



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume L

SECOND SESSION

Number 118

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Wednesday

May 21, 2025

The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit visitors.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 9, second reading of Bill 108, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8, and that is seconded by the Deputy Premier.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that we now read Bill 108, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8, a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No 8. (Bill 108)

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's an honour and a privilege to stand again in this House of Assembly on a technical amendment to the mining and mineral rights tax.

The mining industry plays an incredibly important role in the Newfoundland and Labrador economy and continues to be a key economic driver for the province and a focus of investor interest. The estimated activity in 2024 resulted in approximately \$4.4 billion in mineral shipments, \$244 million in exploration expenditures, and employment of approximately 8,000 person-years. In fact, since 2022 the province has attracted nearly \$740 million worth of exploration investment.

In 2025, we're expecting to see gold production from Calibre Mining corporation's Valentine gold project, and I'm very pleased to see that now coming to fruition and Maritime Resources Corporation's operation at Pine Cove. I've had the opportunity to visit Pine Cove, it is indeed an incredible operation, and I look forward to visiting Calibre at some point.

As demand for critical minerals used for renewable energy and clean technology application increases, our mineral potential provides a major opportunity. In *Budget 2025*, we're making investments in the mining industry with close to \$6 million available to support mining activity, including a mineral incentive, Junior Exploration Assistance and Labrador-specific geoscience programs.

These investments are designed to encourage exploration and attract investment in a province that is home to 34 minerals identified as being critical, of which 27 align with the Government of Canada's list that also includes high-purity iron ore.

I would like to give a shout-out to a former colleague, the former minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, who advocated for high-purity iron ore to be on the list of critical minerals and very pleased to say the federal government listened. It is a critical mineral and especially important as we move forward towards a greener economy.

Today, as mentioned, I am introducing technical amendments to the *Revenue Administration Act* regarding the mining and mineral rights tax. Now, Speaker, from time to time, we do these technical amendments and they're basically to ensure that we have clarity and certainty around our tax administration. Not necessarily have we seen these things happen, it's just that we know that we want to have clarity and certainty.

Specifically, we are looking at the treatment of exploration expenditures. Now, before I

get into the act itself, let me just explain, there are two components to this tax. The mining tax is imposed on mine operators carrying out mining activities in this province. A 15 per cent tax is imposed on the net income of the operator, net income equals gross revenue, less allowable expenses, including operating and processing, depreciation, preproduction, exploration, Crown royalties, processing and smelting allowances and other prescribed deductions.

The mineral rights tax is imposed on the recipient of a mineral production royalties. A 20 per cent tax is imposed on royalty receipts, less certain deductions, including legal expenses incurred in the collection of the royalties and payments of rents and royalties to other persons.

As I mentioned to the House already, this is specifically looking at the treatment of exploration expenditures. These are expenditures that relate to prospecting, sampling, mapping, diamond drilling and other work involved in searching for ore in the province under a licence issued under the *Mineral Act* to explore for minerals.

Exploration expenditures are deductible from net income for mining tax, which is paid by mine operators, or net revenue from mineral rights tax, which is paid by royalty recipients, and can only be claimed to the extent that they have not been used in a prior year. However, no provision currently exists to limit the same exploration expenditure from being deducted from both mining tax and mineral rights tax. We're proposing a new provision to be made to ensure that a specific expenditure may only be claimed once for mining tax or mineral rights tax but not both.

Now, we haven't come across this incidence, but again, we want to make sure that there's clarity and certainty, especially around tax law.

Another amendment we are proposing relates to capital costs. The *Revenue Administration Act* does not currently exclude capital costs from qualifying as an exploration expenditure for purposes of the mineral rights tax. However, for mining tax purposes, the act specifically excludes a deduction for capital costs in the determination of net income. As the House knows, capital costs are always amortized, and this may create a situation where it is not. We're making these changes to ensure fair tax treatment.

To ensure consistent treatment of what qualifies as exploration expenditures for both taxes, it is recommended that a new provision be added to specifically exclude capital costs as exploration expenditures for mineral rights tax. Capital assets will continue to be deductible as an amortization over the life of an asset. We're applying appropriate and fair tax treatment, and that should have no impact on exploration.

In conclusion, Speaker, these technical amendments to the *Revenue Administration Act* are intended to provide consistency and clarity for mining companies operating in Newfoundland and Labrador, and with that I will take my seat and listen to debate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to be able to get up and speak in this House, and particularly on two things that I've been following quite a bit that impacts my district. That being mining and the burgeoning mining opportunities across Baie Verte - Green, but also across all of Central Newfoundland and the province as a whole, and then, in my role as Finance critic to ensure, as the minister

appropriately highlighted, that we have fair tax treatment.

I'm going to take a couple of minutes because the minister highlighted a couple of mines in Baie Verte - Green Bay, and then, as well, the broader picture with regard to a Central Newfoundland. What was highlighted first was the Calibre mine, that's the Valentine Lake project for those that don't know, and that project is actually owned by Equinox Gold. Equinox Gold just finalized that acquisition of Calibre Mining and what's important there is Equinox Gold is now the second largest gold player in Canada with mines in five countries. Having a larger multi-national player involved in our mining industry will only strengthen our mining industry.

One of the big issues that I've continued to highlight with regard to that mine, as they come close now to going into full commissioning and production, is labour. We're going to continue to have mining labour challenges across the industry; but this is good news for all of Central Newfoundland, because I think any of us in Central Newfoundland, we have a number of residents in our communities that are working on rotation in Calibre, which is now Equinox.

As was also highlighted with the construction of that mine by the Member for Terra Nova, we always need to ensure, and we've got additional mines that are going to come on stream, that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the primary beneficiaries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: That comes with regard to employment; particularly, as regards to construction of those mines with the benefits agreement.

The minister also highlighted Maritime Resources; that is the Hammerdown Project on King's Point Road that's about to come in. They'll be transporting ore from there

down to Pine Cove. Now, Pine Cove was previously owned by Anaconda and got bought out by Maritime Resources.

As I highlighted previously, there are a couple of challenges there: the roadwork on Route 390, the bridge on 390, Route 410 – that's the Baie Verte Highway – and then 418 to Ming's Bight. I have sent, and so have the Towns of Baie Verte, Ming's Bight, King's Point and Springdale, letters to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure with regard to some small road improvements so that we can maximize and not jeopardize that mine starting an execution.

The other one in my district that I want to highlight that's, again, down in the vicinity of Pine Cove is FireFly – what was Rambler. FireFly, that mine is there, submitted an environmental review. Government controls that environmental review and this is an opportunity now to expedite that environmental review so we can be off to the races for a 400-500-person mine.

It's significant opportunity for the province with FireFly, with that copper mine and the growing demand for copper. A market where China currently owns about 80 per cent of the resource. There's a world need for the copper and we are not the only jurisdiction with copper but given where that is located, given that we have a straight path across to Europe from the Northeast Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, then it would behoove us to do everything to accelerate that environmental review.

Then, like I said, maybe some of my colleagues will highlight that this is not the only mining opportunity in Central Newfoundland. We also have New Found Gold in Appleton. We have the Beaver Brook Antimony Mine, so we'll see how that goes. There's some additional exploration with significant positive results, so what does all of that mean? All that means is that we have a growing demand for mining labour in Central Newfoundland and we

need a proper plan for it. With all of that from a mining side, particularly in a rural area, a mine would provide somewhere between, and that's empirical studies, 3½ to four times economic multiplier; so a significant growth opportunity for all across Central Newfoundland.

With regard to this bill itself, this was picked up on an audit and, I agree with the minister, this is about doing what is right for the province, this is right with regard to accounting treatment and this is also about providing clarity and certainty to the mining industry. The bill closes a loophole which currently enables exploration expenditures to be deducted from the net income from both the mining and mineral rights. We want to prevent that double accounting and, in doing so, it's being fair and equitable to all mining companies and exploration companies, with regard to that accounting treatment, and ensuring we are following and adhering to GAAP.

As well, as the minister highlighted, this bill closes a loophole with regard to capital costs, which enables capital costs to be utilized as exploration expenditures when calculating net revenue for the mineral rights tax. Going forward now, with this bill, capital costs will now only be able to be used as a deduction against the mining tax as was always the intention. Again, that brings clarity to those in the industry and, on this side, we fully support that. Like I said, it's a technical amendment but it's an important amendment for how mining expenditures are treated within this province, to give clarity and certainty to the companies and to ensure that we are following industry standards.

Given that this is related to the tax, there are two other areas that I would also like to highlight with regard to a need for review with regard to how we are impacting our miners, our exploration companies, the entire mining industry.

One is with regard to the gas tax. Now, there is favourable treatment with the gas tax during the construction of a mine. What a number of small miners are looking for, because their equipment is not out on the road operating, but a continuation of that favourable gas tax treatment during the operation of their mine, or even do it on a sliding scale. Doing so would accelerate their opportunity to come into production and make them more productive, because we are not the only place with base minerals.

There's a competition now across the world with base minerals and bringing a number of mines into production. We will get that benefit back through corporate tax, through various fees and royalties on the mining side and then having more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians employed. Like I said, that employment will extend indirectly to other sectors of the mining economy because you've got drillers and mining supply companies that will all benefit from an operating mine.

The other one area where I believe, and I've highlighted this one before on a farm side is a number, again, of mining companies have highlighted the impact of the Bowater act, which is really handcuffing them from mine acceleration in that they have to wait for approval from Kruger with regard to lease and/or are held in ransom by Kruger, a Quebec company, with having to pay a fee to them for the timber rights so that they can then proceed with deforestation and acceleration of that mine.

Those are a couple of things I fully support. I fully support this technical amendment because it's doing what is right in bringing clarity and certainty on the tax side for all stakeholders involved. I believe there are also two other aspects in the mining side that we also now need to take a look at to be able to accelerate some of our mining opportunities, that is the gas tax and the Bowater act.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Once again, we see another technical bill for the *Revenue Administration Act*. I guess as the staff and the public servants in the Department of Finance continue to do audits and stuff, they come across things like anomalies and things like this there where there are small loopholes or mistakes that has to be corrected.

It's interesting that's in the mining sector. I used to work in the mining sector and live in the mining sector. My spouse works in the mining sector, and I can go on and on with my whole family there, just being from the Labrador West region. We continue to see the advancements of, one, large-scale projects in my area but also is the prospectors and those who are out doing exploration day in, day out.

It's not uncommon to spend your entire summer hearing choppers all summer long, taking in drill equipment, taking in prospectors, taking in things like that day in, day out, all summer long. I guess you know summer is here when you start seeing and hearing that. I know last summer there was a lot of work done in a place called Lac Viroit. After they completed their work – it's roughly the same area where we had the large forest fire this past summer. They were in doing a drill program in a very good area. They found some very, very high-grade iron ore and it continues to show that the place is covered in it, it's everywhere and it just shows the longevity and the amount of resource that is actually in such a small area.

We also looked at all the projects and stuff, even going up toward the Schefferville belt where we see Tata still operating, Labrador

iron mines, but also see Century up there doing work in a place called Iron Arm, who is going through the EIS program there now, to look at starting mining that operation. Then we have the Julianne deposits, the Kami project and there's a list going on and on.

There's a lot of opportunity in the mining industry and you have to highlight because a lot of work is going from prospecting right to mine. I had one guy tell me if all goes well, from the day that you get your investors and that, it takes about 10 years to start a mine.

Recently, when we talked with Kami who's now owned by Champion who owns the mine just across the border on the Quebec side, when they bought it from Alderon, they said I guess this time it takes 20. Because, from the time that they actually went out to market to look for everything to start their first environmental assessment and their federal environmental assessment to the process they are now, it would be over 20 years from the time that they started the project to the time that they finish. It's a long process, and it takes a lot of work and effort.

My hon. colleague, Leader of the Third Party, keeps saying, are you going to go prospecting now? Now that I'm moving on.

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

J. BROWN: I know, but there are a lot of rocks out there to check, so I guess maybe we'll see.

When I used to work in the mining industry, one of my coworkers, he was retired from Rio Tinto IOC, he would work with us during the winter because he spent his whole summer prospecting. So even the people that are working in the mining industry, they still have a side thing where they are prospecting. These prospectors bring in a lot of value and a lot of knowledge because they're out in places that are very remote, very hard to get to, and it takes a lot of

money, and it takes a lot of effort to go in and actually prospect an area that they think that there might be something.

