.

Being prepared to help is the Girl Guide way. The Girl Guide program is to show young women that they can become anything they want to be, all while having fun and making lifelong friends. The Marconi District are planning to have many events this year to celebrate this wonderful anniversary.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to congratulate the Marconi Girl Guides for 65 years of service.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, Jordan Pomeroy of Placentia has a remarkable athletic and student record.

He has been a member of the Canada Games team; selected for the U18 men's Canadian championship; named Senior Male Athlete of the Year, Student of the Year and received the Governor General's Award. He was named Softball NL Junior Male Player of the Year; been a member of the Junior Men's Softball World team; received the Team Gushue Award and played in the Senior Men's National Championship; a SportNL Award recipient in 2020, '21 and '22; a Premier's Athletic Award recipient.

Jordan has been named MVP, top batter and All-League Outfielder with the St. John's Intermediate Softball league. He competed at the International Softball Congress World Tournament, won a SportNL scholarship and was named St. John's Senior Men's League All-Star Outfielder and home run leader.

He was a member of Junior Team Canada and competed in the World Softball Championship in Argentina.

Jordan competes at an international elite level of softball every year and, in 2024, Jordan was named as one of the core eight members for Senior Men's Team Canada competing in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Join me as I congratulate 24-year-old Jordan Pomeroy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. REID: Speaker, the Pasadena Ski and Nature Park offers a unique environment for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and nature interpretation.

I rise today to congratulate Henry and Kay Hounsell of Pasadena on being accepted into the Cross-Country Newfoundland and Labrador Hall of Fame.

This husband-and-wife team contributed greatly to the building of the Pasadena Ski and Nature Park from its founding in 1977. They have dedicated a good portion of their lives together to build this organization.

As the sport started to take off in the 1970s, it was introduced to the students at Pasadena Elementary School and became very popular. Henry and Kay, as teachers, were instrumental in getting students involved. Weekend outings were organized and planned by them and their colleagues, with 40 or 50 students attending regularly. Parents then became involved, learning to ski and were just as enthusiastic as their children.

This contribution to the Pasadena Ski and Nature Park not only benefits the people who use the facility, but the whole community as it has become a major four-

season, volunteer-run recreational resource for the whole West Coast.

I ask Members of this House to join with me in recognizing the important contribution of Kay and Henry Hounsell.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today I rise in this hon. House to recognize Ms. Abby Farrell-Powell of Marystown in our beautiful district of Placentia West - Bellevue.

Abby started her speak out journey when she was in Grade 11 where she competed at the club level and received third place. She took the judges' critiques and came back this year to win at both club and zone levels.

Following that, she competed in Gander against the rest of Newfoundland and Labrador and emerged victorious, earning her the opportunity to travel to Moncton, New Brunswick to compete against the rest of Atlantic Canada.

Abby spoke on the vaping crisis amongst teenagers, a topic which she is very passionate about. Despite speaking wonderfully, she did not win in Moncton, but the experience, to her, was excellent.

Abby is now using this experience to prepare herself as she will begin pre-law and political studies at Dalhousie University in the fall, through a scholarship, where she aims to become a lawyer.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to please join me in congratulating Abby on her accomplishments to date and wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Fred Astaire said: Do it big, do it right and do it with style. For 36 years, The Dance Centre has epitomized this quotation. Established in 1988 by Janine Fraser, Kathryn Sellars and Mara Nofall, The Dance Centre provides a safe, inclusive space for students to develop.

Motivated by a love of children and the desire to share a love of dance and performing arts, the studio grew from two teachers to a dedicated staff of 16 and taught over 10,000 children a variety of dance from ballet, tap, and jazz to acro jazz and Broadway.

Staff choreographed musicals and stage productions to support the local arts community, sponsored financially disadvantaged students who demonstrated a love of dance and supported cancer research through the Run for the Cure and The Polka Dot Trot.

The Dance Centre's legacy lies in the many original students, their children and grandchildren who dance with them today. Many have gone on to pursue professional careers in the arts.

With the unwavering support of family, this small local business achieved much, adapted to change and survived the pandemic.

I ask Members to join me in congratulating The Dance Centre team for 36 years of instilling a love of dance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Does the Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, last Wednesday evening, Ms. Megan Donoghue-Stanford, who is here in the public gallery today, a York University Ph.D. student gave a presentation at St. Andrew's Church centred on the significance – culturally, artistically and religious – of the stained glass windows in the downtown national historic ecclesiastical district.

For anyone who visits these churches, you have a good sense of the vast treasure we have here in the city. Ms. Donoghue-Stanford revealed that in pre-Confederation St. John's, our cultural identity was highly connected to our church architecture, that included stained glass collections in the Basilica, the Anglican Cathedral, The Kirk and Gower Street United.

These collections were designed by some of Europe's best houses of stained glass, including: Scotland's Ballantine, England's Warrington and Kempe, France's Lévêque and Lichtenheldt-Koch and Ireland's Earley. Today, their works can be found in castles and in churches throughout Ireland, Scotland, England and, of course, here in St. John's.

Speaker, I am also delighted to advise that the head of Canada's national Registry of Stained Glass Windows in Canada reached out following the presentation and she is interested in hearing from anyone here in Newfoundland and Labrador who would like to add their stained glass to the national registry.

Speaker, we have a trove of valuable stained glass windows that I encourage all to come our and admire, as do the many visitors we get here in the city.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize June as National Seniors' Month.

Seniors have laid the foundations of our diverse and welcoming province and their leadership and wisdom continue to strengthen and enrich our communities.

Our government remains committed to fostering age-friendly communities and supporting the health and well-being of older adults and seniors.

Budget 2024 includes funding for a targeted basic income pilot for eligible people aged 60 to 64, as well as a plan for a comprehensive Seniors' Well-Being Plan. This will help to further improve access to supports and services for seniors to age well with dignity in the right place.

These initiatives are in addition to the many programs already in place to support healthy aging including the Seniors' Social Inclusion Initiative, the Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Program, the Community Transportation Program, the Seniors' Benefit and the Income Supplement.

Each year, the Seniors of Distinction Awards program acknowledges the remarkable contributions of seniors across this great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I extend my sincere appreciation for the work of our community partners that support our seniors in the province, as well as the Office of the Seniors' Advocate.

I encourage everyone to honour and celebrate our province's older adults and seniors for all they do to uplift our communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, National Seniors' Month, is a great opportunity to ensure that the concerns of seniors are at the forefront of our discussions in this province and our country. Our seniors have given so much to us, it's time for government to make sure that we give back.

There are serious issues impacting the quality of life of seniors in our province and it is worsening. Our government is ill-prepared to deal with the matters facing our aging population. They are without a consistent and thorough strategy to tackle the realities.

It's important to recognize and appreciate the tremendous work of our community organizations that support our seniors and as well, to thank the Seniors' Advocate and her dedicated staff for the important work they do every day.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement and join him in recognizing June as National Seniors'

Month. Seventy-five years in Confederation and many seniors feel unsupported and invisible in their golden years.

If government wanted to honour them, it would make sure that seniors don't have to choose between prescriptions and putting food on the table. It would stabilize rents so they do not have to fear being homeless. It would promise them that they would be able to stay together, if they wanted to, when they entered into care.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, Food First NL says Newfoundland and Labrador is leading the country in a statistic that no province wants. We are now the province in the country that has the highest rate of severe food insecurity, 8.5 per cent of people in our province are severely food insecure. That means they're actually going hungry.

I ask the Premier: Is it a crisis when 46,000 people in our province are going hungry?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I'm happy to answer that question, it's not acceptable, it is a crisis and that's why we've introduced the Poverty Reduction Plan.

I also want to take this opportunity, as the first time, to stand in this House and address something that was very concerning and disturbing that happened last week with respect to a proposition with respect to recruitment and retention of doctors in this province, Mr. Speaker, and immigration.

I want to ask the Member opposite if he supports his candidate in Baie Verte - Green Bay, Lin Paddock, and his comments, which were hurtful and harmful to India, Pakistan and other non-European countries. Should we be welcoming only people deemed acceptable by his view?

To be definitive and clear, it is my position and the position of our government, and I want every Newfoundlander and Labradorian to know – and I'll finish the next time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm here today to talk about food insecurity and people who are hungry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: I've already addressed the Premier's comments earlier.

When you expand from severely food-insecure to just food-insecure, CBC reported that for Newfoundland and Labrador, 26 per cent of people live in food-insecure households, which translates to 134,000 people. In other words, a quarter of our population are never sure they will have enough to eat. Food banks can't keep up.

Again, I ask the Premier: Is it a crisis when 134,000 people are food insecure?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we take poverty very seriously. That's why we've increased the child poverty benefit by 300 per cent, expanded the prenatal supplement to include zero to five years old, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: But I want to leave off with this, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the previous question and previous discussion, it's too important to brush off and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve this conversation.

I want to be clear that it's the position of me and my government that we value every doctor, whether they're from Newfoundland and Labrador or any other country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: Whether you served, Sir, for a shift, a week, a year, a lifetime, or now multiple generations, we will judge you on the quality of your character, the quality of your profession, the content of your character and not on the colour of your skin or the country of your origin.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, more than one in four Newfoundlanders and Labradorians live in a food-insecure household. We are the worst in Canada. The East End Food Banks Coalition has seen a doubling over four years of those using this service.

I ask the Premier: What is the targeted food security rate of the Poverty Reduction Plan?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, the Member of this House raises the importance of feeling safe and secure. Nothing can be more important than being safe and secure. That's why all business of this House is important, but nothing is more important today or any day than standing firm and against racial epithets and racism and those that would promote division in our society.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we will ask the hon. Member, we will ask him clearly, does he stand by providing a safe, nurturing environment for all who come to us and our neighbours and our friends and provide us with essential services, does he and his party stand by those who come with us looking for our support?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time is up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Once again, I'll continue on my line of questioning.

Speaker, what one calls a plan with no targets or data is not a plan. With nearly half of all single mothers in this province living in food insecurity while the child benefit has increased, why hasn't the eligibility threshold of \$17,400 not increased?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Feeling safe and secure is important from the violence of racism, from the violence of racial epithets. Mr. Speaker, the standard bearer of the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, said and said out loud to the entire province: That those who are from India and Pakistan, they're not like us. They don't like the outdoors, they're

not like us. What we need to do is stop attracting them, stop asking them to come to our shores because they're not like us.