I know he just recently sold a claim off for further investigation, for drilling and that, and he did a great job with it. He put a lot of long hours in it. I tell him he's the most fit person I have ever met. I think he turns 80 his birthday, and he's still hopping over rocks and checking rocks and up in the woods checking, prospecting.

They're a great resource. You look at the programs and stuff that help incentivize prospecting, it still really doesn't pay the value that they're worth. They are a great resource for this province, the prospectors. They do a lot of the heavy lifting to find out where the minerals are, to actually learn about the geology of our regions and actually turn theories into facts when it comes to how deposits are formed and things like that.

Hats off to the prospectors, hats off to the junior exploration companies, and those ones for the hard work they do for the mining industry. At the end of the day, usually the big guys take all the credit for all the mining, but there are a lot of smaller groups of people that actually build our mining industry day in, day out.

With that, Speaker, I support the bill. I support the idea that we're fixing loopholes and making sure that there's fairness in taxation and to make sure that everyone is treated fairly and on the same field. With that, we support this bill, but at the same time I want to give a shout-out to my constituents who are the heart and soul of the mining industry in this province and have been doing it, like I said, this year is 71 years of continuous mining. It's a big project that keeps on going back home.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm just going to take a couple of minutes here and just talk about the mining sector as well, as it's very important to the people I represent and the communities I represent. Of course, my colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay spoke about it earlier. We have Equinox Gold up there now which used to be Calibre Mining which used to be Marathon Gold. They went through a few names, but make no mistake, a lot of the faces are the same.

A lot of good people put a lot of hard work into this to bring us this mine, and they were community supporters right from the beginning. They even offered to build up one of the bridges there whether their project was going to go ahead or not. I enjoy having them in our community and I know that everybody else does as well.

Of course, we have the First Atlantic Nickel Corporation which just started as well. It's about 40 kilometres outside of Grand Falls-Windsor and when you go on their website – I'm just going to read just a quick note here – it says, "Strategic Infrastructure: Existing road access allows for year-round workability, with a project boundary just 3 km from a clean hydroelectric power dam." That's fantastic for the mining companies because we have a lot of these off-roads that are here that are prepared for them to use already.

The only other thing that I'll say to that is, a lot of other people use those roads as well. A lot of people from my district, my communities; a lot of people from Buchans, Buchans Junction, Millertown, Millertown Junction right up through Badger use Route 370, which is the Buchans Highway, and then Mill Road into Millertown, a lot of people use that as well. These are streets for vehicles, not just commercial vehicles of course, but for private usage. I continue to

watch some of these roads in disrepair as these big megaprojects, whether it be mining or logging, take on a life of their own, which we're very grateful for. Whether it be tax or the revenue side, I would love to see one day some sort of trust set up for the smaller communities that are impacted directly by these mining operations.

Again, we are so fortunate to have them. We are so fortunate for the work that they give and for the community support that they give. I mean, they've been giving community support ever since they've been in there. The Lionel Kelland Hospice, every lunch and dinner, you can only imagine, Calibre Mining has been a part of it. We're very happy for that, but I would be remiss if I didn't talk about those private roads that are in our communities that need to be worked on, that need work done on them. We're hearing stories every single day whether it be losing a tire or losing a rim sort of thing because these roads are in disrepair.

I'm very fortunate we are getting some work done up on the Buchans Highway this year. I'm so happy for that, but when you go into Mill Road there through Millertown, I'm not sure where the roadwork is going to be done. I'm going to continue to advocate that it does get done there but I would love some day for some government to set up some sort of a trust on the side, a five- or 10-year road project, for the communities that are directly impacted. Not every single project is going to directly impact a smaller community but make no mistake, when it comes to Buchans Junction, and especially Millertown, these communities are impacted.

I would love to see, like I say, whether it be from the tax side or the revenue side, some sort of money going directly to helping the roadwork there, because the citizens that are there are very happy to have the mine as well but they shouldn't have to pay for any destruction that are done on these roads. I mean, these are older roads. They continuously get in disrepair every single

year. I know my constituents reach out to me every other week. They would like to see something done as well. I had the conversation with the minister this morning about what work is going to be done up on the Buchans Highway.

I'm hoping to get some answers on that and we can move on from there. Make no mistake, we have rotational workers up there and it's a safety concern when it comes to these roads. I mean, who wants to see an ambulance come out if, God forbid, somebody get hurt and lose a tire or lose a rim on one of these roads.

Do you know what? For all these big, big mining operations that we have throughout our province, that we're all so proud of, we also want to be proud of what they're going to leave. What they're going to enhance throughout our communities. I know that we have top-tier cleanup when it comes to this stuff and I want to make sure, as well, that they leave it in a better fashion than what they found it in eventually. As we navigate through this 20-year mining project or however long it's going to be – I mean, there are three million ounces of gold up there. It's absolutely phenomenal. The first find is going to be 13 years from what I know, but I'm sure they're going to find others.

It's a living, breathing operation. So as they move forward and move into these smaller towns and these smaller communities, I just hope that a government comes onside one day and says: You know what, let's make sure that there is some sort of fund set up over a five- or 10-year period where we continuously do the roadwork so the people of the area don't have to pay for it and the people that are using the mine and are mining, the government themselves can come up with something to please, please foot the bill for some of this roadwork that needs to be done; because, again, it's a sin. The residents shouldn't have to pay for it but they are in the end here.

That's just one thing I'll leave you with and, of course, the community benefits agreement. We've been advocates ever since the six years I've been in here, myself and the Member for Terra Nova. It would only enhance our mining projects and our future mining projects here in the province. A solid, solid community benefits agreement would only enhance it, would only help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and, like my colleague from Baie Verte - Green Bay said, it would ensure that we are the beneficiaries right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

A strong community benefits agreement; we'll be looking for that and hope to see it in the future. That's all I have to say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

I would like to take a few minutes just to speak about this. I wasn't going to but then I started thinking, you know, before politics, I had almost a three-decade career working in environmental consulting and, in particular, in support of the mining industry. It's a very important sector of this province and one that sometimes gets overlooked I think in the rush to oil and some other resources that we have.

Further to some of the comments I heard, particularly from my colleague from Labrador West, it is in this aspect of exploration that we really need to tip our hats to that dedicated group of individuals who are out there prospecting and looking for opportunities, because it is one heck of a difficult and challenging job.

I just was going to list off and then I started thinking back over – since the late '80s, I've worked on a variety of interesting projects,

again in support and completing environmental assessments for, usually, those folks who come after. Sometimes there are larger companies that are funding the folks that are doing the exploration, sometimes they can create joint ventures and get involved. It's always quite a play, but at the front end of the whole process are those people who are taking a lot of risk and spending a lot of energy out there across this great expanse of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I started out my first project was in Tally Pond working with Noranda. That project ended up going into full operation. Cape Ray was another one, a gold mine down the southwest coast. I worked on Hammerdown. Voisey's Bay occupied many years of my life – just a little story: My wife and I moved to – well actually I was working Labrador for several years on a seasonal basis and then we got wind of this discovery that Al Chislett and Chris Verbiski had. I knew Chris's father, Mort, from by Tally Pond days, and the excitement around that and everything, I remember calling my supervisor and I said, I think it's time to finally commit to Labrador and set up an office.

We happened to get in on the front end of that most amazing ride that was the rush that occurred, that nickel rush, that claim staking rush that occurred late '94 in through '95 and '96. I know we went from two or three people in our office to 30 in the span of a couple of months. The boom and the excitement around that, it was really a once in a lifetime for so many of us who were involved to see that amazing discovery, to see the expertise that existed, because Chris and Al were originally out there looking for diamonds. Diamond Fields had been their support.

Al and Chris had this company called Archean and happened to be flying home one day in a helicopter, almost out of fuel, and spotted something that was very interesting. They stopped to take a look at it

and the rest is an amazing history. To have been involved and associated with that was a real honour of my life.

Further to my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and talking about opportunities to take full advantage of some of these resource development projects in the areas where they occur, we often talk about adjacency. One of the great features that came out of the Voisey's Bay project was that we finally had the opportunity to have built for us, a modern, new hospital that opened in 2000, the Labrador Health Centre. Fifty per cent funded by the provincial government and 50 per cent funded by the company involved. That has made a big difference for health care in Labrador. That was 25 years ago. We certainly are always looking for improvement, but wise people at the time took full advantage of those opportunities.

I've worked in Lab West with all of the iron ore projects over there and many others that are still being developed from the LabMag project to Alderon, the Kami program, expansion at IOC, and many others. It was a great ride. Valentine Lake is another one, and of course all the uranium development that occurred in the late 2000s through to 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 until the bottom dropped out of the uranium sector. That was another exciting rush and run at the whole situation.

I didn't want to do a full bio of my career, but what I wanted to point out is that there have been a tremendous number of projects, and each one of them is of tremendous benefit to the region and to this province. We need to, as legislators, today and going forward, always be cognizant and thinking about what we can do to help and support.

By the way, I want to make a statement. This doesn't mean that we have to shortcut the environmental assessment process. I worked in that world, and I can tell you that while we have some of the best legislation in the country, maybe in the world,

regarding the protection of our environment, it works with the resource sector such as the mining industry.

Yes, people are always anxious to get going and so on, but I can tell you, if a company is serious and they're organized and they have good support, they can get through that process very efficiently. I'm living proof. I'm very proud of the work that we used to do. I worked hand in hand, and the co-operation that you can develop with the engineers to make sure that those initial discoveries by the folks involved in the exploration phase carry through to the construction and operation.

I can tell you, if you ever get a chance, get yourselves up to Voisey's Bay and just see what has gone on there. I started working on that project in January 1995, and to see how all that upfront work, all the co-operation that ensued and so on and to still see the wilderness quality of the area. Yes, there's a big mine there. Yes, there are a lot of people working there, but I can tell you the rivers are still running clean.

My wife, that I spoke about yesterday, she used to run this rain effects monitoring program and she had sleeves of mussels that used to be deployed in Anaktalak Bay and she would go out there once a month and would be tracking, collecting these mussels. They would be analyzed, and we were looking for any kind of contaminants from the shipping that was going back and forth. A very clean operation, also very well managed and well scrutinized. I often hear these cries for shorter processes, ways to get this out of the way. I can tell you, for future generations, we should be very proud.

Glad to make that point and I guess, again, I just spoke with the Deputy Premier on some of the merits around this bill, it is providing technical clarity. It's very important. There's a lot of money involved. We need to be as transparent as possible.

I worked in Russia for 14 years and part of the work that we used to do was guiding Canadian companies through the bureaucracy, through the expectations on the regulatory side and so on. One very important aspect of that was around taxes and making sure that when you put a dollar into a relatively unstable environment such as Northern Russia, you understood exactly what that meant and what your expectations were for the various levels of government.

That's what we're doing. We're catching that up here. Making sure that, as a jurisdiction, we are second to none. We are transparent and have a very attractive investment environment for future exploration.

With that, Speaker, thanks for the opportunity

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm not going to take very long. I will say we are going to support the bill. It closes an important loophole that allows things to go forward.

I've said in this House several times, my mom was one of the first women to go to work – two women hired the same day – in Wabush mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: My dad, they both had a full career there. My brother works there, and we all know the importance of mining in this province. It's huge. We've heard the number that for every 500 finds, really, one becomes successful now. I think that's the number that's used throughout the world, not necessarily in Newfoundland because we've had some fairly significant finds.

The finds, they have to come to life and they need lots of different things to do that, whether it's electricity or water and the loopholes they have to jump through. While this bill closed some loopholes, I would strongly suggest that we find ways to close other loopholes that can make us move this sector forward.

In my role as critic for Industry, Energy and Technology, I've had lots of conversations with people in the mining industry. We hear the same thing all the time. Years ago, there was an independent department for Energy, Mines and Resources and we didn't have as much exploration and things going on as we do now. Now, as we move forward, there's a steady cry out that they need more staff in the department and a stand-alone department to look after their needs. I would urge government to have a look at that.

What we have here in this province is something that I think we've done an okay job trying to sell, but I don't know that we've done a good enough job. I'll reference, if you look at Labrador West as an example, we're bringing iron ore out of the earth that's almost 100 per cent pure. It requires very, very little refining. It's a big deal. You look at our gold finds, same thing. The gold is readily available, not a real complex process in order to extract the gold. A lot of regions don't have that.

Another one I'll talk about, and this is, for Labrador specifically, and the Member for – I always forget where the Members are from – Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair will know what I'm talking about. When you talk about Search Minerals, as an example, one of the best, richest rare earth finds in the world – and right now we see the stuff going on with tariffs and we understand what's going on with China. The next best find would be in Australia. Really, it's a race to who extracts these minerals first.

What a lot of people don't realize is that the rare earth minerals that are in Labrador are protected; they're shielded by the beautiful

land that's up there. So they have a layer of glacial till and inside of that, they have iron ore, and then inside of that, uranium. Which really makes these minerals the most sought-after in the world. Because when it comes to rare earth minerals, when water gets at them, it changes everything about them.

So our rare earth minerals are dry, pristine, ready to come out of the earth. Our actual natural landscape makes them the most accessible and valuable in the world. It's why we should be pushing as hard as we can to move forward.

Rare earth minerals are utilized in everything, whether it's electric vehicles to the military –

AN HON. MEMBER: Cellphones.

L. PARROTT: Yeah, our cellphones, everything we do.

Right now, the prime source of rare earth minerals is China. We say all the time, or I certainly say it and I think most people would agree with me, as a government, one of the biggest problems that we have in this province is our geography and how spread out we are and our population.

If we look at the ability to build these mines, and certainly if they're longer term, if they're five or 10 years we understand that it's fly-in, fly-out, but people still will move to smaller communities throughout the province and the population will grow.

Some of these larger finds with long lifespans, you look to Labrador West, Labrador West could probably still be taking ore out of the ground 100 years from now. It's incredibly important for us as a government to find a way to harness the resources, the taxes and a big part of that is to have people move here, live here permanently and become a part of our population and help us grow.

I'll close up on that. I support the bill. I think it's great. I do think there's more we can do for the mining sector. When it comes to prospecting certainly, people are out there all the time. The duration of time it takes to get a claim approved now is a little longer than it used to be and it is a problem inside the prospectors, or they tell me it is, but a lot of it is just red tape. It's not that they're getting pushed away from it, it's just the duration of how long it takes to get things done.

We should be very proud of our mining resource in this province. I would argue that we are the envy of the globe and if you look at both Newfoundland and Labrador, what they have to offer, most of which we don't even know we have yet – and that is the truth, as many claims has been staked the major finds that we have, there's so much more out there that we don't even understand.

On top of that, years ago as an example when they went to Labrador West, just to get iron ore, they didn't realize that there was dolomite or that there was value in silica or the other things that they are now using and graphite and different things that are up there, quartz, all subsequent finds based on a find that they decided to go in and mine and the second finds now are equally as valuable as some of the prime finds.

I believe out in Central there's a thought that they're going to go back in and recoup the tailings and they think there's enough gold in there in the tailings, the stuff they threw away, the waste, in order to make it viable. I just urge government to try and find more ways to not only attract, but to help people get from point A to point B easier. A part of that is the environmental process and the other parts are, like I said, if we had solid community benefit agreements in place where people knew what the cost was going to be upfront, what the expectations were, I think it would help us attract people to the province in order to access these resources.

On that note, I'm going to support the bill.

Thank you very much for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you.

Seeing no further speakers, if the hon. the Deputy Premier speaks now, she will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

As I was listening to debate – and I want to thank the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, the Member for Lab West, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, Lake Melville and, of course, Terra Nova for contributing to a respectful discussion and debate here this morning. I thought it was very interesting to listen to the contributions this morning and how we can continue to improve and grow our mining industry.

When you consider there are 8,000 people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador directly involved in the industry, it certainly speaks to how important it is to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm always proud and I was the minister for almost five years of Natural Resources and it was a source of interest, pride and encouragement to always hear and always participate in so much opportunity and development that we have in our mining industry.

The Member for Terra Nova used the words "envy of the globe," and I would echo his sentiments and thoughts. I can tell you that I have to, on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, go out and raise money and talk to investors and one of the things I speak of, quite frequently, is the opportunities in our mining industry.

It's not just the opportunities for future development, which we have tremendous amounts – the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair said, as the debate was going on this morning, we only scratched the surface of Labrador and I said, literally. We have so much opportunity. When I speak of everything from the rare earth minerals and I would add the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay talked about the gold rush and he talked about copper, the opportunities in lithium in the province and rare earth and copper and gold and the high-quality iron ore, it is astounding what we have here.

When I speak to investors about those opportunities and then add on our hydroelectricity, our hydrogen, our oil, our gas, it is almost overwhelming for them to hear of this and it makes me very, very proud.

I did listen intently to debate and I did listen and understand the challenges around the roadwork because I've driven on the roads that were mentioned. They do take a lot of the weight of the mining industry and there are a lot of big trucks going over them. That is one of the reasons, when I became Minister of Finance, I think I shocked the Minister of Transportation and really did put that \$1 billion in. We do need to upgrade our roads in this province. It's not just in the mining areas; it is all over the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have tremendous opportunities in tourism, opportunities in mining, opportunities in the fisheries, in hydrogen. We're just blessed. We're so blessed in this province. That's why I think it's so good to have respectful debate because ministers are listening to those that are contributing to debate and making notes. I know I make notes. I have many, many notes about where the roadwork is really required and what needs to be done.

The Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay talked about environmental assessment for

one of the mines in his area and making sure that's streamlined. I think the Member for Lake Melville spoke very wisely when he said you can streamline and, at the same time, have a strong environmental assessment, and I echo him on that.

I do want to give, again, before I close, a shout-out to the labour, the people that are employed, the workers, the incredible contributions to society that they make. It's great that we have 8,000 direct workers in the mining industry, but they're also big contributors in their communities, and I would say big contributors to our global economy. So I want to specifically say thank you to them, today –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: – and recognize I think – well, I don't want to have any hubris, but I think we have some of the best workers in the world come from Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: That's not my opinion; that is the opinion I hear all across Canada and around the world when I visit various countries or have the opportunity to travel. I always hear about, you know, I know in Newfoundland they're the best workers, and I agree. We are strong and tenacious and proud of the work that we do, so I wanted to make sure I said that.

I did listen as well on the gas tax. Just for clarity, it is exempt during pre-production and exploration, and of course, it's deductible in calculating taxable income after a mine has been developed, but we'll certainly take that into consideration. I know the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture certainly was listening to debate and talking about the timber rights and how to make improvements there.

I will thank everyone for their contributions this morning. I specifically want to thank Members of the House of Assembly for their

contributions during this debate, but during all debate. I know two of the speakers this morning, the Member for Lake Melville and the Member for Labrador West, will not be in this House after the next election, and of course, we are moving towards that election date. I just wanted to thank them for the contributions they made to the House of Assembly, to Newfoundland and Labrador, to their communities and say I've always appreciated their involvement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat, and we'll look forward to questions.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 108 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 (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8. (Bill 108)

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

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

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8," read a second time, ordered referred to a

Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 108)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, that this House do now resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 108, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8, and that is seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 108.

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 (Trimper): Order, please!

We are now considering in this Committee of the Whole Bill 108, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8." (Bill 108)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To start, when we talk about exploration expenditures that's in the initial phase of the Lassonde curve for mining, if we look at mining and mining investment – and I fully echo the minister's comment with regard to providing clarity and certainty. That really struck me as to where we are then early on with regard to both enticing and encouraging mining investment and accelerating from what was highlighted with regard to exploration opportunities into mining.

On that, as I highlighted, one of the other risks that we have related to this in providing clarity and certainty is the Bowater act. Is there any plan to review it with regard to the impact on our mining industry?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

I couldn't speak directly to that particular act because it does not fit in within Finance. I can say, I know the Minister of FFA, the Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, is listening intently today and will take note of your suggestions around that act.

We are constantly, I know, since the time that I was in as the minister of Natural Resources, always looking to improve the processing around mining and ensuring that we can very well manage both the exploration as well as the development of the mines.

I know that when I was minister of Natural Resources, we developed the *Mining the Future* and it was a plan and I know it's been implemented or in the final phases now of being implemented because we do have incredible opportunities here.

I would say to the Member opposite, while I can't directly, while we're discussing this act, I can assure the Member that it is taken note of and his thoughts around that it should be considered, will be considered.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: My second and last question, again, here in the early phase of the Lassonde curve, and this comes back to on the prospecting side and, again, helping our prospectors. We have a resource room that's available to them and that's the Matty Mitchell Prospectors Resource Room. That capacity resource room has been closed for an extended period of time.

I kindly ask of government, what is the plan to reopen it and when?

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

I echo the Member opposite's point about the Matty Mitchell Prospectors Resource Room. I know a lot of prospectors. I know how important it is in the exploration, and I'll take that under advisement of the minister who will investigate. He's not here today, but I will certainly take it under advisement to see when that can be reopened. I wasn't aware personally that it had been closed. It is a good resource for the mining industry.

I have to say, we have some incredible exploration activity happening in the province. Our prospectors and what they've been able to achieve – and I listened to debate and I know the Member for Lake Melville was making comments about how those prospectors, actually, are doing the early, early findings. We have so much opportunity there. It is important and I'll take it under advisement.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further speakers?

Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Clause 1 is carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Clause 2 is carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The enacting clause is carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8. (Bill 108)

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

It's carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 108, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Thank you.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 108 carried without amendment; seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

CHAIR: It has been moved and seconded that this Committee of the Whole do rise and report Bill 108 carried without amendment.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

All those against, 'nay.'

Thank you.

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 Lake Melville and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have directed me to report that Bill 108, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 8, has been carried forward without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report that Bill 108 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 Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that this House do now stand in recess until 2 p.m.

SPEAKER: This House do stand recessed until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit visitors.

First of all, it's good to see such a good crowd in the public galleries today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I just want to welcome everyone to the House of Assembly but I'd also like to recognize and welcome in the Speaker's Gallery today Reverend Wishart and his son David. They are here this afternoon for a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery, I'd like to also welcome, visiting for a Member's statement, Mila Lilly and her parents Bruce and Simone.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Joining us this afternoon for a Ministerial Statement is Eli Peach, Mehak Humayun, Darwin Anderson and Jayda Crummey.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Stephenville - Port au Port, Ferryland, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Topsail - Paradise and Terra Nova.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

"Leave it in God's hands; he will look after it." These are the words that Sylvia Oliver

lived by. Today, I rise to honour the recent passing of a special lady in my district who has given so much to her family and to the community of Mainland on the Port au Port Peninsula.

Sylvia Oliver, born in Stephenville, was the eldest of eight children. At the age of 18, she began her vocation in education, taking up a teaching position in Winter Houses for a year before moving on to Mainland where she would go on to marry and leave an indelible mark on that community.

Self-taught to be fluent in French, Sylvia was a dedicated advocate for Francophone rights in Newfoundland and Labrador and a proud member of the province's Francophone School Board.

Sylvia was a woman of deep faith and service known for her unwavering devotion to her church and community. Alongside her beloved husband, the late Howard Oliver, Sylvia fostered over 300 children from communities in Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – raising many as her own. Her legacy lives on in the lives she has touched. My condolences to her family, friends and the community of Mainland.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize two groups in the District of Ferryland, one from the Town of Bay Bulls and another from the Town of Witless Bay.

Ms. Margie Dinn brought forward the idea that a community food-sharing pantry was

needed for the Town of Bay Bulls and, on April 16, 2025, the town received its first official donation from the Living Faith Program. This donation was presented by Joel and Nathan Windsor, Jack and Parker Clowe and Ms. Patsy O'Brien.

Many thanks to the HMP Carpentry Program for building a beautifully custom-crafted pantry, which is now located outside the Town of Bay Bulls office, and to all community members who supported and helped in any way to complete this project.

A few years back a community food-sharing pantry located at the Puffin Centre on Southside Track was organized by the Kinsmen Club of Witless Bay and supported by the Witless Bay Home Hardware and the Town of Witless Bay. The Kinsmen Club of Witless Bay still play an enormous role in maintaining this community project.

Please join me in congratulating all those who played and continue to play a role in these two wonderful community projects.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

L. PADDOCK: Headquartered in Springdale, Green Bay Ground Search and Rescue serves all Green Bay as well as the Baie Verte Peninsula. This team was re-established in February 2023 by committed area volunteers who sought to help in addressing public safety and emergency response needs.