What we need to do is find people who are more like us, like Germans. They went on to say that those who come to us from Pakistan and India, they just simply want to leave to Toronto.

Everything about this is just wrong, false, misleading and must be corrected and it's time for the leader to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, once again, we're talking about 134,000 people in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador who are food insecure.

Again, based on the CPI, the threshold should have increased over \$22,000 to reflect the same value to the individuals. Inflation is squeezing more people out of the benefits they need.

I ask the Premier: When will this eligibility threshold be increased to allow more of those in need to avail of the benefits?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, feeling safe and secure is a basic right. It's something that we feel very, very strongly about. Hate begets hate. It challenges that safe and nurturing, secure environment that we've come to expect and need to protect.

Mr. Speaker, there was a letter – I just want to emphasize, just to say this, and say this out loud so that all hon. Members, especially from that side, understand that hate begets hate. This letter was sent to members of the Muslim community of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it says:

Were I a Muslim I would have had sense enough to run and hide as quickly as I could. Now we see the racism endemic in the Indian population and in the Muslim population. They had absolutely no reason to get involved in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, hate begets hate, will the Leader of the PC Party stand down?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the Seniors' Advocate has said that seniors will get sicker without the resources they need. We now have both the Seniors' Advocate and the Health Accord warning this government that keeping seniors underfed, without their medicine, and poorly housed is making them sicker and collapsing our health care system.

I ask the Minister of CSSD: When does the government plan to act on their recommendations?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker, and I'm happy to answer this question.

While I think it's unfortunate that Opposition Leader Wakeham won't give his position –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A. PARSONS: – won't give his position –

SPEAKER: I'm reminding the Member to not use names.

A. PARSONS: – on the statements of his candidate, what I'll say is this to the

question that was asked: Can you imagine what we could do in this province for seniors, mothers, children, if we didn't have to spend \$740 million this year on Muskrat Falls?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I wish we could get answers to our questions, Speaker.

The East End Food Banks Coalition has seen a doubling of clients since 2020. Shelves are becoming bare, essential food hampers are becoming smaller. This is all because of the growing demand without meaningful action. Seniors, alongside many others, are struggling in growing numbers.

Minister of CSSD, how did we get here without action?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I say again, last week, to ensure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians power bills would not skyrocket, we had to announce \$740 million because of a PC boondoggle.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: So the answer to the question is, there are many things that many people on this side could do if we didn't have to make that decision, which was forced on us, I remind everybody, by a PC government.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Again, Speaker, we are not hearing answers, but just deflection.

In *What Golden Years?*, the Seniors' Advocate reported: "NL has the highest rate of seniors (aged 65 years and over) reliant on a food bank in Canada, at 10.6 per cent. This confirms a very stark reality of poverty for older adults in this province and aligns with the findings of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate that 30 per cent" – 30 per cent – "of seniors" – under this government – "cannot afford the necessities of life and are going without food."

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I ask the minister –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Get to the question.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I ask the Minister of CSSD: What components of *Budget 2024* directly help seniors?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Now I'll remind the Members on the other side that it was the PC Opposition that actually said that the Seniors' Advocate was a luxury that we should not have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: Now, they are using that same person's report. And here's what I would say to the Members on the other side, to the Senior's Advocate, to the Child and Youth Advocate and to every Newfoundlander and Labradorian: Can you imagine what we could do for long-term care? We could have 10 new long-term care units for \$740 million, plus what we had to spend last year, plus what we're going to spend next year. So, again, I would say to the Members on the other side, please tell us what we should have done with that \$740 million besides keeping Newfoundlanders and Labradorians rates down because of a mess that was left to us.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, we are still failing to get meaningful answers from this government about our seniors.

Most seniors are living just above the poverty line – just above it – if not below it, which simply –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you for the protection.

Which is simply not good enough. Now the Seniors' Well-Being Plan is released with little to uplift seniors from the disproportionate poverty they experience. This government has scrapped their plan to add a targeted poverty reduction plan.

Minister, how many total seniors are expected to be raised above the poverty line with your Seniors' Well-Being Plan?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Speaker, there is one number I can think of, in fact, there are 275,000 ratepayers in this province that we just saved from an exponential increase in their power bills –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: – because we had to spend \$740 million because a PC government foisted Muskrat Falls on us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: What I can tell you is that a significant portion of those 275,000 are seniors throughout every 40 districts who will pay far less now because of our actions.

Again, imagine what else we could've done if we didn't have to come up with \$740 million this year because of the mess that was left to us that affects just about every decision we are able to make.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, the minister stood and we welcomed the address where he said this is National Seniors' Month. We're asking questions about seniors and we're asking questions about poverty reduction – listen to the answers, for those people watching.

When the Liberals announced their Poverty Reduction Plan on November 8 with no targets to aim or measure success from, they stated a targeted Poverty Reduction Plan for seniors will be released in the coming months. This will be informed by further stakeholder conversations to acquire more data and the ongoing work of the

Cabinet Committee on Seniors will continue and it's anticipated that further measures will come.

I ask: Why are we one decade into this government's jurisdiction and we have no poverty reduction strategy to address?

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I will say to the Member, even though we are almost a decade into it, do you know what has plagued us that entire decade? It was a Muskrat Falls decision, which I would point out was exempted from the PUB by the PCs. Again, now they're bringing up the Seniors' Advocate; also said not good enough by the PCs. That \$740 million, that could be doing a lot for seniors.

So I would say, look around and realize that a lot of decisions aren't ours. They were left to us by you and your PC Party friends.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, 10 years they've had to look at addressing poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: Will the government accept our recommendation, the one that they voted against last fall, to index the Seniors' Benefit to inflation? We need to do a better job of looking after our seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I need to hear the question.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: We need to do a better job looking after our seniors. It's a petition that came from this side of the House on three occasions.

Will you index the Seniors' Benefit to inflation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remember being on that side of the House when Members on this side told us that we weren't smart enough to debate Muskrat Falls. They said they weren't going to bother with a debate because it wouldn't have been worth it.

So what I will say to the Member opposite, if you can find a way that I can come up with the \$740 million just this year alone to make sure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians don't freeze in their homes, then we will consider doing what you want.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, we all agree in the House the fact that we have a huge number of seniors who cannot afford to feed themselves, to find warmth or to medicate themselves properly –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: – or to socialize outside their homes to combat loneliness and mental decline. In fact, this is National Seniors' Month which we stood and applauded the Minister of CSSD for bringing it forth.

I would ask: Will the Minister of CSSD commit today to showing and soliciting feedback in its plan from the Seniors' Advocate before finalizing his Poverty Reduction Plan?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I tell you what, I'm all open for soliciting feedback. What I want is feedback from the PC Members on the other side on what we should do with the \$740 million that we had to spend this year in order to make sure that rates did not skyrocket because of decisions that they and their PC Party friends made.

So, again, the question I put out there is: Tell me what we should have done, or tell me the different things we could have done, if we didn't have to spend that almost three-quarters of a billion dollars in one year just to make sure that the seniors he references, along with everybody else, didn't freeze in their homes.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

One quick point I'll make and it's the only point I'm going to make. The Upper Churchill was done by a Liberal government. We've lived with it for decades. Just like the Muskrat Falls, they have an issue with that. There's no one on this side that voted for Muskrat Falls, Speaker. It doesn't deserve a response. It's so lame,

but we're going to move on and ask questions that are important to the people of this province. They will not provide answers, they play theatrics, but we're going to keep asking questions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Last Tuesday, May 14, the Premier announced he had lowered the age for breast cancer screening from 50 to 40. Big news, until we found out the next day, there was no plan in place to actually do this and 50 will remain the cutoff for an indefinite future. No plan. No change.

I ask the minister: When will there be a plan so women 40 and over can avail of breast cancer screening?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Speaker.

Let me take an opportunity to address both parts of the question – the preamble and the question itself.

With respect to the preamble, Mr. Speaker, there's no one on this side of the House that thinks that Churchill Falls deal was good, and different than the opposite side in which they were up last week saying, Muskrat Falls was great.

Let me be very specific and clear, Churchill Falls was a lost opportunity cost. Muskrat Falls was a huge cost to seniors, to people in care, to our health care system, to our roads, to our education system and we'll be paying \$740 million, not just this year, year after year after year after year to ensure that seniors don't freeze in their homes, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the breast cancer screening, you have to take the policy decision first. The policy decision after the evidence became available was to change. So I'm asking the Member opposite, does he not

think that this is a wise policy for the women of this province, Mr. Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: The Premier knows full well what he's getting on with there is nonsense, Speaker. You know we all think this –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

You know we all support this but we want a plan. You just don't come out and throw 40 out and then no plan to address it. There's no room to take them 40-years plus, it's only for the 50 onward, but they announce 40 because it sounds good. It's about the photo op. It's what this government does, day in, day out. It's an announcement with no substance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: On what date will the implementation plan be announced, Premier? What date will the cut-off be actually lowered? Days from now, months or years, Premier? It's all about the photo op.

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The day we announced this new policy, Mr. Speaker, at the recommendation of the Canadian Cancer Society, right in the news release it had indicated that this is a policy decision to lower the age. We will be

working with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to identify and put the resources in place so that we can lower the age.

Mr. Speaker, that's the plan. We announced the policy. The resources will be found and identified by the health authority and they'll be funded by this government. But, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you we will also have health care workers from India and Pakistan and other countries working to ensure that women get the health care they need.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: I thank the Minister of Health, probably one of the only people in this House to vote in favour of Muskrat Falls for that answer. Don't agree with (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Officials say there are not enough personnel to handle the increased demand.

What is the plan to ensure sufficient personnel are in place to handle expanded workload from potentially 34,000 more clients or will more clients simply mean longer waits?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that if a PC government got in, they wouldn't have nurses from India come into this province to provide the services.