Since re-establishment, the team has grown to 20 members who undertake regular training. The Green Bay team operates under the Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association, and they are now organized to assist the RCMP with any type of search and rescue incident.

Over the past four months, they undertook a fundraising effort in hopes of acquiring a second-hand utility vehicle to support their training and call-out missions. That fundraising was led by team member, Moody Roberts, who passionately approached area businesses and other patrons.

Given the phenomenal response from that fundraising, the team now has plans on a brand new 2025 utility rescue truck. It is wonderful to see first responders step up and, likewise, to see them supported in such an overwhelming manner with timely donations from businesses, service clubs and area residents.

Please join me in wishing the Green Bay Ground Search and Rescue continued success with all their future missions and endeavours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

For some, being a published writer is the work of a lifetime, but Mila Lilly of Paradise was able to do it while still attending Octagon Pond Elementary.

Mila is the author of *Mr. Monkey: Detective Agency: The Case of the Missing Banana*. The concept came about after her mother bought her a stuffed toy monkey while on a trip to Halifax and, hence, the eponymous character, Mr. Monkey, came to be. Mila, now 10 years old, was nine when the book was published.

Mila has a love of poetry, writing and short stories. After initially writing the book for school and reading it to a Grade 3 class, one of her school friends told her she should publish it and so she did and published it on Amazon. Her book is now at

her school library and in the Little Free Library at Crooked Creek Convenience.

Lilly is working on another book, another Mr. Monkey book. She says her next book will be titled Mr. Monkey: The Case of the Missing Cookbook and will include some banana recipes.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to Mila's next book and ask all Members to join me in congratulating Mila on her literary success.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as a veteran, I am honoured today to salute and thank Reverend Dr. Major Ian S. Wishart, C.D. Words can't summarize his life but I'll try and do it briefly.

Reverend Wishart was educated at Royal Roads Military College; Trinity College, University of Toronto; New College University in Edinburgh, Scotland; and Göttingen University in Göttingen, Germany. He has authored a book of poetry, a book of Common Order and book about the German Philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher.

Reverend Wishart arrived in St. John's in 1972, taking up ministry at The Kirk, and presided over the congregation until his retirement in 1998. Some would argue whether or not he's ever retired, as he still remains the Chaplain of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Newfoundland Militia District, Branch 56 of the Royal Canadian Legion and Provincial Command of the Royal Canadian Legion.

For over 50 years, Reverend Wishart has been the chaplain at Remembrance Day services at the National War Memorial. He marched each year until recently, but proudly brings a prayer of remembrance at these services still, at the age of 94. His son

David told me last week that Dad stands taller and sounds prouder each year as he prays for those fallen comrades.

I'd like for all Members to rise and recognize the Reverend Dr. Major Ian S. Wishart, CD, for his service and ministry for the people of this province, for our fallen soldiers, our living soldiers and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I stand to acknowledge four outstanding youth joining us here today in our gallery for their radio and video work addressing workplace injury prevention.

Congratulations to Eli Peach of Southwest Arm Academy, Little Heart's Ease, Darwin Anderson and Jayda Crummey of Holy Spirit High School in Conception Bay South and Mehak Humayun of Macdonald Drive Junior High in St. John's.

They are the 2025 award recipients of WorkplaceNL's Student Safety Video and Radio Ad Contest encouraging junior and senior high school students in the province to share the message that we must always be aware of potential hazards on the job. You can see and hear these winning submissions on WorkplaceNL's YouTube channel.

Sharing the perspectives and voices of our students and young workers is crucial to effectively promote workplace safety and health across Newfoundland and Labrador, and I encourage more students to get involved.

Young workers, aged 15 to 24 years, are typically at higher risk of injury on the job. WorkplaceNL continues to invest in programs that engage youth to become more aware of workplace safety and injury prevention.

Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in this honourable House to congratulate Eli, Darwin, Jayda and Mehak.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

The PC caucus would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the remarkable youth who have been recognized with awards for their outstanding achievements. These young individuals exemplify the potential that comes from engaging and empowering our youth from an early age. By fostering their talents and encouraging their active participation, we not only build on their confidence, but also cultivate the leaders of tomorrow.

However, as we celebrate those achievements, we must remind the government of its responsibility to implement effective prevention strategies and enforce strong laws that protect workers in all sectors. It is crucial that we work together to ensure that every employee can work in safe and healthy environments. The safety of our workforce should always be priority, as it lays the foundations for a thriving community and a brighter future for our youth.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I congratulate the winners of the contest: Eli, Darwin, Jayda and Mehak.

Students are out looking for their summer jobs right now. They want to know that workplaces are safe across this province. So we call upon government to make sure to work towards having safety inspections available online so people looking for work can know to make sure that the workplace is safe, to make sure that training and resources are available to our young workers as they go out to look for these jobs, to make sure that we keep them safe and teach them good working habits to make sure that their workplace is safe and to make sure that they know they have the right to refuse unsafe work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to congratulate the College of the North Atlantic on being recognized by Research Infosource as one of Canada's Top 50 Research Colleges in 2024.

I am proud to share that, for the first time, the college has placed in the top 10. This report from Research Infosource places College of the North Atlantic at the forefront of applied research through the Office of Applied Research and Innovation and the NL Workforce Innovation Centre.

Speaker, the report also gave the College of the North Atlantic other significant rankings in the medium-sized college category, including ranking first nationwide in Granting Council Research Income Growth, in which the college experienced an increase of more than 1,000 per cent.

In addition, the college ranked third in Canada for research income; second in Canada for research income growth; and second in Canada for research intensity – this is impressive stuff.

I want to extend congratulations to the team at the College of the North Atlantic for their work and their dedication in pushing forward with innovation in applied research which contributes to the workforce and economic development in our province.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, it is great to highlight the extraordinary educational institute which we call the College of the North Atlantic. Education is not an expense; it is an investment, and the college demonstrates this every day. Countless graduates of the college contribute immensely to our workforce in many roles. They are a reflection of the diverse offerings and the top-tier education provided.

We, the Official Opposition, pass along a huge congratulations to the students, faculty and support staff involved for their well-deserved new position in the country's Top 50 Research Colleges last year. Landing within the top 10 is certainly no small feat.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of this statement.

Research doesn't just magically appear; it requires teachers and students, and they require funding. The money is an investment because those people then use their knowledge to innovate, grow our economy and create new jobs.

We encourage government to heed this advice and treat Memorial University as the resource it truly is as well, so that both the college and the university can continue to be centres of excellence for education, research and innovation.

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, new data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information exposes this Liberal government's failure to provide timely cancer care in our province. Between April and September of 2023, Newfoundland and Labrador met the national benchmark for timely cancer treatment in just 57 per cent of cases.

Why are cancer patients in Newfoundland and Labrador waiting longer than anywhere else in the country?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

The Member opposite raises a very important issue here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we do recognize that we have some of the highest rates of cancer across the country.

Speaker, we've made significant progress in our screening initiatives, and that is the first step. Prevention is how we address some of these numbers. Just today, I had the opportunity to stand with the CEO of NLHS, as well as the chief of gastroenterology, and we announced a screening tool that will be available on the MyHealthNL app, opening access so that individuals aged 40-plus can now have the opportunity to self-refer for a lot of these preventative measures.

That's one step that we use in our efforts to improve cancer care here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, the evidence is clear that timely cancer treatment is critical for improving outcomes – timely cancer treatment – yet, while the national average for timely care was at 94 per cent, our province lagged far behind at just 57 per cent.

I ask the minister: Why are we failing patients in desperate need of life-saving treatment?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

There are often many things that play into a timeline for surgical interventions or disease

treatments, not the least of which has been some of our staffing issues. We've worked diligently on our recruitment and retention efforts.

I think the most important thing that we recognize in any disease process is the prevention aspect. We've been able to certainly decrease some of the numbers and, as Dr. McGrath was able to allude to earlier today, here in Newfoundland and Labrador we've reduced our wait times for colonoscopies, which is one of the most preventative steps in terms of colorectal cancer. We are now operating within the national benchmark for colonoscopy referrals and conducting those.

We certainly do have work to do but we recognize that there are steps that will lead us to the most appropriate timelines and we're continuing to work on that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, here again, we are reminded of the significant backlogs that we face in rural Newfoundland and Labrador continuously. In 2022, this province actually met the national benchmark 94 per cent of the time with a dramatic difference with little change in the number of patients.

Can the minister explain why the Liberal government is now failing cancer patients in their time of need?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said, when you're talking about cancer care, one of the most important steps is prevention and screening. That's why we've been able to invest significantly in our screening measures. We've opened up the

referrals and the availability of breast cancer screening to individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador by lowering the age. We've also done significant work on cervical cancer in opening up the screening for HPV. That's another important part of preventative measures for cancer treatment.

There are investments that have been made into the screening process for lung cancer. Again, that is the first step. We want to ensure that, if we can prevent these diseases from happening, we won't have to face the consequences of treatments and the immense pressure that it puts on individuals who experience these diseases. By preventing them from happening in the first place, we're alleviating some of those stresses on (inaudible) –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, it's good that the minister can talk about things that have been opened up, but let me talk about things that have not been opened. The long-promised radiation unit at the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital remains mothballed. After 10 years, the Liberal government still has failed to recruit a radiation oncologist.

Is this failure to recruit a specialist part of the reason cancer patients cannot access the treatment they need?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Member opposite referenced, this is a very specialized type of physician that we are attempting to recruit. We are encouraged with conversations that we've had with individuals who fall within that specialty group, that will be able to staff that unit.

As we talked about last week, by opening the second unit here in St. John's, it allowed us now the opportunity to be an accredited provider in this type of care. That will allow us to produce our own isotopes here in Newfoundland and Labrador, which will allow us to transfer between St. John's and Corner Brook instead of having to rely on an outside source.

It was important that we received that benchmark so now that is an additional tool as we recruit for that specific position. We now offer an accredited service which will attract highly qualified individuals to work here in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we have been told that two family physicians in Lewisporte have not been reappointed to medical staff and are at risk of leaving.

I ask the minister: Why haven't they been reappointed to practice in Lewisporte?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly our intention to work with any individual, any physicians or any health care providers who want to operate here in Newfoundland and Labrador. If there is a barrier that's in place for those two individuals, we will certainly be investigating

that to remove that barrier. We don't want to see anybody leave our system. Whatever the measures that need to be implemented, we'll certainly take those actions and we'll have that addressed as soon as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

From what we're being told, government are well aware of this issue. It's not a new issue but it's dragged on.

Speaker, this husband and wife family physician team serve the people of the Lewisporte area and now the residents are at risk of losing them. Can you tell us why this is happening?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Member opposite is well aware, the physicians have incredible mobility within their profession. I can't chain them on to clinics. I can't make sure that they are available in certain areas if they choose not to be there, but I can speak to what we've done to attract and retain professionals.

We've offered significant bonuses for individuals who wish to practice in rural settings. We've offered compensation for education. We've offered increased access to supports for these individuals and we'll continue to build on our recruitment and retention plan. In the meantime, there are certainly avenues that we can explore by means of other opportunities for access to primary care in utilizing nurse practitioners, as well as virtual care, and those are options that we intend to explore in that area.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Minister, those doctors are here and they want to stay. Why have they not been offered a job? It's not about recruitment, they're there and they want the position now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I can't speak to specifics of HR negotiations, but I can certainly say that if there are things that we do as a government and as department that we would be willing to work with those individuals to meet whatever it is that they are expressing they need to stay in those positions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The people of the Lewisporte area deserve answers. Let me ask another question, Minister.

Can you confirm that the chief of family medicine for Central Region does not reside in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

K. HOWELL: That's a question that would be better suited for NLHS, but I will ask that

question and get back to the Member opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, we've been told that the chief of family medicine resides in Ontario and spends four days a month in the province.

Can you confirm that the chief of medicine's clinic in Ontario also provides virtual care in this province, including the Lewisporte area?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As said, operational issues such as that would be better suited to be asked to NLHS, but I do recognize that there are particular challenges and times when we rely on virtual clinics and virtual services. In events where there cannot be coverage on the ground, then that is certainly an option that we will pursue to make sure that services are available. There's no reason why, at times when they are needed, we can't utilize virtual care.