Yes, we do need more health care workers, Mr. Speaker, but we need health care workers from around the world, because every province in Canada has a shortage of health care workers. This side of the House,

this government, supports newcomers that can bring their skills, that can bring their profession –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. OSBORNE: – that can help this province provide the health care we need and we are proud to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

In 2022, more than 16,000 mammograms had to be reviewed because our province's health labs had used substandard equipment.

What is the plan to ensure sufficient new, up-to-date equipment will be in place for proper testing once another 34,000 people become eligible for testing?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the health authority had the proper equipment in place. It was identified that there may be concerns. This government took pro-active measures to ensure that the screenings were reviewed, as they should be, to ensure that people had their proper health care. We worked with the health authority to make sure that that was the case.

But again, we need to lower the age, it was a recommendation of the Canadian Cancer Society. We also need the health care workers in place to be able to provide those services.

I'd like to know from the Leader of the Opposition does he support his candidate who doesn't support bringing in health care workers from India or Pakistan?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, I have asked twice in this House for updated numbers for those living at the airport inn.

Can the minister please tell us today how many people are currently living at that hotel?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the House and to address the question.

The updated number is 11. There are 11 residents there. I'm also happy to report that, through our End Homelessness St. John's partnership, in the last month, they have been able to get their key management team in place. There are 10 staff on site right now.

I would also like to mention this, here's a number: 2,466. That's the number of homes we could build with \$740 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, how many former Tent City residents are now placed at that hotel?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, my earpiece is not functioning. Could I ask the Member to repeat the question? I apologize.

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

J. WALL: That's not a problem, Speaker, thank you.

I asked the minister: How many of the former Tent City residents are now placed at that hotel?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, some of the folks who were living at the tent encampment are indeed at 106 Airport Road. The number of residents who are there now is 11.

There were some residents who were living there prior to the engagement that we had with the former owners of the hotel and now End Homelessness St. John's, but to discuss the exact number of people who were there would be a privacy breach so we're not going to discuss that exact number.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

In Question Period on March 11, the Minister of Health admitted that freezer units holding bodies next to a dumpster was quite disturbing and said his department asked the health authority to deal with the dumpster issue. Speaker, the dumpster is still there.

I ask the minister: How can we trust this government to fix the problem causing the accumulation of bodies if we can't trust them to deliver on this minor promise?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have asked the health authority to move the dumpster, and I will look into it again,

because that is unsightly. I know the health authority is putting in place plans for a longer-term solution to this issue. We do want the remains of individuals treated with respect and dignity at the health authority while they are waiting for family or relatives to claim their bodies.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

A long-term solution involves actually helping people who can't afford to bury their loved ones to do so.

I ask the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development for an update on his department's progress in addressing the problem of accumulating bodies at the Health Sciences Centre.

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

P. PIKE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, my department is here to help families and to help individuals in funeral costs for their loved ones, especially those living on low income. We still cover the full cost of a basic funeral, Mr. Speaker. We've never said no to that – full cost of the basic funeral, whatever that is.

We are in a process now of looking at the rates. We've already contacted funeral home operators in the rural districts as well as in urban. We're looking at getting a report put together soon to look at the amounts and so on. Our intent is under our income support review to look at those costs as well and we'll have something before the House soon.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

From my conversation with staff at the Health Sciences Centre, the hospital is preparing to add a fifth freezer. Funeral directors tell me nothing has happened since the issue was raised over two months ago.

I ask the minister: Why does the problem appear to be getting worse, and why his department has failed to address the problem with funeral homes?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I saw a news report out of Ontario where the number of unclaimed remains has skyrocketed. This is an issue across Canada; I know other jurisdictions across Canada face the same issue. This is an issue that I know the health authority is focused on trying to find a resolution to. Government have asked them to find a resolution to this.

The long-term plan, Mr. Speaker, is to have a more respectful and dignified location for these remains, but the issue of individuals or families not claiming the remains of loved ones is an increasing issue across the country and it is concerning. It's concerning to us as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the latest review by the Department of Justice following a child's death outlines recommendations on a subsection of the act dealing with operator

training. This section was exempt from the implementation of the government's off-road safety act.

I ask the minister responsible: When will this be implemented?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to say that last year we updated the *Off-Road Vehicles Act* and actually, this Thursday, the new training component launches in MyGovNL. Following that, we will be working with stakeholders to make it mandatory for those deemed in the regulations, including new drivers, people who've been stopped from driving and there are a few others. But, as of this Thursday, it will be available in MyGovNL.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, in November this government released a five-point Poverty Reduction Plan with no details about seniors; in April, another stay-tuned announcement, while seniors in this province are splitting pills to afford food.

I ask the minister: In the spirit of Seniors' Month, coming up, will this government finally deliver for seniors and announce the specific details of the \$10 million earmarked for seniors' poverty reduction?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget alone, we saw \$10 million for

Seniors' Well-Being Plan and the details of that will be announced. We saw wage increase for home support workers, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that home support workers get an increase in pay. That is now under ratification between the union and the agencies.

We saw a geriatric medicine fellowship at MUN to ensure we train our own geriatric specialist in this province. We see centres of excellence in aging and seniors, Mr. Speaker, in this province. We saw increased spending for Home First, a dementia care action plan and the list goes on.

To insinuate that we have not focused on seniors is a false insinuation, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow, introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Provincial Offences Act, Bill 79.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend

the Medical Act, 2011 and the Psychologists Act, 2005, Bill 80.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Visions Employment Plus is a not-for-profit, community-based, supported-employment organization. Established in Mount Pearl in 1994, Visions provides employment-related services and supports to individuals with intellectual disabilities who require assistance and supports to access the labour market and who experience barriers obtaining meaningful long-term employment.

Individuals are employed by businesses throughout the communities we serve, including the City of Mount Pearl, Town of Paradise, Town of Conception Bay South, Conception Bay Centre and the Southern Shore. Services are also provided to individuals throughout the metropolitan St. John's area as requested.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills has informed us that the federal government is reducing funding by \$16.5 million to the province. For the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, provision of supports to organizations and those they serve, this would represent a \$3.4-million reduction in direct supports to persons with disabilities and could result in 175 individuals losing the supports they require to remain employed.

Organizations could also lose \$400,000 in organizational support from these proposed

changes. If the supported-employment program for persons with disabilities ends, over 700-plus people will return to the Income Support program in Newfoundland and Labrador. Likewise, demands on the respite and home support programs will increase.

The investment in programs that helps build diversity of the workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador is critical to the economy. Reducing or eliminating the program will force people into poverty.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: While we recognize these programs are undergoing some changes, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to find additional resources to ensure the funding is restored to supported-employment programs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I present this on behalf of Visions Employment, but certainly there are a number of similar agencies throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I have heard the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills talking about this. I do agree with him 1,000 per cent that we simply cannot accept the cut. And I would agree with him that we do need to be lobbying our seven federal MPs and insisting that this money is reinstated.

But with that said, should that not happen – and I am not suggesting we give up, but should that not happen, we have to find a way, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that these supported-employment programs continue. It's very beneficial to people with intellectual disabilities in my community and throughout the province.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills for a response.

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the petition and I appreciate all of the hard work of Visions Employment and the 18 supported-employment corporations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. They provide supports to those with intellectual disabilities and those who are on the autism spectrum live full and complete lives to their full potentials.

So, with that said, Mr. Speaker, it is a priority issue of myself and our government to challenge the federal government in its misguided decision to reduce labour market development agreement funding by \$16.8 million in this fiscal year and a comparable amount in every year forward.

This was a bad decision for many, many reasons. As we move and have a dynamic, organic workplace and a workforce within the workplace, this funding right now is more important and more essential than ever, ever before, not just for this organization, but for many organizations.

I would point out that I have had several conversations with Visions Employment and all of the supported-employment agencies across the province. I did indicate to them that no decisions have been taken regarding the fiscal envelope that they currently can expect and need. But with that said, there have been two decisions. I should correct and say there are two decisions. One is the federal government decision to cut the funding, and the second decision is the provincial government decision to extend six months of core funding while we work through this mess.

So I say to Visions and all our supported-employment agencies: Work with us and lobby the federal government to override these unnecessary cuts.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Cancer patients served by the Bonavista hospital have not had access to chemo treatments locally for approximately two years. These patients have to travel to the next closest site over 1½ hours away. Travel becomes arduous and costly.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the chemotherapy service at Bonavista hospital immediately to better serve the residents of the Bonavista Peninsula.

Mr. Speaker, we asked lots of questions in the House of Assembly today during Question Period. We asked them on seniors. We asked them on poverty reduction. Zilch was the answers. There were no answers.

The Minister of CSSD stood and talked about it being Seniors' Month. We asked questions about seniors but no answers. Several seniors who travel from the Bonavista Peninsula and have to travel to get chemotherapy – which they hadn't had to do for some time – are not feeling well, and they go through the added expense, which many of them do not have the funds to travel.

I would say this is an operational issue. We're not talking about large swaths of money here; we're talking about an operational issue to reinstate chemotherapy at the Bonavista hospital to serve the 8,000 residents of the peninsula who would be serviced there.

We mentioned the cost and how seniors are struggling. The Seniors' Advocate talks about the struggle that seniors have. This is one element that can be seen to rather quickly. I know that Members are looking at me and saying: well, this is the third time that the Member for Bonavista read this

petition. They are correct, the third time. Neither time did the minister stand up and say what the action was or any pursuit is going on to look at the chemotherapy being reinstated in the District of Bonavista. That is what we are missing.

I mentioned in my last petition, Harvey Hayley was a gentleman in Bonavista who just got diagnosed with lymphoma. He's got to travel to an hour and a half away and an hour and a half back after treatment in order to get to the comforts of his own home. Prior to that, it was 10 minutes.

On top of that, recently, we've had somebody who got diagnosed with cancer. The doctors prescribed they travel to Clarendville, and in travelling to Clarendville only to find out that their expenses would not be covered because they could have got it in Bonavista, even through the doctor prescribed the travel.

We've got a lot of operational issues, Mr. Speaker. We ask for help.

Thank you/

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

WHEREAS seniors couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

WHEREAS seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

WHEREAS separating couples has a detrimental effect on their health and well-being; and

WHEREAS the province has a rapidly aging population, which is one of the most important challenges confronting government;

We, the undersigned, your petitioners, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to change its current policy of separating couples due to their differing levels of care in publicly funded universal long-term care system and direct regional health boards to do the same and pass legislation to this effect.

Speaker, it's only last week that I had an email from parents who are having to deal with this same issue with their parents. Two different levels of care, which basically forces them into separation.

Now, today, I attended a news conference on aging with dignity up at Bishops Garden and the federal minister of Seniors spoke about an economy of care. Well, we referenced something similar to this in last year's budget when we talked about a well-being budget, similar to what New Zealand had introduced.

What we asked for in the questions, certainly in the question I asked, is about the specific details, about how we're going to make sure that seniors are indeed able to age in place or to stay together. This will be one such practical way to make sure that seniors age with dignity and, more importantly, are able to stay together with their partner if they so chose, for as long as they chose to do so.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is for adequate health care for Postville.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure the residents of the Northern Labrador community of Postville have access to adequate health

care. The community of Postville, Labrador, has only one Labrador-Grenfell nursing position in Postville at the single community nursing clinic. This means that there is only one clinic nurse physically present in the entire community. That nurse does not have access to RCMP support during a medical emergency, because the community does not have RCMP stationed.

The community of Postville is isolated. There is no road access to the outside world – totally isolated. The only means of year-round transportation is by aircraft. Often inclement – that's bad – weather prevents air services, including medical evacuation services from getting to Postville. Also, if the lone nurse becomes ill and inclement weather prevents the nurse relief from reaching the community, Postville will be without a nurse.

Now, Speaker, like the Member for Bonavista, I, too, presented my petition multiple times. Usually, what I talk about is the lack of RCMP supports, because the community of Postville wants a second nurse so that their medical needs will be looked after. They are at risk of not having access to timely and adequate medical care. I usually talk about the lack of RCMP support but, Speaker, I want to talk about all of Labrador, especially with my district, when I talk about access to timely and adequate health care.

Now, Speaker, people in my district are dying. Just this year alone, there are many people in my district that have died because they got access to health care too late. They've been diagnosed with cancer too late. That used to happen all the time. I can recall growing up as a child where people would actually go away and we would hear: Oh, they're full of cancer. But it's 2024 and we're still living with that in Northern Labrador.

Just this weekend a friend of mine died, Speaker. You want to know something? All fall she couldn't go to work. She missed

most of her work because she was in pain. No one could tell her what was wrong with her. She was basically in pain. She couldn't work. As of Easter, she was sent out here to the Health Sciences.

She was a teacher. She was from the community of Rigolet. She was asking for care, she was asking to be diagnosed, Speaker, and she was missing work because she was in so much pain.

What happened? She wasn't diagnosed. When was she diagnosed? She was sent out to St. John's just after Easter. Speaker, when she was diagnosed she was basically on her deathbed. She went into palliative care. Is that the health care system that we're going to continue to allow in Northern Labrador?

Speaker, I've got to tell you: In the last five years, many people have passed away.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

Orders of the Day

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act and Provincial Offences Act, Bill 79, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 79 be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Provincial Offences Act," carried. (Bill 79)

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Provincial Offences Act. (Bill 79)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 79 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 35, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, be now read a third time.

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.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000. (Bill 35)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 35)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 62, An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and Liquor Corporation Act, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 62 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.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Corporation Act. (Bill 62)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Corporation Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 62)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that Bill 66, An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded the Bill 66 now be read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province. (Bill 66)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 66)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 5.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that Bill 71, An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 71 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.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act. (Bill 71)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Correctional Services Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 71)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 17.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, that An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009, Bill 77, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 77, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009." (Bill 77)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, the Vital Statistics Division within the Department of Digital Government and Service NL is responsible for the registration of significant life events for residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, including births, stillbirths, deaths, marriages, adoptions and legal name changes.

People can request online or in person certificates from the division for life events for any number of reasons, including identification purposes, confirmation of entitlement of certain benefits or for legal purposes.

The staff of the Vital Statistics Division do an incredible job of helping people with their requests and assisting with questions they have. I just want to thank them for the vital work that they do to help people of Newfoundland and Labrador every day.

Speaker, we always want to ensure legislation is designed with public interest top of mind, as well as doing our work to ensure the legislation reflects current norms and best practices. As part of the

department's ongoing legislative review process, I'm bringing forward Bill 77 with amendments to the *Vital Statistics Act, 2009*. The proposed amendments include allowing a parent and or legal guardian to obtain their deceased child's birth certificate; updating the definition of a funeral director to align with other recent legislative amendments, including the definition of aquamation to align with other recent legislative amendments; and other housekeeping amendments for consistency with other laws.

Section 30(2.1) of the *Vital Statistics Act, 2009*, outlines who can obtain a birth certificate of a deceased individual. This list currently does not include the parent of a deceased individual as listed on the birth certificate or the deceased individual's designated legal guardian. The legislation currently would only allow issuance of a birth certificate in this situation pursuant to a court order.

Speaker, this gap in legislation has only recently been brought to my attention. This is an unnecessary obstacle to a parent or guardian at a time when they are grieving a loss and it is something that we want to rectify immediately. Allowing the parent or guardian to obtain the birth certificate makes sense. We recognize the inherent unfairness associated with this restriction in the current legislation and we are taking action to correct it immediately.

Given this change involves accessing a birth certificate, which includes personal information, we consulted with the former Information and Privacy Commissioner and the then Commissioner did not identify any issues.

Speaker, the next two proposed amendments revolve around updating and including certain definitions pertaining to death that's in current legislation. In Newfoundland and Labrador, deaths must be registered in accordance with the act and

the act presently includes definition of a funeral director and cremation.

Last session, we introduced and passed amendments to the *Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008*. Amendments included adding the term and the definition for aquamation, along with modifying the definition of a funeral director to include reference to aquamation.

Aquamation, like cremation, is the process for disposal of a body, but it is a new process that uses water and chemicals. As the *Vital Statistics Act, 2009*, is the authoritative legislation for death registrations and death certificates, the act includes a reference to the term funeral director and directs the process by which a death may be registered.

Speaker, Bill 77 adds the term and definition for aquamation and modifies the definition of funeral director to the *Vital Statistics Act, 2009*, to align with those recent changes made to the *Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008*.

In addition to these amendments and to be consistent with approaches taken in some of other legislation, the bill replaces reference to Trial Division with Supreme Court, replaces references to the director of Child Youth and Family Services with a manager appointed under the *Children, Youth and Families Act* and incorporates gender-neutral language throughout the act.

I'm happy to answer any questions in Committee and looking forward to hearing any questions or concerns or comments from our colleagues in the House.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 77 and go over some stuff that we did in the briefing the other day and to thank the staff for being there and answering most of the questions that we had. So we certainly do thank them for that.

Some of the stuff that is changing and the minister did touch on some of it but I'll touch on it again: adding the definition of aquamation, which means the disposal of a dead body through the use of water, alkaline chemicals and heat; amending the definition of funeral director to include aquamation – funeral director means that an individual takes charge of a dead body for the purpose of burial, cremation, aquamation, removal or disposition. It also replaces the director of Child, Youth and Family Services with the correct reference to manager appointed under the *Children, Youth and Families Act* where the child is in care of a manager appointed under the *Children, Youth and Families Act*, that person or persons designate.

The most notable change is to allow parents or legal guardians to obtain a birth certificate of the deceased person under section 2.1 where a person has died and the person's birth occurred less than 100 years ago, the Register General may issue a certificate of birth or a certified copy of the registration of the person's birth only to a spouse, cohabiting partner, adult child, adult sibling or legal guardian of the deceased; the executor or the administrator of the person's estate; a person whose name appears as a parent on the registration of birth; a designated agent of a person referred to in paragraph (a), (b) or (c); or a person on the order of the court.

Previously, legal guardians or parents were not included in this, so that's the major change that certainly is happening and that's very important to clarify that for most of the families that are in a time of sorrow and they'd like to get through this fairly quick.

It also replaces references to Trial Division with the correct reference so now the Supreme Court; and it incorporates gender-neutral language, as well, in the bill.

So we'd be happy to have a couple of questions to ask when we get to Committee.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Tornгат Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm not going to speak very long. This is a straightforward amendment and the minister covered most of the information and my colleague there from Ferryland also reiterated a lot of it.

I must say, this amendment to amend the Vital Statistics Act is so important. One of the reasons why it's important is to address the trauma that a lot of parents and guardians had to encounter after losing a child, especially an infant where they couldn't access the birth certificate from Vital Statistics. This amendment allows for that now to happen. So that's one of the biggest accomplishments.

The Member for Ferryland also talked about adding definitions that were so important and looking at incorporating gender-neutral language. So, Speaker, this amendment is really, I guess, easy to support it.

One thing I'd like to take a moment and talk a little bit about is the role that Vital Statistics play in the province and access to that birth certificate. I don't know if a lot of people in this House of Assembly and across the province understand the difficulties people in my district have in obtaining that birth certificate. I have adults now who have given up trying to get a birth certificate because they couldn't actually make any progress, and they needed that birth certificate to access like a social insurance number.

The reason why I am bringing it up is a lot of the births in Labrador have not been registered. Back in the day, we're looking at older people, a lot of the births weren't registered. So it doesn't matter if they fill out their application correctly and they had all the fees paid and everything was done so that their application should have been accepted and they should have been able to get their birth certificate, they were rejected time and time again. It was because their birth wasn't registered but also, during COVID, we ran into some of the problems in Northern Labrador, and my office has been helping a lot of people in my district.

Speaker, I want to talk about the importance of that but also I want to speak about the role this amendment plays in helping parents not have to go through the process of going to court to get a birth certificate for a child that they've just recently lost, because that was retraumatizing people. It was actually introducing more trauma. It's so important.

I had a parent who lost a child to suicide and that was one of the problems that they had in trying to access the birth certificate. So the trauma is real. I'm not going to actually go over the points that were already made, but it is so important for us to make sure that when we introduce legislation it's properly investigated and all the amendments that could actually be enacted are done to help the citizens of this province and this is, actually, a really good one.