If there are instances where that's not appropriate, then that won't be the first course of action but there are certainly times when virtual care is the most appropriate course of action, or other types of care, be it through Teladoc, be it through nurse practitioner services, be it through Family Care Teams. All of these are the conglomerate that we used to provide progressive primary care to people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The minister knows this is not about virtual care, I'm asking a specific question.

So, Minister, you're not concerned about this potential conflict of interest? This is a very glaring conflict of interest and it's something you should be concerned about. Are you willing to investigate and get to the bottom of it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said to the Member opposite, these are questions that are better suited for Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services but I'll certainly communicate with them and make sure that we have an appropriate response because we don't want to have any types of conflict, but we certainly do recognize that there are times when we need to think outside the box and be creative in how we provide services in a time when health care is in such a difficult position.

We are willing to do that. We want to do it within the confines that we have, certainly being accountable and transparent in the measures that we use.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thinking outside the box is a little different than thinking outside the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I raised the issue of postal codes in rural Newfoundland sending emergency responders to the wrong locations. I was told, “my department are quite happy to work through Municipal Affairs to deal with the issue of locations of premises and properties in a way that gets around the need for postal codes.”

I ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs: What exactly is your department doing to help?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very, Speaker.

Further to my comments yesterday, I have gone back to 911. They do not ask for a postal code. When a call is placed to 911, they ask for a location.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, they do not.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HAGGIE: That location can either be a community, a highway marker – and I would encourage people who use the highway rarely to use those – or a general area.

The call is then routed to whichever emergency service is required. In the instance that the person does not know where they are and they are calling from a cell phone, we have access directly through the telecom providers to automatic location from that cell phone. That will be supplied by 911 to the appropriate emergency services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: This is just another example of a minister with a title but no responsibility. The question was for Municipal Affairs.

Yesterday the minister also said, and these are his words: The facts are we acknowledge that postal codes and civic addresses do not work in rural Newfoundland. People are indeed asked for postal codes.

Since raising the issue yesterday, will the minister direct emergency dispatch to stop asking for postal codes and instead use landmarks and specific directions to ensure a timely response?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

This is a period in the House when the Opposition get to ask questions. It is up to this side of the House to determine who answers those questions. I am dealing with these questions.

Speaker, 911 does not ask for postal codes; they ask for an idea of location. We have worked with municipalities directly to avoid the issue of civic addresses. Civic addresses are not needed by any branch of 911 currently. We are now working on a system with GIS mapping directly to a cell or a land line number, and that is ongoing. We have 70 communities done already and we continue to work through the rest.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: It’s funny how the minister of spin yesterday said it was a problem. He said it was a problem that they needed to acknowledge and they knew it before it was implemented. Today, it is not a problem; they don’t do it.

Everyone who calls my office, makes a comment or calls anyone else's office are telling us the same thing, as are the dispatchers and the people that are waiting for ambulances. So somebody is not putting out the full truth here. The integration of 911 and central dispatch has created risk in delays and timely responses in rural parts of our province.

It's a simple question: When is it going to be fixed?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have a working group between the three departments concerned, Health particularly, myself with Fire and Emergency Services and the 911 Division, and with municipal and provincial affairs. There is also a Cabinet-level Committee to deal with this as well.

We are in the process of working through it. We have the resources to do it and we're working on it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, if I may give the minister an example of ambulance wait times in rural Newfoundland. On June 19, 2024, a 54-minute wait. Recently, on April 5, the response was 50 minutes and, again, on May 1, it was 1 hour and 15 minutes. These times are from the department records.

Will the minister admit that the new ambulance program is failing the constituents in the District of Bonavista?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Member has referenced, we have done significant work as we've integrated ambulance services into 911 and into government. There is still much work to be done. We do recognize that some of these things are different fits for our rural communities, and that's certainly a perspective that I have and I recognize that.

There are different aspects of a response time for an ambulance that might be problematic, and we know right now that we are experiencing some significant wait times in terms of our off-load delay. Ambulances are often held up and aren't returned to service as quickly as we would like them to be for a number of reasons, but we do have a plan in place to address some of those issues, particularly around the areas where emergency services may be delayed or emergency rooms may be overfilled with people who are waiting –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Residents in my district are not only concerned about ambulance wait times, but they're also concerned about the closures of the ER at Bonavista hospital.

Will the minister promise that the ER doors will remain open in Bonavista 24-7 with a physician or a nurse practitioner on site?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

We recognize that there are certainly challenges in some of the emergency departments in our rural communities particularly, and we've been able to make great strides in reducing the number of closures as well as diversions.

This is largely in part to our recruitment and retention efforts, as well as the introduction of virtual care. In many instances, this is why these emergency centres can remain open. We've had great feedback from those who are conducting these services on the front line. We'll continue to build that into our plan and we'll continue our robust recruitment and retention effort.

But, as I said before, we can't really make people stay in an area. We can only give them the incentives to make them want to come and stay and that's certainly part of the plan that we're building and we'll continue to utilize all across the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

Earlier this week, I asked the Minister of Environment why this Liberal government supports an access-card system that's blocking people, especially seniors, from cleaning out their properties in communities.

Now that he had time to think about it, will the minister finally tell us does he support this policy – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

S. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, the Regional Service Boards, which the former administration set up, are responsible for setting up operational policies on waste recovery facilities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We recognize that there are many challenges with implementing this and we're willing to work with these boards and municipalities to try to overcome some of these systems. We, certainly, recognize the need for improvement here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, this government has been here 10 years and haven't got this ironed out yet.

Speaker, yesterday, the minister took a question under advisement, twice. He had a night to sleep on it and I'll ask it again.

Will he direct the Eastern Regional Service Board to scrap the flawed card system at the waste recovery sites that are turning people away and replace it with something that actually works?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

S. REID: Mr. Speaker, we don't have the authority to tell the board – the way the former administration set that up, that's the way it is. We're willing to work with them and work with municipalities to overcome these issues, and we recognize that there are a number of problems there.

So, Mr. Speaker, in terms of 10 years to fix the problem, there are a lot of problems the former administration created that it's going to take more than 10 years to address if the Member wants to get down to it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, I raised concerns about the many issues with schools such as Larkhall Academy to which the response was – and I quote – we have a big, long list of improvements and fixes. As if it was something to be proud of. These issues still exist as another school year comes to an end.

What measures are in place now to ensure all schools are ready in advance of next year?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Obviously, it's very important for us on this side of the House of Assembly as well as all Members of this House of Assembly to have our schools safe, have our schools very well maintained. We're working towards that. Obviously, things come up when you have buildings that are different ages and different levels of build-out that have happened over the years.

We're working very closely with Transportation and Infrastructure who's responsible for the envelope of the schools. We're really working very hard to identify those issues that exist in schools, work on a plan to get them fixed, and part of the plan is replacement of schools that you'll see here in the very near future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: It's interesting, the minister mentioned safe schools. I raised a health and safety issue yesterday regarding the furnace problems at Larkhall Academy, to which the response was: "I'm not aware of an issue today ..." despite several ministers being sent an email on the matter.

If the minister responsible for Occupational Health and Safety can't respond to an urgent health and safety issue, what level of confidence can you give that any response will be forthcoming in a timely manner?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for a question.

Any time you have operating mechanical equipment in any school, there is a potential chance for it to break down, whether it be a new furnace or an old furnace, whether it be an air handling unit or any of those type of things. When those issues occur in a school, there are decisions made on what is the best course of action for the safety of the school community, both staff, students and faculty that are there. We work very closely with those, working with Transportation and Infrastructure on a regular basis to ensure those don't happen.

Any time you put a mechanical infrastructure in the school, it has the potential to fail. We look at those, we evaluate them, and we try to fix them as fast as we possibly can. The hon. Member is well aware that we get those concerns on, I won't say a regular basis, but it does come up from time to time just like it would in your regular home.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: That's an interesting response, given that Larkhall Academy should have been closed years ago.

Given the complaints we continue to hear about buses stopping on four-lane highways with little, if any, safe place for the kids to wait, what plan is in place to ensure young

students will be picked up and dropped off at safe locations in the coming school year?

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

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, the safety of children on our buses or anywhere in the province on any vehicle is of utmost importance.

I say to the Member opposite, I don't know if there are specifics that you're referring to. If there are, bring them to me, and I will happily sit down with you, address it and to make sure that our children are safe in all places in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

These issues, specific issues, were brought forward. I understand the minister is in a different role now, but I would have expected the previous minister to share those.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: These are safety issues.

Schools open each year missing key, core teachers and many vacancies.

What will be done next year? What measures will be taken to ensure these key roles and positions are filled well in advance of the school starting?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All I can say is that the \$20-million investment that we've made in this budget is

going to drastically improve that situation. It's going to put more than 400 educators in the school system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Everyone on this side of the House voted for that; everyone on the other side did not.

All I can say is that every school in this province is a priority for us to try to work with and make sure those resources are in place. I'm a new minister in this role. I really want to get as much resource as we can to the schools, because that's our future.

Those children that are in our trust in those schools, we want to make sure they have the best educational opportunities, not just in schools, but as their future progresses, to make sure that those decisions that they make are going to be the best ones for this province and the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Will we expect to see construction start on the divided highway from Bishop's Falls to Grand Falls-Windsor this year?

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

E. LOVELESS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that this government has invested in our highways like no other government has before.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: In terms of that roadwork to be done in Central, which I advocate for because my district does lie on the border of Central Newfoundland – no doubt about it – that work will continue. It's started but we'll

see more as the summer months unfold. I'm sure the Member will be happy to see it and so will I.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday, the minister of Housing said that government's role is to make sure seniors and other low-income families have a place to call home. These are pretty words.

Speaker, Sarah is a single mother of five children on maternity leave from her job as a home care worker and facing a no-fault eviction as of July 1. She has applied to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing who offered support if she found a place to rent. The prices of the 15 properties she has viewed so far range in price from \$2,400 a month and up.

I ask the minister: What steps will he take to ensure that this mother and her five children have a place to live on July 1?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Obviously, the Member identifies a very specific case and I won't address that specifically.

What I will tell the House, and in my conversations with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, when we have families in need, families who are in distress, we will make sure we address their housing needs. Whether we provide them with a rental subsidy or whether we can

provide them with a housing unit itself is determined on the situation.

So, obviously, we will work with any family to make sure their housing needs are met.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, there are real people being affected here.

Speaker, the Canada Housing Benefit and financial support are thoroughly inadequate and have not kept pace with market rental increases. Since the minister lacks a political backbone to implement rent and vacancy controls on large, financialized landlords –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: – will he demand increases in the Canadian Housing Benefit –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I will ask the Member to retract that statement, please.

J. DINN: I will gladly retract it – intestinal fortitude then and increase provincial supports to offset the high rents people are facing?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Modernization and Service Delivery.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I would be happy to chat about rent controls. I have thought a lot about this. I have done a lot of research. When you look at the data across the country, provinces with rental controls have higher rental

increases than provinces without rental controls.

This is a complicated, multi-layered issue. It would require us to add bureaucracy, add red tape and add a whole other government department. It would require the landlords to apply hearing processes. All of that drives up rental rates and Newfoundland and Labrador have lower increases than provinces with rent control. I will continue to monitor this. It is very important and very serious.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Monitoring will not help this family find a place to live.

Speaker, at a meeting on April 24, the Acting Minister of Housing assured me there were no plans to sell off the properties on Livingstone Street destroyed by the March 27 fire. In a recent letter from the current Minister of Housing, he states there is no decision on what the future use of this property will be.

Will the minister commit that he will not sell the property to a private developer, like he did with 106-108 Livingstone Street, and instead rebuild the Newfoundland and Labrador homes on the site or turn it over to not for profits, like the Co-operative Housing Association?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker.

In terms of vacant units and, in this case, units that have been destroyed by fire, we assess each replacement option on its own merit. For those who are familiar with

Livingstone Street and, in particular, the area that the Member is speaking of, you would not replace a unit there. It is not suitable and we will not be putting good money after a bad situation.

However, we will work with the community association and others to determine how best to use that site going forward.

Thank you. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Speaker, there is a shortage of long-term care beds in the Corner Brook-Bay of Islands area. Newfoundland Health Services are encouraging families to keep their loved ones home with supports. One of the main supports is home care workers.

While the concept of keeping your loved ones home is noble, there is a shortage of home care workers. I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: How can our seniors stay at home without these services, and what steps are your government doing to increase the numbers of home care workers needed and to retain these workers?