Speaker, I do have some questions for Committee but, with that, I'll end my discussion now.

Thank you.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to stand just for a second on this and speak about the Bill 77 at a later date. I

just asked the minister if she could bring up – there was a big controversy in Corner Brook a while back about the cremation within the city and some of the residents that lived around the area asked me to bring up to the minister if there are any regulations – and I'm sure there's not – about where a crematorium can be built, whether it can be in residential area.

So I just ask the minister if she can get some answers to that question and if the minister is going to start an initiative to bring in regulations for a cremation site in a residential area or any area.

I'm going to speak later on the bill in Committee on Bill 77, but that's just a part of it and I just asked the minister if she can get some details on that and confirm if there are regulations for the building of a cremation site and, if not, will the department start the process of creating some kind of regulations so we wouldn't have the dispute we had in Corner Brook back a few years ago.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speaks now, we will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you everyone for your feedback and comments.

To the Member for Torngat Mountains, I do understand that there is a process in place for an individual to register a previously unregistered birth. I assume the Member and her constituents that she mentions have gone down that path, but I'm happy to answer any specific questions or take it away. We can speak about that further, take that away, and we can certainly do whatever we can to help individuals who

have an unregistered birth to go through the process of registering those births.

I will get more information for the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands on his question and, hopefully, in Committee, I will have an answer for them.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 77 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009. (Bill 77)

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

When shall the bill be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 77)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 77.

SPEAKER: And a seconder for that motion, please,

L. DEMPSTER: Seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

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 Bill 77.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 77, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009." (Bill 77)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Chair.

In the briefing, we were told that the reason for the change was because over the last six months or so, there have been

complaints which promoted the change. Does the minister know how many complaints have been filed?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

So we did learn about this over the last few months. There is a way that individuals can go to court to access this. I'm not sure how many inquiries we got that were not able to be resolved. This is kind of an easier way. Essentially, the individuals won't have to go to court to get a court order for this information. So it's really making things easier – as appropriate. They should be able to get this information.

We're correcting kind of an omission in previous legislation. I don't have the number. I'm aware, if I had to guess, maybe three over the last few months.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you.

I was going to ask how many that was, but there was three you said. Reducing the red tape basically, that's what we're supposed to be at here, is reduce the red tape for most people so that will certainly help.

Is there a plan to go back to these families who have complained and update them if the legislation changes and who could be in the process of trying to obtain a court order to get their child's birth certificate?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, our team will certainly reach out to anyone who they are aware is currently undergoing this process and will make them

aware of the new change. I believe everything is ready to go on our website, revised information, revised application forms.

So that is under way and anyone we're aware of currently going through that alternative process, we will make them aware.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: If the legislation passes, will families apply online or in person for birth certificate?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

In general, people can apply for birth certificates online or in person. I will have to check whether or not – because this is kind of an outside case. I will just confirm whether – I'm not sure right now whether you can apply for a birth certificate of a deceased child online, but I will confirm that shortly.

Thank you.

CHAIR: No further questions from the Member for Ferryland?

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

Before I start my questions, I'd like to make a comment. I did briefly talk to the minister about this regarding Vital Statistics. I did mention about the difficulty people in my district are having in accessing their birth certificates, but I did mention how helpful and supportive the department of Vital Statistics has been in helping my district

and helping my office be able to get those birth certificates. I just wanted to say that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: I just wanted to thank them and publicly acknowledge all the work they're doing to help people get their birth certificates. So thank you, Chair.

Looking at my questions for Committee, when drafting these amendments, did the department conduct any consultations to consider whether other parts of the act required updating as well?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

In terms of this specific change, we did look across the country and look at other provinces and most provinces do explicitly allow this. Obviously, there are other amendments that we're making, mostly housekeeping. We are updating those now.

It wasn't a wholesale review of the act. I've made multiple changes to this act since I've been minister. If there's anything in particular that the Member and their constituents have a concern with or want to see changed, happy to discuss potential ways forward.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

I agree with the minister also. The changes in this amendment are good; they are very timely and I think they'll help a lot of people.

My next question: Is the department looking at ways to reduce the number of steps a person has to go through to change their

name, especially in cases where a person is transitioning their gender?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

The last time we made changes to the Vital Statistics Act, it was about changing your name. I'm not aware of any unintended consequences of that. I'm happy to discuss with the Member. Changing your name is a big deal. There is paperwork and documentation required to support that.

I think that's certainly an area where we do need some amount of red tape. If the Member has any suggestions, I'd be happy to take that away and review to see where we can make things easier for people. There will always be documentation, applications and things required to do some things of such a magnitude as changing your name,

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: I thank the minister for her offer and will be following up.

My next question is along those same lines. Is the department considering ways to allow a person to be referred to in government documents by their chosen pronouns?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Actually, to correct myself previously, when we dealt with change of name, there's a specific act for changing names. It's the Change of Name Act, not the Vital Statistics Act. I was incorrect with that so apologies for that.

In terms of chosen pronouns, we did make a change to allow individuals to have a kind of gender-neutral change on their birth certificate. So you could have an X rather than a female or male. That was a very progressive change that I believe the Chair spearheaded when the Chair was minister of Service NL.

I guess as ministers of Service NL across the country, we've had discussions in terms of how do government and government systems change and health systems or just the flow of data, and how that's appropriately maintained and updated. There are very few places where it actually matters what gender you are in terms of giving you the help that you need for what you're looking for on that day.

When people write me, I often don't know if they're male or female; we often respond with their first name. I think if you don't know if they're Mr. or Mrs., you can say Mx. – Mx. Stoodley – in your response. That's certainly something that we're looking at and if the Member is aware of any area where, in legislation, that could be improved, we'd certainly be happy to take that away. In this bill we are removing all the pronouns to have gender-neutral language, which I think is very important.

I do have some response to another Member's question. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands was asking about a few things. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands asked about cremation in residential areas and so – well, the funeral and embalmers act, that's not under this act but municipalities would be responsible for determining any kind of rules about where a crematorium or where a funeral home would or should be positioned within the municipality.

Then, the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board regulates the service providers. Once a funeral home is up and running, then the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board, which is a self-regulating industry, they

regulate the service providers. The municipality would set rules in terms of where that type of establishment could or could not be located.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

During the technical briefing we were told that the department received complaints from grieving parents trying to obtain a birth certificate for their deceased children. So I was just wondering, were there a lot of people who complained? We didn't get a sense for that. Or was it just the department's sensitivity for the trauma of the parents that you decided to bring forward this amendment?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

That's a very important question. Potentially – I'm just trying to think off the top of my head – I'm aware of maybe three instances. Not having this change does cause a significant burden on an individual who needs this for a variety of reasons when they should be able to access it. Then, without this they'd have to go to court to be able to access that information.

So it certainly is a very important change to make. I guess I would apologize to anyone negatively impacted, or any families who were negatively impacted, prior to us bringing this forward.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Yes, thank you, Chair.

I'd just like to add to the minister's comments. It may have been three or a few, but the sensitivity of the topic is so traumatic to parents that I do applaud the government for stepping up and bringing forward this amendment.

I'm sure that there's been a lot of parents who never had the ability or the wherewithal during their moments of trauma to actually put in a complaint with the department. So I'm sure there've been a lot of people impacted over the years.

We do applaud the government's efforts to, I guess, prevent future suffering of parents. So I do thank the minister and the government for bringing forward this amendment.

That's the end of my questions, Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for the questions. I do want to confirm that in a few – let's say a few weeks, once the online systems have been updated an individual will be able to apply for a birth certificate online, by mail or in person as it relates to the change for this act.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions, 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 through 25 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 25 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 25 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009. (Bill 77)

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 77 carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 77 carried without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 77, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009, carried without amendment.

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 that Bill 77 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

L. DEMPSTER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 18.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, second reading of Bill 78.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 78, An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2." (Bill 78)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, we are talking about An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009. We have six credit unions operating in Newfoundland and Labrador with offices in 36 locations throughout the province. There are approximately 61,000 credit union members and assets totalling more than \$1.5 billion. It is important to our government to create a robust and stable economy in Newfoundland and Labrador and prudent oversight of the credit union system in our province contributes to a

stronger economy through stable financial services.

The Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation is a provincial Crown corporation responsible for regulatory oversight of provincial credit unions through the administration of the *Credit Union Act, 2009*, and its regulations.

The act has been amended recently through Bill 46 in 2020 and Bill 8 in 2022 to further strengthen governance of the corporation and oversight of credit unions. The operations of the corporation are governed by a board of directors, which monitors credit unions in Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure compliance with provincial legislation, conduct ethical business practices and a goal of financial stability.

We have in the past two years appointed a new chair, board and hired a new chief executive officer. The corporation's new board of directors met with my department, bringing forward proposed amendments to the *Credit Union Act, 2009*.

I just want to thank the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation board, the chair and the CEO for all of their hard work in helping maintain the stability of our credit union system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, the first amendment relates to liquidity and investment requirements for credit unions. Liquidity is the ability of a financial institution, like a credit union, to generate, obtain and maintain sufficient cash or its equivalent in a timely manner, at a reasonable cost, to meet its commitments as they fall due.

Credit unions are required, under legislation, to hold on to some deposits as their reserve, which serve as a source of liquidity. Section 41 of the *Credit Union Act, 2009* requires a credit union to maintain liquidity in accordance with the regulations and section 40(2) allows a credit union to make investments in accordance with the

regulations for the purpose of meeting those referenced liquidity requirements.

The regulations require that a credit union must participate in a liquidity pool that is provided by a financial central. A liquidity pool is a method of holding a credit union's deposits whereby revenues earned on an investment of those deposits go to the financial central. A financial central is a financial institution that basically acts as a central credit union for other credit unions.

This is all a bit complicated, Speaker, but once I understood this it started to make sense. So a financial central is like a credit union for other credit unions. It's where credit unions pool their money together. So I think that's important to understand.

Credit unions deposit their liquidity funds into a pool with that financial central, which maintains and invests liquidity funds earning a return on the funds invested. Atlantic Central, which is regulated by the Province of Nova Scotia, is the main financial central for credit unions operating in the Atlantic Provinces. All but one credit union in Newfoundland and Labrador is a member of Atlantic Central.

Since 2006, the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union has been a member of Central 1, which is regulated by the Province of British Columbia and serves credit unions in BC and Ontario. The Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union is the largest credit union in the province with 10 branches and serving over 20,000 members. They became a member of Central 1 to gain economies of scale and progressive approaches to clearing, treasury and liquidity services more suitable to a larger credit union.

Although Central 1 used liquidity pools at the time the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union became a member, Central 1 has since ceased mandating the use of liquidity pools and currently only the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union

remains in a liquidity pool due to the requirements in our regulations.

Allowing this change and allowing the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union to participate fully in Central 1 would result in increased revenues to the credit union and subsequently potential increased dividend payments, investing in new technologies and strengthening the capital of the organization for their over 20,000 members.

It would be substantially onerous for the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union to separate themselves from Central 1, given the existence of long-term processes within the credit union that have been developed over time through the membership in Central 1. As the largest credit union in the province, the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union and its members are benefiting from the operational differences that exist with Central 1, benefits that would not be realized if they were to cease membership in Central 1. The corporation supports a continuation of that membership and it's recommended the amendments included in this bill facilitate that.

There is a concern that prescribing broader liquidity criteria would enable smaller credit unions to select liquidity and investment options that may increase risk to their credit union members. We want to make sure that there's continued prudent oversight of credit unions to ensure this does not happen.

Therefore, this bill authorizes the corporation, as the regulating body, to assess and approve requests from credit unions to deviate from the liquidity investment requirements, as are prescribed within the regulations. Providing the authority to the corporation to review, assess and approve such actions mitigates the risk to credit unions and the credit union system in the province.

The corporation has expressed no concerns with the continuation of that membership and it has indicated it would subsequently

officially approve the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union membership with Central 1. My department consulted with the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union, and they support this approach in Bill 78.

This bill also includes administrative amendments to the act, as requested by the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation. These include updating language specific to the audit process and financial reporting standards, ensuring the corporation is to receive a copy of the audit-related documents and correspondence issued by a credit union's auditor.

Specifically, the bill requires an auditor of a credit union to conduct examinations in accordance with Canadian Auditing Standards. Although auditors already do this, as it is consistent with standard practice, we want to make sure the act clearly references this requirement.

The bill requires an auditor to indicate in their final report whether the financial statements were prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards, which again is standard practice by which a credit union is required to prepare its financial reports.

These standards are already in effect and being used by credit unions; however, the language will be updated in the legislation to reflect this ongoing business practice to ensure consistency, clarity and continued adherence to these standards.

The bill also requires an auditor of a credit union to provide a copy of all documents prepared by the auditor and provided to the credit union that highlight financial weaknesses or deficiencies identified during the audit of the credit union.

This will ensure the corporation is fully aware of any financial issues with a credit union in the province, and will help inform additional regulatory requirements that the

corporation may consider necessary to mitigate these financial concerns.

Bill 78 will help credit unions in our province continue to grow and thrive and enhance the protection of members. I'd like to thank the corporation for working with us on the amendments, and I just want to thank credit unions across Newfoundland and Labrador for their valuable services and contributions to the provincial economy.

I'm happy to discuss further and answer questions in Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, we'll certainly be supporting Bill 78, and thank the staff again, which we done both bills on the one day when we went over briefing, so I certainly thank them.

I'll just go over some of the stuff that was in it. The minister is right. When you sit down and listen to it first, it was pretty complicated, but once the staff got in and explained, it was pretty good. We certainly need to change what's there but to get a better understanding, the staff did a good job on it.

This bill would amend the *Credit Union Act, 2009* to authorize the Guarantee Corporation to exempt a credit union from the liquidity and investment requirements prescribed in the regulations, set the liquidity and investment requirements for the credit union, and revoke the exemption.

Also, require an auditor of a credit union to conduct examinations in accordance with the Canadian Auditing Standards; require an auditor of a credit union to indicate in the auditor's report whether the financial statements were prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting

Standards; and require that an auditor of a credit union provide a copy of all documents prepared by the auditor that highlight the weaknesses and deficiencies in the financial affairs of the credit union.

Provides a cheaper way for the credit union to access money for members; gives boards stronger oversight to protect their members; changes to the legislation will enforce audit standards to include both International Financial Reporting Standards and Canadian Auditing Standards – is what the CPAs use – and to formalize and reflect current practices.

When we get to Committee, I do have a couple of questions.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other questions, if the minister speaks now, we will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, everyone, for your comments and feedback and I'm happy to answer any questions in Committee.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 78 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2. (Bill 78)

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

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

Tomorrow?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 78)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I want to say it's Monday, Speaker, but it is Tuesday, right?

I move that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 78.

SPEAKER: And a seconder, please.

L. DEMPSTER: Seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

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 Bill 78.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Order, please!

We're now considering Bill 78, An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2." (Bill 78)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of questions. Were the changes implemented before the new board and CEO came on?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Just to be clear, in the act today, the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation has asked us to make these changes in legislation. So we're making them now. I'm not sure about the timing with the board, but the board has now asked us to make these changes, so we're here today making them.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: How long have the proposed changes been common practice on this?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I guess in terms of auditing standards – because there’s some really dry stuff here about auditing standards. We were aligning the legislation with the standards. I can’t say for sure how long they’ve been – I’ll see if my team has any information.

In terms of the Explanatory Notes of the bill, the second one: require an auditor of a credit union to conduct examination in accordance with Canadian Auditing Standards. These changes were not identified by the prior board; they were only identified by the newer board, which we appointed last year. Potentially within the last year, but I don’t have background, I guess, prior to that.

The third one: require an auditor of a credit union to indicate in the auditor’s report whether the financial statements were prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards. It is quite basic mundane stuff here.

Then, fourthly, require that an auditor of a credit union provide a copy of all documents prepared by the auditor that highlight the weaknesses and deficiencies in the financial affairs of the credit union. So the fourth one there, I would have expected that any auditors would have always done that and now we’re just updating the legislation to align with that kind of extra practice. So I would have expected that that would have always been in place.

Thank you.

CHAIR: No further questions?

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

I ask the minister: What consultations were conducted with the NLCU or any credit union before these amendments were drafted, and what kind of feedback did you receive from the credit unions?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So the only real change that we’re making that affects credit unions, like a change for credit unions, would be in terms of the liquidity requirements for the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union. We did consult with them and they are happy with this change. The other changes just reflect current standards that I believe are already in place for the other credit unions.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Did the department conduct any consultations with any third party expert in this field that’s not affiliated with either the guaranteed credit corporation, Central 1 or the NLCU? Did you look outside of that for feedback?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

We would have discussed with BC because they regulate Central 1. Just double-checking with Nova Scotia because Nova Scotia also regulates the other financial – I can’t remember the term, but there would be no one else impacted.

The Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation oversees the credit union. We believe that these changes will only improve overall the financial situation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union, while also maintaining appropriate oversight. They’ll still have to maintain appropriate financial liquidity. The Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation will ensure that.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Did the department do any judicial scan with the other provinces on these amendments to determine if they're in line with best practices in the industry and in the country? Or did we just talk to Nova Scotia and BC?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I mentioned Nova Scotia because Nova Scotia oversees the liquidity pool that all Atlantic provinces are part of. So every other province would be part of the Nova Scotia one and, then, in BC, they have another major one. The Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union is looking to continue their membership of Central 1, which is regulated by BC.

The other liquidity pools in the other provinces are not impacted. The legislation that we're proposing does allow the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation to work with credit unions on changes on a day-to-day basis that would still maintain – I'll just read the first bullet point in the Explanatory Notes: "... authorize the guarantee corporation to exempt a credit union from the liquidity and investment requirements prescribed in the regulations, set the liquidity and investment requirements for the credit union and revoke the exemption"

So my expectation would be that the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation works with any credit union if they were asking for a change, so that there are still appropriate liquidity and investment requirements for the credit union to protect their members, while not being overly burdensome.

Also, just to note, BC and Ontario are both in Central 1, which is overseen by BC. So all credit unions would have their pool in Central 1 and they would be overseen by BC as well.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

What alternatives might the Guarantee Corporation impose on a credit union that seeks an exemption to the regulations?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, can you repeat the question, please?

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

What alternatives might the Guarantee Corporation impose on a credit union that seeks the exemption of the regulation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I think that would be up to the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation. As an example, in this instance they would be allowing the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union to maintain business with Central 1, which is overseen by BC. So it meets the liquidity requirement rather than having to be the only one still in this pool at a greater cost essentially to the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union.

The Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation would review any proposals, including the one from the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union, to ensure that they are equivalent, or if not stronger, than what our regulations already provide.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: With these alternatives, are there risk assessments or anything that would have to be done for the membership to make sure that the risk is low, given that these are significant changes?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I have full confidence in the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation, the board, the CEO and the staff. They are experts in overseeing the credit unions in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have full confidence that they would only allow things that maintain an appropriate level of liquidity and assurance for the members of the credit unions.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Under the circumstances, might the Guarantee Corporation decide to revoke the exemption and reapply regulations to a credit union?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

That would be up to the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation. But, yes, if they were not happy with an arrangement or

if there was something changed in the marketplace or with any of these, the Central 1, then the credit union could revoke that and it would revert to the old rules. In which case, let's say the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation allows the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union to do this with Central 1 and then they revoke it, then the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union would have to make other arrangements with Atlantic Central, governed out of Nova Scotia, at a greater cost.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

What is the current practice, does the auditor have to send a copy of the report to the guarantee corporation and the department? Does this bill change any of those requirements?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: No.

CHAIR: No further questions?

Seeing no further questions, 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 through 5 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 5 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 5 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2. (Bill 78)

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 Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 78 carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 78 carried without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 78, An Act to Amend the Credit Union Act, 2009 No. 2, carried without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed that Bill 78 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

L. DEMPSTER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill 78 ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now stand in recess for 15 minutes.

SPEAKER: This House do stand in recess until 3:42 p.m.