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

The Member opposite raises a very important issue in terms of how we deal with supporting seniors and those individuals who need long-term care. The paramount decision is to keep these individuals in their homes as long as possible and that requires significant support.

We've done a number of things to build the capacity to do that by increasing the caregiver support grants. We've introduced our home modification grants that allow us

to make modifications to an individual's home to make it more appropriate for them to stay there. We've also offered our Aging Well grant.

All of these things are measures that will apply to families but, as we look at the supports that are required for home care workers, we've also made some steps in the right direction. We've introduced –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: I say to the minister, there is a shortage in Western Newfoundland, just for your record.

In our long-term care facilities and hospitals there's a critical shortage of personal care attendants. I wrote the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services on April 7 concerning five international students who completed the program. They were offered temporary work, but to keep their visas they need requirements of full-time employment. We need these workers and they should be hired as full-time employees, as the need is vital and these students are well trained and willing to stay in the Corner Brook area.

Can the minister give this House an update of this letter of April 7, 2025, and I trust it will be a positive response for these workers.

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to add to my previous answer that we've been able to work with the agencies responsible for home care workers and we've been able to offer them some incentives and increase their wages, as well

as introducing a travel allowance for those individuals who have to move between different communities in order to find their place of employment.

To the question that the Member just raised, we do recognize that there are gaps in the personal care attendants in Western, and all across the province, but the particular instances that he had mention do fall under a collective agreement. They have to be posted by NLHS and individuals then are hired based on a seniority basis; but if there are individuals who are interested in working, we certainly will work with them to develop a plan so that we can see more individuals on the front lines providing this very important service to the members of the public.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: 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 Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to move the following resolution: Resolution respecting the appointment of Members of the Independent Appointments Commission.

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Assembly as follows:

WHEREAS section 6(3) of the *Independent Appointments Commission Act* provides that members of the Independent Appointments Commission are to be appointed by the

Lieutenant-Governor in Council on a resolution of the House of Assembly; and

WHEREAS section 7(1) of the act states that a commissioner may be reappointed; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the following commissioner expired on May 25, 2025: Karen McCarthy, Chairperson; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the following commissioners expires on May 25, 2025: William Mahoney, Brendan Mitchell and Jamie Schwartz; and

WHEREAS it is proposed that the said commissioners be reappointed as commissioners for a term of 3 years from the date of the expiry of their terms; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the following commissioner expired on May 6, 2025, and is not eligible for reappointment: Cathy Duke; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the following commissioners expires on June 25, 2025, and are not eligible for reappointment: Peggy Bartlett and Gerald Anderson.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the following persons be appointed or reappointed as members of the Independent Appointments Commission for a term of 3 years: Karen McCarthy, chairperson; William Mahoney, Brendan Mitchell, Jamie Schwartz, Karen Skinner, Nancy Ruth Healey and Rex A. Goudie.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

This morning I was asked a question about the Matty Mitchell room which is housed within the Industry, Energy and Technology Department.

I did investigate; that room is a joint initiative between mining NL and IET, Industry, Energy and Technology, and is funded by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agencies and the Department of IET. They're working through a memorandum of understanding with mining NL as we speak that contemplates a position and delivering of prospecting supports. The MOU, the memorandum of understanding, is being finalized and then recruitment for the position can commence.

So it's eminent and under active involvement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

Petitions

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

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons and background for this petition are as follows:

There is a dire need to address several environmental issues in the community of Main Point-Davidsville, as presented to the

Local Service District committee by residents.

Erosion of coastal shoreline that is rapidly washing away land and road; overgrowth in ditches along the sides of the main road causing water flow, drainage and flooding issues; poor upkeep and trenching of the gravel sideroads that become pits of mud because of the lack of drainage, creating safety issues for those living on these sideroads.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to use tiered layers of large rocks along the shoreline in the communities to prevent further erosion damage. This erosion is bad enough in many areas that the shoulders of the roads have started to wash out. It's only a matter of time before this will cause sections of road to collapse. Clear the overgrowth from the ditches and properly trench them so water can run freely through the culverts and not cause flooding; proper trenching, grading and overlaying of gravel sideroads for proper water runoff. Currently, the water has nowhere to go, so it sits on the gravel and makes it a mud pit.

Speaker, I was invited to go down to that area of my district and I saw the deplorable conditions of the roads there and the ditches. It's a lack of the Department of TI not to address this issue. It's getting worse. I advise that they should be more proactive than reactive because, at the end of the day, this is going to get to a point where it's going to cost the taxpayers of this province a lot more money to put back into what you call a decent road and trenching.

Therefore, I ask the minister to address this at his earliest convenience.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Those home support personnel being paid for by the Department of Health and Community Services are receiving much less pay than those unionized home support workers, which are also being paid by the government. In fact, with the latest negotiated increase in April 2025, we have a pay differential of \$2.40 per hour, both being paid by government.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to address the discrepancy in pay for those doing the same home care support but receiving far less pay. This immediate adjustment would be in keeping with the Pay Equity and Pay Transparency Act passed in this hon. House in October 2022.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, minutes ago, the Minister of Health and Community Services was addressing the question posed by the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands. In her response, she said that we want to keep the people in their homes as long as possible. We agree. She also said that we put better support into the agencies that are looking after those people that are living in their homes. We agree.

But under the spirit of pay equity, why in the world wouldn't those employees being paid directly by the Department of Health and Community Services doing the same job receive the same pay as those in the agencies?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Now, this has been raised before in the House, and we give it a certain period of time to say make it right, and we haven't. We have not made it right, and this

seems to be a decision that can easily be made to say, we've got parity.

We all know who negotiated the home care workers support, who signed off on it was government, but the employees that are doing the exact same work out in the system, supporting seniors and supporting others, those with disabilities in their own homes get paid far less, and that is not correct.

So under the spirit of pay equity, which the government celebrated when they put the act on the floor in 2022, they celebrated quite significantly, but we have, Speaker, no regulations since 2022 for this stuff in order to make corrections, equal pay for equal work is what we decided. We ask government to please make it right.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday and pretty well 3 o'clock, I'll call upon the Member for Harbour Main to put forward the private Member's resolution that we'll be debating today.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Terra Nova, the following private Member's resolution:

WHEREAS persons who have disabilities far too often face barriers in the community; and

WHEREAS persons who have disabilities have a right to equal access to services and community spaces, including health care, employment, transportation, housing and education, and a stand-alone statutory

office of the advocate for persons with disabilities would play a vital role in ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are properly respected; and

WHEREAS according to Statistics Canada, over 30 per cent of the residents of this province live with a disability; and

WHEREAS people, both those who have a disability and those who do not, have consistently been calling for a disability advocate for many years; and

WHEREAS the 2021 mandate letter for the then minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development reads: Please continue work to establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, Newfoundland and Labrador, has said that they are very much opposed to adding the role and responsibility of an advocate for persons with disabilities to the role of the Seniors' Advocate; and

WHEREAS the Seniors' Advocate has publicly stated that her statutory office does not have the resources to take on the role and responsibilities of an advocate for persons with disabilities and represent the disabilities' community well.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House calls on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately create a dedicated advocate for persons with disabilities who, as a stand-alone statutory Officer of this hon. House, will investigate and make recommendations based on the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I am honoured and it is a privilege to introduce this private Member's resolution on behalf of

the PC Opposition Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: It is excellent to see so many Members and community organizations of the disability community present here in the gallery today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, this is such an important private Member's resolution. It is important because we are advocating for something very basic and necessary, which is the establishment of a disability advocate.

Why is that so important? There are many reasons. First of all, the needs and the interests of persons living with disabilities have not been heard. They have not been heard and I would argue not been respected for so many years.

For many years, we know, when we look at the fact that the people of the disability community have been calling for the establishment of a disability advocate and not only that, we know that there has been promises made repeatedly, year after year, going back to 2020, when we saw the premier at the time, in his mandate letter, direct that there be work done to establish a disability advocate. That has been repeated, yet there has been no movement and no real action and real decision on this, and that is not acceptable, Speaker. That has been very, very frustrating for the people who are living with a disability in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is important to have this disability advocate because it's about human rights. It's about ensuring equitable rights. It's about looking at the barriers that we know that persons living with a disability face in our communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. They face incredible barriers, and

these barriers prevent them from meaningfully participating in our society. They cannot do that fully in the communities in which they live.

The other important reason that we must have a disability advocate is we look at the percentage and, according to Statistics Canada, there are 30 per cent that self-identify as having a disability in our province. I would argue it's even more than 30 per cent, but at any rate, persons with disabilities represent a significant portion, perhaps one-third of our population, and they deserve to have a direct advocate who can represent their needs and interests in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, we cannot forget this fact that a person with a disability can be any one of us. Many of us acquire disability in our lifetime, so this is so important. It is important because we know that persons with disabilities face these barriers.

There are systemic problems that exist with programs and with policies that are set up by the government and the community organizations which exist to represent the persons with disabilities. They are surely doing their very best but they don't have the resources, they don't have the capacity and they sure to God do not have the funding to vigorously do the work that is required.

That is another important reason why we need to see a disability advocate put in place in our province. A disability advocate would have the opportunity to address the systemic issues, would have the opportunity and the resources. They would release reports. They would do the public work that needs to be done in order to assess what the systemic problems are, yet all of this really, according to people that I've talked to in the disability community, they feel that this is not getting addressed, and often they feel that issues that impact them are getting

just pushed under the rug and they're getting missed, Speaker.

We need to look at the fact that there's no question, it is undeniable that we need to have a disability advocate in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: What is concerning is that this has been asked for for so long, and it's been promised for so long, and that it's not happened. Then we see that there have been indications that perhaps it might be a good idea to merge the disability advocate into the Seniors' Advocate, and that has received widespread opposition by the disability community.

The combining of these two roles that has been suggested by the structural review of the statutory offices of the House of Assembly is not the answer, and I've heard that from many individual members of the disability community in addition to community organizations that represent persons living with disabilities.

We know that the structural review committee basically had said that that would be perhaps something to look at, but that is not acceptable. We know, also, and we just heard this recently from the Seniors' Advocate, she does not believe that this is a viable option either. Moving and combining these two important advocates together would be a disservice not only to the members of the disability community, but it would be a disservice to seniors as well. So that is not a reasonable suggestion that has been put forward, at least as far as the disability community is concerned.

Speaker, we need to say that that is not an option, and what is also concerning about that review, I've heard from members of the community that they were not consulted with respect to that review. There were many consultations and presentations to

that review committee, but the disability community were not engaged, so that is not, certainly, adhering to the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us.

On that note, I realize I'm running short of time. I want to say that we hope that all hon. Members in this House of Assembly support this important resolution. I look forward to hearing from the speakers that will present on this vital, vital issue today.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you.

I now call on the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

It is an absolute privilege to stand here today and speak to this private Member's resolution. I, too, see many familiar faces in the audience, some of my old guard that I advocated with many years ago.

Speaker, I just want to paint a picture to start off. On March 6, 1996, I became a mom for the second time to a beautiful baby boy. He was the perfect child, it was an easy pregnancy, easy delivery. He ate, he slept, nothing was out of sorts. He was the best baby but fast-forward to February 24, 1999, and he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

I became an advocate for one child at that point in time. Overnight, I became a stay-at-home mom, I became a therapist and I became a researcher. I became all kinds of things that I never knew I could do but that's what parents do when they're raising children with disabilities.

Speaker, I was a member of the Provincial Advisory Council to the minister responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I see some of my colleagues here today that

were with me, who I would call the old guard when it came to advocating for persons with disabilities.

On June 1, 2009, the hon. Susan Sullivan officially opened the Disability Policy Office within government. There was a commitment at that time to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society; it was a good day. The office was mandated with working across government departments and agencies in developing policies and programs that included persons with disabilities. The office would strengthen the partnerships with community agencies, businesses and the public sector.

There was also some confusion in community because people didn't understand if the office was there to help people with disabilities in community to communicate with government or if the overall reason for the office was just to advocate within government and make it a more inclusive government. That's what it was, it was a policy office to build relationships with community but to ensure that government, as a whole, had a disability lens. I was at The Fluvarium that day for that announcement and it was coined by community as a step towards greater inclusion.

In 2010, I was employed by the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living, now called Inclusion Canada NL. Speaker, we advocated for persons with intellectual disabilities. We advocated for more inclusive education, a more abling and inclusive society, and that is exactly how I ended up running to be the Member of the House of Assembly for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's. It was from the disability community that I came into this position.

Speaker, I remember sitting around the executive director's and chair's boardroom table, we were drafting our list of things we wanted and needed and things we had to advocate government for and we were

trying to figure out how we were going to communicate with government the needs of the disability community. I remember the inclusive education document that we presented and I remember advocating for more inclusive spaces. I can say that we did get inclusive education into the schools but it still has its challenges today. However, we do have a lot more spaces in community today for persons with disabilities to park and to be able to access public places.

Fast-forward another 10 years and what has government put in place for persons with disabilities? What is government going to do to ensure that persons with disabilities have equity, not more, but they have equity, Speaker? Equity is defined as treating everyone fairly and addressing systemic inequalities to create a clear and level playing field. That is all persons with disabilities ever, ever advocated for – equity.

If you google the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador programs for persons with disabilities, you will find a very extensive list. There's the Special Assistance Program that assists with medical equipment and supplies. There's the Prescription Drug Plan. There's the Home Support Program. There's intervention services which I, myself, which our family used for many, many years. There's Supported Employment and the list goes on and on. There are many, many things there.

Speaker, not everyone with a disability qualifies for all these services. They are individualized and sometimes qualifying takes a lot of advocacy work and time. I know first-hand how exhausting and how frustrating it can be, and many persons with disabilities find that they're often misunderstood in their needs.

Our government does embody Nothing About Us Without Us. Our government is working towards a basic income for all and in July those who qualify for the Disability

Tax Credit and whose income is low will receive up to \$400 a month, in addition to supports and services they are receiving today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: As the MHA for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's, I am supportive of this policy change.

But this brings me to today, to our private Member's resolution, which was entered by the Official Opposition. Speaker, I read this a number of times since yesterday and it states a number of facts: persons who have disabilities far too often face barriers in the community. Speaker, that's a fact.

Persons who have disabilities have a right to equal access to services and community spaces, including health care, employment, transportation, housing and education. Speaker, that's a fact.

According to Statistics Canada, over 30 per cent of the residents of this province live with a disability. That's a fact.

People, both those who have a disability and those who do not, have consistently been calling for a disability advocate for many years. That's a fact, because I have been involved with that call for 26 years.

The 2021 mandate letter for the then Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development reads: Please continue work to establish an Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's a fact, Speaker, our government is and has been working on that.

The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities has said that they are very much opposed to adding the role and responsibilities of an advocate for persons with disabilities to the role of the Seniors' Advocate. That's a fact, Speaker, I have heard them in the media and I have also heard the Seniors' Advocate

publicly state that her office doesn't have the resources right now to take on that role.

Speaker, our government has been working toward this for a number of years, this disability advocate, this individual, this person, this office, this position. After 10 years of working on legislation, changes, regulations, policies and working with individuals and community groups, business, et cetera, I firmly believe that community groups are the avenue to educating and informing the public in changing society for the better, but, Speaker, it does take time.

I hear the Opposition talking about we've given this promise but we're taking forever to do it. It takes time and there are multiple, multiple, multiple steps to arrive at this point here today.

Speaker, while there is a cost to setting up an office, the concept of shared space and resources for office of the House should be evaluated. I believe in that also. I believe that many times these offices of representatives of the House of Assembly can in fact work together to represent community, not necessarily be the same person or the same office, but work together to share resources and to deliver their mandates.

Speaker, I believe that families, caregivers and persons with disabilities need an advocate for persons with disabilities. They need a person, a position of power that can consistently speak on their behalf and our Premier has said that we will continue to work with the disability community and have discussions about what the specific advocate would look like.

Speaker, I will be supporting and voting for this PMR today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I next call on the hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, a couple nights ago, as we were leaving the House of Assembly, and I was in my wheelchair, I was being accompanied by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, out of the blue, he said: Lloyd, do you identify as a person with a disability? And my answer was pretty quick, I said: No.

So what I would like to start off by saying today is not only is that the wrong answer; I'm a little embarrassed that I said it. I am an individual who has a disability and I'm proud to be a member of that community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Everybody's journey through life is different. I remember it was around January 16 or 17, 2007. I lost my leg on the 15, and I had a minister come into the hospital and he asked if I wanted him to pray with me, and I said no. I said no because, while I am spiritual, at that time I didn't think he or God or anyone else was going to help me.

He left. He came back the next day and he made a comment to me. He said: You know, Lloyd, I know that times are hard, but anyone can climb a mountain, anyone can jump out of a plane. There are people with disabilities and blind people and people with their leg gone doing this every day. That's not going to determine who you are. It's how you walk through the valleys, through the tough times in your life that will determine who you are as an individual.

You'll often hear people with disabilities say forget your disabilities and explore your abilities. I couldn't agree more. My disability, I would argue, has shaped me as an individual. I'm proud of who I am and who I've become because of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: What I will say is we've always heard our parents, our preachers, our teachers say to us: Don't judge until you've walked a mile in somebody else's shoes. My journey had me in a prosthetic and over the last two years I've spent an extensive amount of time in a wheelchair. Yeah, it's tough. It's tough. Believe me when I tell you, I'm tough. I'm as tough as they come and as hard.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The previous speaker said the programs are extensive and it takes a lot of time. The first thing I need to do is give a big shout-out to, certainly, the staff here in the House of Assembly. When I went and spoke to them before I ended up back in a wheelchair, there wasn't enough that they could do and I will tell you that, Kim Hawley George – I don't know or care if I'm allowed to say the name or not – at the end of the day, the communication from all of my colleagues in the House of Assembly actually, it was overwhelming.

As individuals that are here in this room today I'm sure can attest, you can have all the programs you want, you can have all the access to money and other things, but until you go visit a government office or come to a place like the House of Assembly – this is the people's Chamber and it's not accessible. So I would say while things take time, we're failing. It's just simply not good enough. It really is not good enough and it shouldn't be good enough for us.

I guess for me today, I look at this and we say we're looking for an advocate for persons with disabilities. I'm embarrassed to say that we're debating this on the floor of the House of Assembly and I think lots of previous governments have failed in doing this. It shouldn't be a conversation we're having. It should be done. It's okay to say it takes time, but I'll tell you now – and I'm not trying to be political – this is the reality of it: it doesn't take time to put an office in Grand Falls for the Premier; it doesn't take time to

have someone represent one person when we're asking for someone to represent 30 per cent of the population.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: It's a failure. We talk about things we do and we talk about accessibility. If you're in a wheelchair – listen, there's a lot of stuff I've learned. I'm at home alone; I don't understand all the struggles, I have to be honest. I really don't because I've managed to get by life very, very – I won't say easily, but I've dealt very well with it.

When you're someone who has a mobility issue, you know, it's not as simple as going to even just get a cup of coffee or to brush your teeth or do these things that we take for granted every day. You go stay in a hotel that is supposedly an accessible room, you understand very quickly that there may be an accessible shower but there's no button to open the door. There are things that we do partway but we don't go all the way, and do you know what? People deserve it – people deserve us to go all the way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Listen, I get it, money helps but I'll give you an example.

If you want to talk about failure and – so if you're an amputee, as an example. The last time I talked to the people at the Miller Centre, because I've done a lot of advocacy for them and I've helped a lot of people and I'd like to hope that I've inspired some people to just try and move forward with the things they deal with on a daily basis, if you go to the Miller Centre and you're an adult over 18 years old and you need a prosthetic, we don't cover it as a government.

Right now in this province, there are fewer than 500 amputees – fewer than 500 amputees. Now think about this: We would sooner have a person sit at home on social assistance or on CPP and disability and

those types of things than to buy them a prosthetic limb. We'd sooner keep them out of work. We'd sooner build a wheelchair ramp, send electricians in to adjust their light switches and make it so they can live on a daily basis instead of buying them a prosthetic limb. That prosthetic limb will make them able to get back out in the real world.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: It's an investment.

L. PARROTT: Yes, It's an investment in our people. Everyone, regardless of what walk of society you come from, deserves that equal investment. It's a failure. It's a failure on behalf of all of us, and I have no problem saying it.

I say all the time. If I can't do something for someone, I feel like I've failed them. It doesn't mean I haven't tried, and I know government is trying but this is easy. This is easy. This is an advocate for persons with disabilities and why do they need it? Why do they need an advocate? They need an advocate because we failed in our jobs. We failed to provide them equality and equity. We failed to provide them the dignity of getting into a building without struggling to get through a door, of being able to go a restaurant and eat with dignity, about being able to go to a hospital and not have to deal with accessibility issues. We fail every day.

Two years ago, and I know it still hasn't been fixed, it's been brought up here in the House of Assembly a couple of times: Labrador has no elevator in the school and there's a young child up there who's in a wheelchair and the elevator, to my knowledge, still isn't fixed – two years. The teachers have to pick that individual up and carry them up over the stairs.

I had a young girl in my district and the parents moved. They wouldn't plow the road, so every morning members of the fire department would go down to the end of the

road and bring that young girl out, carry her out in her wheelchair so she could get on the bus. It was a solution by volunteers when government, all they had to do was pick up the phone and say you need to go an extra 200 metres on that road. That's it. That was the solution, 200 metres.

Now I will say, there was a question brought up here today and, the current Minister of Transportation, I ran into a similar situation out in Eastport area. When we had troubles with a bus stop, it was fixed instantly once he knew what it was. It was a young girl in a wheelchair and she had to go 300 or 400 metres up the road, but it got fixed. That is the response that we should get and it's the response that we should give people with disabilities and specifically CODNL.

The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities deserve the dignity and the respect of this House that they've always deserved. We should be giving them an advocate for persons with disabilities. There's no question. I don't even know why we are debating this.

Last year, we brought legislation in. When that legislation came in, we argued that it didn't go far enough. We found out during the legislation that they weren't consulted. We make these decisions without talking to the people who are affected and guess what happens after that? It affects us, everyone in this House, as legislators. It makes us look like fools. It makes us look like we don't care when the reality of it is that we do and all we had to do was ask a question.

Anyone who lives with a child or an adult or with a personal disability themselves, they will not disagree with one word I'm saying. I guarantee you that because, at the end of the day, it affects your life in a way that you don't understand. So I plead with everyone in this House on both sides, don't judge and always think of what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes. Please vote for this but not just a silent vote and let it go away. You've had four years since this has been

pushed on by the premier, let's make it happen right away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you to the Member for Terra Nova.

I now recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I was standing to applaud my colleague and a wonderful example and a true advocate. That's what we're talking about here today, advocacy and how do we best do that.

I've had the privilege in my lifetime to work all over Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the advantages of that is you get to work with people all over this great province of ours and you get to work with many, many different organizations, volunteer organizations and community organizations, who work on behalf of people in their communities.

That community is not just a physical community. That community is a community of people who get together to try and make positive change for people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities has been able to do, bring people together from all across Newfoundland and Labrador with a common purpose to make life better. Isn't that the role of government at the end of the day, to improve the lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and improve them in a way that will help them get on with their daily lives?

When I think of the value that these organizations provide to our province, and I have said this many times in this House and outside this House, when you give money to an organization like that, when you enter into a partnership with them and you

provide them with funding, I will guarantee you that they will turn a dollar into \$5 and then \$5 will become \$10. They just find a way within their organizations to be able to take that and do so much more with it than anything anybody could.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: What's really challenging for them, for all of our organizations – and we support. You know, there's money handed out every year to different organizations, but for too many of them the funding is not what we call core funding. It's simply you apply every year and you hope every year that, yes, we're going to get something in the budget. It becomes a political process instead of a process that should be based on need. The process should be based on results. The process should be based on what they have been able to do.

While we understand that we can't provide all, the principle of a core funding allows us to say, as a government, that we believe in you. We believe in the work you're doing and we value that work and we're going to make sure that you stay around to deliver it. Yes, we can argue about how much that core funding will be and what it will look like, but we all sit down and we establish that principle and we say to people, yes, we believe in your organization. We believe in what you do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That is something that I intend to do, because I believe in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and I believe in those organizations that are delivering services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Like I said, we will argue about what those amounts look like and we will come with principles on how to value tangible and intangible benefits, but it needs to happen. It cannot simply be a political

process where you wait for a decision to be made and a Budget Speech to be given. These organizations and the services that they provide are much too valuable for that, much too important for that and we need to make sure as legislators that we find a way to get that done.