Recess

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

MHA Brown, are you ready?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise on a point of privilege. This is the earliest opportunity I've had a chance to do so after hearing some information probably right around Question Period today and having a chance to review what the options are after I had this information. So I'll just take a minute to advise the House and to make a request that this point of privilege be considered by the Speaker.

Just so everyone is aware, parliamentary privilege is an essential component of parliamentary democracy. It exists to enable Parliament to function effectively and efficiently and without undo impediment. So everyone in the House is aware, but, of course, if anyone in the public is watching today, we do all kinds of legislation in the House.

Essentially, my understanding is, really, what is a courtesy to make this House function properly is that briefings are done before legislation is brought to the House to brief Members of the Opposition and to brief government Members as well on essentially what the legislation is. Officials from the various departments are made available at those briefings to answer questions. At those briefings, a copy of the proposed legislation is provided as well.

My understanding is, historically, there never used to be briefings. So it's certainly a step in the right direction to make sure that this House operates as it best can. I don't think it's ever appropriate or ever in anyone's best interest to surprise anyone in the House with legislation or questions or issues. It's always good for everybody to be prepared.

What I learned in law school is they got rid of, years ago, what's called trial by ambush. Now there are fulsome discovery proceedings for trial so you're fully aware of the case before you and the other side is aware of your case as well. It makes things operate more quickly and more smoothly and more fairly which is really how this House should operate as well, Speaker.

However, there was a briefing done this morning. There was a briefing at 10 a.m. for the proposed amendments to the *Limitations Act*, which is on the Order Paper. That was another to Members of the Opposition and their staff as well and a briefing at 10:45 a.m. to government Members and their staff as well. So two briefings done this morning.

My understanding is the legislation would have been provided, hand delivered to both of those, before those briefings occurred. One of the privileges that we share – and this is a collective and an individual right, Speaker. We have parliamentary privileges. One of the privileges that we have – it is a privilege to have; I don't mean to be redundant, but it is a privilege that we all

share and have, and I think we need to honour and make sure that those privileges are protected is that, as Members of the House of Assembly, privileges that we are the first people to get to see legislation before it's made public.

That's very important, Speaker. The confidentiality of bills is necessary so that Members themselves, all of us, all 40 Members, may be well informed of the issue before it's debated in the House and before it's debated in the court of public opinion, but also because of the pre-eminent role which the House plays and which Members play, and must play, in the legislative affairs of this province.

So as I was in Question Period today, I received an email about this piece of legislation. Again, keep in mind that the privilege is that we all get to see this first. That's a privilege that we share as Members of the House and the members of the public do not get to see it until it's tabled in the House. The *Limitations Act* has not been tabled in the House, despite the fact that it's on the Order Paper.

Someone in the Department of Justice and Public Safety received an email that said: I've got a copy of the proposed changes to the *Limitations Act*. I've attached it here. I trust the source I got it from but just double confirming with the department that this is legitimate. There's a copy attached here, a PDF, which I've reviewed and it certainly looks like the legislation that was provided to Members of the Opposition and the government Members this morning.

I will note that the email continues to say that this member of the media has spoken with two individuals of the public, so that's at least three people that now have at least – I know one member of the public has certainly seen it because it's in his email and I certainly know that two other members of the public are aware now what's in that bill.

Speaker, having said all that, I believe that there's a prima facie case of a point of privilege here and I ask that you would rule on that.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm going to take a recess to review the point of privilege that's just been presented by the Government House Leader.

This House do stand recessed.

Recess

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

Order, please!

The Government House Leader rose on a question of privilege regarding the premature disclosure of Bill 74, An Act to Amend the Limitations Act.

He alleged that before the bill was distributed to Members in the House, the proposed contents were disclosed to media and the public, thus constituting a breach of Members' privilege. I'm satisfied that the Government House Leader raised the matter at his earliest possible opportunity.

As Members know, one of the most important responsibilities as Speaker is to safeguard the rights and privileges of Members, both individually and collectively. The matter before us today relates to the fundamental responsibilities of parliamentarians to fulfill their parliamentary duties in considering legislation.

The Speaker's responsibility at this point is to determine whether at first glance a point of privilege has been established. Based on the information provided by the Government House Leader, I agree that this is a prima facie breach of privilege by the way of contempt.

In accordance with Standing Order 34, this matter takes priority over all business of the House and I ask the Government House Leader to make his motion.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker, for your ruling.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that this matter be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections and that the Committee report back to this House.

Speaker, thank you for the ruling. I'm not going to speak long other than to say this is very disappointing to me personally and as Minister of Justice and Public Safety. A lot of work went into preparing this bill. A lot of Members on the Opposition side spoke about this on numerous occasions in Question Period and in Petitions. I think it's pretty safe to say it's the single issue that's received the most petitions on numerous occasions than any other issue that I've heard since I've been a Member of this House of Assembly.

After the briefings were done this morning as well, I met with officials in the department to discuss what came up at the briefings and sort of any ways that the bill could be improved. I don't mind saying that I was looking forward to making those improvements in the House of Assembly or, even prior to that, I was happy to sort of look at whether we could do it before it was debated in the House. Again, would have been happy to make amendments or have someone make amendments in the House of Assembly as the House should work.

I'm always open to amendments in the House of Assembly if they're proposed by any Member of the Opposition and to fully debate them. Whether they're adopted or not, obviously, it's a different question but the House certainly should function with legislation being presented.

I really feel like that opportunity has been lost and I'm extremely disappointed, personally, Speaker, on what's happened here. It does throw in a little bit of an issue for me as Government House Leader to decide how the legislative agenda is going to work. My plan was to bring this to the House floor tomorrow morning to do second reading and Committee. Of course, the legislation – the bill is not dead. I'll certainly consider what happens today on my motion and make my decision about how we're going to move forward with this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm only going to take a second. As I listened to the Government House Leader reference – I guess he directed his comments to the Opposition side of the House with that legislation. If I'm not mistaken, this has been sent to the Privileges and Elections Committee to look into it further. So I hope that Government House Leader was being misquoted by making the reference that it was this side of the House that's responsible.

That piece of legislation could land in many hands. We've heard this happen before in this Legislature. There were accusations made sometime before on the *Mitchelmore Report*, to be quite honest with you. It got, supposedly, leaked. Privileges and Elections looked into it. I don't know what they ever found.

In saying that, Speaker, I'll probably go a step further and say I guess the question needs to be asked to the general public – sometimes you get lost in the point of privilege and these maneuvers in the House of Assembly that the general public probably don't really understand what's happening.

Is it such a terrible thing that others would have a chance to look and review any legislation coming to the House? Isn't it about getting the best piece of legislation for the people that are affected by this? Especially if you look at the statute of limitations, Speaker. I've always lobbied to go to the Committee stage and when the Committee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: I'd like to be afforded the same respect as I afforded the Government House Leader and my caucus did as well. And we also done it during Question Period.

I think that you're not getting a bad piece of legislation if you're going to refer it out to get experts to look into this. Right now, you get a lot of legislation that's done through government. It is done through government officials, through the minister and they work it out and they seek whatever input they want and they put together a piece of legislation. They brief Opposition Members on it and then they bring it in the next day to second reading.

You got, on a good day, 24-hours notice. And I know I hear people say oh, how government previous, back in the day, done this and done that. I mean, I can't speak for that; I just know it is not a bad thing – the more time you get, the better the legislation you get. The more consultations – it's all about making the best piece of legislation.

So, no doubt, maybe privileges and whatever may be violated, but is that our biggest problems facing our province today? Whatever happened – I don't even know, I had to ask the Government House Leader what was going on. I had no idea what he was even talking about. I was not at the briefing. I have no idea, I never seen the legislation – full disclosure: I don't have a clue, but I'm listening to the commentary going back and forth.

I guess you could try to make whatever works and get the proper uptake and make it sensationalized, which I think there was a lot of sensationalization that went on during that presentation. But I mean, you're basically saying it's a violation of privilege. You're saying it is a prima facie violation of privilege that this legislation was supposedly distributed elsewhere. Fair enough, we'll deal with that.

I don't think the world is crumbling because of it, Speaker. At the end of the day, if we end up with a great piece of legislation, what's wrong with that – what's wrong with that? We haven't disclosed this highly confidential sensitive information. At 10 tomorrow morning, it is going to be for all eyes to see anyway. When it hits the floor of the House of Assembly, it's not like there is going to be an embargo for the next year, or six months, or three months or one month. This is coming out tomorrow morning.

So, at the end of the day, if you can give honest, good debate to a piece of legislation, what's so bad about that? We deal with it with Bill 22. It's still there on the House of Assembly floor because we've debated and we've not got the answer we want, but it keeps coming back in Committee and keeps coming back in Committee. Again, what's wrong? The Committee stage is a prime example of doing that; I see nothing wrong.

Again, about this issue, it is a separate issue, but the general approach to violating privilege, I respectfully disagree with the minister's sensationalization of it. Fair enough if you feel it is a violation of privilege, that's a separate issue, but to make it seem like – we have a lot bigger issues in this province, Speaker, than a piece of legislation getting out 12 or 14 hours ahead of time for second reading. And again, full disclosure, I don't expect to see it before 10 a.m. tomorrow or whenever the minister tables it.

But I think that needs to be put on record and for clarity and on behalf of our Opposition caucus. Because the references are being directly made at the Opposition Members and I felt compelled to pass along my commentary.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll just take a moment here to put my two cents into it, given that this has happened. But maybe this is an opportunity for us, as a House, to move into it with all of our sister legislations and have a Committee stage. Maybe that's what was missing here is that we don't have a Committee stage like other legislatures across this country, where we actually have an opportunity to actually flesh out things.

We did it once since I've been sitting here; we did it with the Real Estate Act. That was a fine piece of legislation in its time, but now we haven't done it since. Maybe that's the problem here is that we're not actually following what other parliaments and our other legislatures across this country are actually doing when it comes to how our bills move through this House.

So maybe this is an opportunity now that we can actually go back and actually have some transparency and some openness when we do go through this bill process. So maybe that's another thing we could add when it goes back to Privileges and Elections, maybe we actually start implementing a Committee stage, like everyone else is doing across this country. I think we're a little bit behind on that and maybe that's an opportunity now we can actually move forward and actually do some good legislation and have some time to flesh out things.

Thank you.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I just want to say, first of all, I haven't seen the legislation either. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it to the briefing, but my colleague, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, did attend. So he's filled me in on what he heard at the briefing. I do look forward to seeing the legislation.

I do agree, Speaker, for this institution to operate effectively and properly there has to be rules. I think everybody acknowledges that. So I agree that the rule has been that until the legislation is actually tabled for the public to see, that these briefings do take place in advance and there's an understanding that the information that we receive we would keep under embargo – I think is the term that you hear used – until such time the legislation is actually presented in the House of Assembly.

So I don't have an issue with that, per se, but I'll tell you what I do have a concern about – I'm just going to say a concern about – is that when the minister just got up to speak about it, he kind of – and maybe I didn't hear it right, I hope I heard it wrong – but there seemed to be some sort of an inference, if you will, that we were asking for this legislation, which we were.

I know that I presented numerous petitions, my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands, I know the Member for Harbour Main and other Members and the Member for Torngat Mountains, in particular, we presented a lot of petitions on it, as the minister said. We did so because we feel it's such a serious issue that needs to be dealt with and we need to see it happen.

So my concern is that when the minister was kind of making his comments and he said, well, I was prepared to bring this

before the Legislature and so on, now I have to consider what has happened here in the context of whether I decide to bring it forward or not. That's the way I took it. If I mistook what he said, then I certainly apologize. I would ask the minister to clarify, but it sounded to me like he was saying, well, because somebody leaked this, allegedly, and I have no idea who allegedly leaked it or what side of the House it came from or who did it, and I guess that will be part of the investigation when it goes to the Privileges and Elections Committee, but there seemed to be this inference that now I've got to think twice, will I even bring this forward or not.

That's how I took his comments. That's what I gleaned from what he said. So I just want to say to the minister, this is such a critical issue, not just for Mr. Whalen, but for anybody who was in Mr. Whalen's position, that's why we presented all these petitions. I certainly would hope, and I am pleading with the minister, please, just because somebody did what they weren't supposed to do, allegedly, that doesn't mean now that we have to punish the Whalen's and other people in that position and say now we're not going to bring the legislation forward to the fall and it's the PC's fault or it's the NDP's fault or it's somebody's fault. We were willing to do it, but now, all of a sudden, because somebody leaked the document, we're not going to bring it forward and try to make some kind of a big political heyday over it. I hope that's not going to happen.

So I would ask the minister, perhaps, if he could just clarify for this House of Assembly, that regardless of that, it can go to Privileges and Elections Committee, they can do their investigation. If you find out who broke the rules, they can be sanctioned according to the rules of the House of Assembly. I have no issue with any of that, but, please, Minister, I would like for you to clarify for this House that regardless of all that, it is still your intention to bring this very

important legislation before this House of Assembly this session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It maybe worthwhile for the House to reflect on the origins of this particular convention. It is not to invoke a secrecy for secrecy's sake. This convention is based on the quality of all Members. We on this side, many of us have already seen this legislation as Members of Cabinet, as having sworn an oath to His Majesty and taken the Oath of Office, we have access to this legislation, so we have seen it. It's inherent in the Cabinet process. Members on the opposite side, however, have not.

So this is a convention which was born not from an appeal to invoke a secrecy clause for the sake of secrecy. It's to ensure that all Members are treated equally. What I heard this afternoon was a very impassioned plea that the ends should justify the means. They are prepared to forego that equality of membership so that we can actually arrive at a better process somehow.

So to answer the question for the Member for Mount Pearl South?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Southlands.

G. BYRNE: Mount Pearl - Southlands, sorry.

There is a valid reason as to why the Minister of Justice and Public Safety would take some concern from this. There could be a pecuniary interest in financial gain. One of the reasons why budgets are kept in secret until the information can be shared broadly, publicly and without exclusion to anyone. It's to prevent financial gain.

In this particular instance, I would argue that the minister has a responsibility to ensure that without knowing exactly what the potential implications are from someone having access to a piece of legislation that would be privileged in this House before anyone else, that minister would have a responsibility to look at whether or not there was a pecuniary gain that was achieved that would not have been achieved by any other means or by any other individual.

So that is the history of this and this is the nature of why we keep these matters confidential until all Members can share them equally and fairly in the House so that no Member is advantaged or disadvantaged, and no member of the public can seek advantage and no member of this public is disadvantaged accordingly.

This is what we call the Westminster tradition, so I think we should hold dear those in this particular House to avoid these kinds of unnecessary and ill-fated concerns.

As my father once said, Mr. Speaker, conventional wisdom is born of one of two sources: convention or wisdom.

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

J. DINN: Speaker, I understand the basis of the point of privilege. I understand when it comes to parliamentary conventions. I guess what it comes down to, to me, is maybe we need to do a review of what those parliamentary conventions are as well.

I think for me the most frustrating aspect of being in this position is often getting the legislation sometimes the day of, sometimes the day before, and having to get the researchers and that and do your own research to at least have an informed debate.

I've heard the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, I think, when he brought this

forward, talk about in the legal profession doing away with sort of an ambush prosecution, ambush approach to legal cases and about the discovery process, so that it comes down on a fulsome debate or exposition of the facts. I've heard the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills talk about equality of Members, but by his own admission the fact that Cabinet would have this long before, he, in fact, recognized an inequality that exists within this House itself.

My colleague from Labrador West spoke about the need maybe of having a Committee system where there is an opportunity for a more fulsome discussion of legislation, and maybe an avenue, too, for public engagement on that. I think, in many ways, I take the role I have here seriously in making sure that the legislation that we're debating is the best legislation and that we can have informed debate and discussion of it.

On some of the issues when it comes to education, I know based on my own experiences, an awful lot about it and I'm comfortable in that area. But there are other areas, especially in a small caucus, where it takes a significant amount of effort to be able to be well informed to debate the issue in this House.

Yet, at times, we find – and I come back to this; I mentioned it before – we've had emails and correspondence from the Privacy Commissioner about concerns that were raised. We often get that information as we're debating a piece of legislation.

So while I understand the point of privilege as the rules exist, I do not always feel that we're getting the best debate on legislation, because we probably need a lot more debate behind the scenes so that when we come here, at least when we're proposing amendments, maybe that's done before it gets to the floor.

But my take here at times, when I see amendments brought forward, it comes down to the Committee stage where if we want to make changes, we have to be prepared to keep speaking until it jams up – I guess for lack of a better word – Members of government when we're up against a long weekend or when people have flights to catch and so on and so forth and the government side acquiesces.

I do believe in this: If you firmly believe in the position you hold, then you will fight it tooth and nail and defend it tooth and nail. Otherwise, there have been amendments that have been brought up from this side which, at the last minute, were agreed to. Why do we go through that?

I find that to me, personally, that's the most frustrating aspect of it. I've been in conventions where at least by the force of your argument, you had the ability to influence or change public perception. But here I find the problem with this of talking about how an equality of Members or about the privilege of getting the technical briefing sometimes the day of, the day before, they're hollow. Because I think here to have that formalized debate, really, there should be an opportunity to make sure that everyone has sufficient time to do the research, to reflect before they come in here.

Maybe there's an opportunity, too, as we look at this, if it goes to Privileges and Elections, to look at how we can do it better and maybe engage the public as well.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, is the House – the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want an opportunity to respond to some of the comments that were made. This is not about this bill, even though I said

this is personal to me, because a lot of staff in the Department of Justice and Public Safety put a lot of time and effort into this. So that's why I said this is personal to me.

This is not about delaying the *Limitations Act* or anything like that specifically because it's the *Limitations Act*. It just happens to be a bill that was developed in the Department of Justice and Public Safety. If it was any other bill related to any other department, I'd be standing up to say the same thing, because it's not about this bill; it's about the rules. Despite some comments about whether they should or shouldn't apply, I agree with the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills that the rules are there for a reason and they're important to maintain them.

If we don't maintain this rule, in my opinion, which is a privilege that we all share, we may as well all go home out of it, to be honest with you. Rules are here for a reason. They're not here for fun. They're not here so we can just follow them when we want and choose not to follow them on other days. There's a process and a procedure here.

Standing up and saying these words: I move, seconded by, that the House now read the bill a second time – no one knows what we're saying, but it's very important and it's structure and it's rules and it's historic. We didn't make this up yesterday. I just really feel that it's important that any privileges that we have – I think that the Member for St. John's Centre, one day, stood up on a point of privilege because the lights were too bright and his argument was that he wasn't able to fully do his job. Now, that might sound silly, but I agree that if he felt that that was a point of privilege that was important to him, we needed to follow the rules and rule on that matter for him because it was important to him as a Member of this House.

No different than the fact that bills are being provided, somehow, to members of the

media – and I want to be clear that I don't know that members of the public, other than the media, have the bill. I just know that they are, from what I read in the email, aware of the contents of the bill.

As for comments about looking at whether this happened through Opposition, I was very clear when I made my prima facie case that there were two briefings. There was one to Opposition Members and there was one to Government Members as well. The same bill was provided to two different groups and I'm not prejudging on how this information came to the media, Speaker.

As for my comments about how I deal now, as Government House Leader, with the legislative agenda, I fully intend to bring this piece of legislation forward. I'm just not sure that it's going to go according to plans, which was to do this tomorrow, mainly to take some time to either let the Committee do its work or not. This is all new information and I need to take that away.

The final point I want to make is talking about fully debating bills, not getting bills far enough in advance, that's all well and good. I'm happy to have those conversations with any Members of the House. I don't think, as Government House Leader, I've ever brought a bill forward that was briefed the day of.

In fact, I had a conversation with one Member about that this morning and over the weekend, and I don't think I've ever done that and it's never my goal to do that. I don't understand how that's linked to the fact that the media have the bill. If the argument is that, if the media has it, it can fully inform debate in the House, we have a much larger problem because it's the Members that debate the bills and it's the Members that are supposed to get the bills first.

So it seems to me that that was provided to the media for a different reason, which is really what is troubling, Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that the prima facie breach of privilege by way of contempt be referred to the Privileges and Elections Committee.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.

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