So today we're talking about one other aspect of this. We're talking about the position of an advocate for persons with disabilities, the PMR. As my colleague alluded to, and my previous colleague alluded to, we're here talking about something that we thought that was going to be done four years ago. Here we are still talking and the people of those organizations are still out there doing the work. Doing what they need to do. This year, an urgent call went out. They didn't know if they were going to be able to keep the doors open passed June. I still don't know if they've got an answer to that. This should never happen.

I think today we'll hear lots of agreement on the other side about need. We've heard a report that talked about, oh, they need to be shared with the Seniors' Advocate; but the Seniors' Advocate clearly has indicated, no, that's not a fit. That won't work. There's just too much there and that's the same we've heard from The Coalition of the Persons with Disabilities. This needs to be a stand-alone advocate.

Imagine someone that we can say represents 30 per cent of the population, who's prepared to come in and who will issue recommendations. We've had lots of great recommendations coming in from the Seniors' Advocate. We put people in positions to do good work and they do good work and they make recommendations. It's a responsibility on us to make sure we implement those recommendations and we find ways to do it.

So that's why this PMR is here again, to remind us that, four years later, we still haven't done what we said we were going to

do. That we're still talking about it and still saying it will be done or it won't be done. Even if we all support this PMR today, what happens next? We're supposed to be open for another week in the House of Assembly; we know it's not going to happen. How long does it take to bring the legislation in? I'm prepared to stay here next week and come back and do it to make sure it gets done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: I'm sure all my colleagues will too. Let's not put off what we can do today, what we can do next week. Why do we need further delays? Let's just simply get it done.

I look at the statistics and, recognizing that this statistic from Statistics Canada covers the period from 2017 to 2022, included in that is, the disability rate rose in all provinces and most of the territories. Newfoundland and Labrador, according to this statistic, recorded the third highest increase of all the provinces in the country. So yeah, we have a need. We have a need for advocacy. We have a need for this advocate to be put in place to represent more than 30 per cent of the people. It should not take another year or another delay.

It could be done next week. You'd have unanimous consent of the House to do it. If you want to, as we often refer to the House, ask leave. Let me tell you, you'll have leave to get it done because we will all give leave to get it done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: The time for talking has passed. The time for action is now. This PMR says it all and the whole principle when I read this, Nothing About Us Without Us, that's exactly what we ought to be doing. We ought to make sure that we stand here today united and say to all of those people and to the Coalition, the 30 per cent, some who are here today in the House and

others out there that we have your backs. We hear you loud and clear and we will not delay this anymore.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: We will stay here in the House next week and pass the legislation if that's what's required to do it. I can tell you from where I stand, and all of my caucus Members stand, right now, and I will say this commitment now loud and clear for all of Newfoundland and Labrador to hear, when we form the next government after the next election, this will be done immediately.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: No delays no more. We will create the advocate for persons with disability as a stand-alone statutory Officer of this hon. House just like it says. We will investigate who can make recommendations based on the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to stand here today and, of course, I'm going to support the PMR.

We hear a lot of different stories around and about all of our personal experiences. I guess, I'm a bit unique because I'm a bit older and I remember back in the '89 and '90s when we had the Canadian Paraplegic Association. I sat on the national board as president for five or six years, the provincial board for about 20 years and we seen all the barriers that people with disabilities had to face.

I'll give you a little example. Sometimes you get yourself into a bit of a mess when there was a certain premier, he was out in Corner Brook and we were walking in. I sat him in the wheelchair and said: Get in; go in the building. You couldn't get in. Six months later the building was completely accessible. They put the funding for accessibility because they understood the barriers that people have just in wheelchairs or with a disability getting in, opening the doors, the elevators – you can't push the buttons, they're too high.

There are so many things that have changed over the years. One of the people that I dealt with over the years, I had many meetings with and he helped our association, the Canadian Paraplegic Association, a lot was Rick Hansen. He was a great advocate for people with disabilities all across Canada.

Here's a time for us now in Newfoundland and Labrador where we have made strides, but we need more strides. There are more people now with disabilities. The number, around, is 30 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's a great honour to be able to stand in this House and speak about what we should do and what we can do. I'm definitely going to be supporting this because I spent a lot of time with people with disabilities. I've been on many boards. I started the Special Olympics in Corner Brook. I know the barriers.

I also know the abilities that people with disabilities have. I know the economic impact that people with disabilities can have on our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. When we were at national training, we always said look at the abilities, not the disabilities. Never look at the disability; look at the ability. That's what we're missing in this province. We are not giving the proper support because there are always issues. The Consumer Advocate has got their issues, the Seniors' Advocate, people with disabilities; there are always issues and barriers, there's education.

We got work, employment, but yet we forget the services that might be needed for that and that's pushed behind and, right now, there is not a person that they can go to to promote to the government and bring issues to the government. This is why this is so important. It's for the economic benefit of the province, not only to the people with disabilities. This is so serious. I'm not going to get into politics in this House, not one bit about it, but I'll tell you one thing, I've heard many times in this House of Assembly that we can do what we want to do in this House. If this House of Assembly wants this brought in, it can be done pretty quick.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I can assure you. We can bring this in here pretty quick. I am more than confident that the work that has been done behind the scenes, legislation is pretty close to being done. I can assure you that, and once you bring the legislation into this House we can always add to it. Once we get the legislation and set up the disabilities advocate, then we can start moving ahead and adding and letting them do the work setting up an office, because all we need in this House to start it is the legislation.

I can assure you, and I've been involved nationally, provincially and locally for over 35 years now, that if we don't do this and we delay it again until another election, what we're doing right now is delaying the services that we should be providing to all citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador, and in this group alone are the people with disabilities that we could start providing it now and not wait six, seven or eight months. We could do it now. This House of Assembly can do this. We can do it.

I know a lot of the Members opposite; I know you want this done. There's no doubt. There's no disagreement here, but what we need is the will to do it. That's what we need. I can assure you, there are times that this House of Assembly comes together,

that we all say we're all working together and this is one of the times.

I can assure this House, and I can assure the people in the gallery, and the people that are watching in this province, if this legislation is going to be brought in next week and we say we'll stay until next Monday to bring this in, everybody in this House will support it. Everybody in this House would agree to stay until next week to get it done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: Everybody in this House wants it done, I'm confident. I'm more than confident that there's not one Member in this House of Assembly that doesn't want this legislation put through to have an advocate for people with disabilities in this province.

All we need is the Premier or somebody with the will to say let's do it. That's all we need. I can assure you that we would do a great service to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, not just with people who would avail of the services, but for the whole people of Newfoundland and Labrador because you'd be surprised the amount of barriers that people with disabilities face. You would be terribly surprised. We, a lot of us, don't even know.

I remember when the blue parking started. That started with the Canadian Paraplegic Association. Sean Fitzgerald was a big advocate of people with disabilities and the blue parking program was brought in by the Canadian Paraplegic Association years ago. It was taken over by the government at a later date.

The people in the communities and the people who most need the assistance and want the advocate, they're the ones who come up with the new programs to help the people with disabilities. They are the ones who face the barriers. They are the ones who face the barriers, that they need the

services for. They are the ones who can enlighten all of us, how we can make this province a better place and ensure that the 30 per cent not only have an active life but also contribute to society and to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I call upon the government to do this. It can be done. It definitely can be done. This is the time that we should unite. I'm not being a reflective of any mandate letter that was supposed to be done or anything, but here's an opportunity for us to put everything behind us. Let's start off new, both sides, myself and I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands is 100 per cent with it also, and I know the NDP are very supportive of it. The PC Party is.

I know the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador is supportive of this; I know it. There's absolutely no doubt. I know the individuals. I know many of the individuals. I know the individuals of the Liberal caucus would love to see this put into legislation and have an advocate, but we need the champions that are around the Cabinet table to say, let's do it. That's all we need.

I can assure you that the people who draft the legislation, it will not take them long to have legislation drafted for us to approve in this House of Assembly. Once we get it approved in the House of Assembly, then we can build on it from here and it's never going to end. It's never going to end because there are always different issues. There are going to be different disabilities and, also, you find out more when people get out and they start working, you have to then be starting on the supports that they need, the housing.

I'll just give an example. Sean Fitzgerald, I'll use him again, back in probably '93 or '94, there were two buildings built here for people with disabilities: one in Corner Brook, ended up being the John Piercey building, and the other one in Grand Falls. It was just for people with disabilities, 35 units I think it was at the time, and that was the

initiative taken then by the Canadian Paraplegic Association: that people with disabilities had their own buildings, wheelchair accessible – everything was accessible.

AN HON. MEMBER: Lion Max Simms had one in 1984.

E. JOYCE: Pardon me? Lion Max Simms, 1984.

This is the kind of initiative that we need. I understand now that the unit in Corner Brook is under the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing but it's still for people with disabilities and for seniors. I just encourage government, let's get this done so we can make a great advancement for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we all could come together as one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Community Engagement.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased today to speak on this Private Member's motion. In December of 2023, as Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities at that particular time, I was pleased to introduce the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Accessibility Plan for the period from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2026. At that time, I didn't realize how much work was actually done already on this plan and how much work that was already done by government in, of course, consultation with the disability community.

Today, I want to talk about some of the highlights of this work. There are several programs that I want to talk about with the Office of Employment Equity for Persons

with Disabilities. The Opening Doors Program includes full-time positions ranging from temporary to permanent with provincial government departments and provides access to other career paths and learning and development opportunities. The student Summer Employment Program provides post-secondary students with disabilities opportunities to work in a field related to their training and gain skills and knowledge for future entry into the workforce.

Cost-shared wage subsidy initiatives provide résumé building opportunities for persons with disabilities to work with provincial government and agencies, boards and commissions. Personalized career development supports including résumé development, interview preparation and connection to other provincial departments, government departments and community organizations depending on the individual's needs. Consultation with local disability-focused community organizations ensure that programs and services are reflective of the current accessibility best practices.

We also maintain connections with other community partners, including the Murphy Centre, Avalon Employment, the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic, and we share ideas there to better support each others' programs for persons with disabilities.

We also consider the accessibility when it comes to the physical built environments. When there's an open call for bids for provincial government leased accommodations, there is a specific language regarding accessibility included in the documentation. This is set as a requirement for all potential bidders. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure implemented a universal design standard in May of 2022 that addresses accessibility requirements for the design and construction of new facilities, as well as retrofit, alteration or addition to existing facilities owned, leased and

operated by the government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This addresses the diverse range of user needs, including persons with disabilities, and embraces a spirit of universal design throughout the inclusive environments.

In 2019, Transportation and Infrastructure's marine vessel crews completed specialized training from InclusionNL to accommodate passengers that have mobility issues. Our government also includes accessibility and disability considerations in employee training. The Centre for Learning and Development has developed learning content that allows accessibility requirements. We make accommodations for skilled trade exam challengers. We ensure exam accommodations such as Level, red seal, blaster and power engineer are available to clients with disabilities or language barriers.

We've made accessibility updates to cultural sites. The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation made improvements to a number of sites, including accessibility updates to the structured operations of the Colonial Building Provincial Historic Site, to remove accessibility barriers. Modifications include improving existing accessible parking, removing obstacles that impede mobility by installing concrete pathways, signage for wayfinding, push-button doors, accessible washrooms and lifts serving on all three floors. Exhibits were also modified to improve accessibility by spacing exhibit cases to provide an extra passageway between them and having interpretation panels installed at an accessible reading height.

Our government also ensures gender equity, diversity and inclusion plans are part of every large-scale natural resource project in the province. These plans include commitments such as employment targets for persons with disabilities, scholarships and co-op education placements for persons with disabilities. Reporting is based on a voluntary self-identification, as not all

persons with disabilities choose to self-identify. Targets act as a guide rather than a benchmark as participation is subjective and based on self-disclosure. There are various grants and programs across the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador that aim to improve accessibility and inclusivity.

There are too many to name here but I encourage anyone who wants to learn more about them, please contact the departments listed in the plan. While I take great pride in the release of the *Accessibility Act*, I also recognize that another initiative undertaken by government while I was minister will have the greatest impact on persons with disabilities in the province.

In June of 2024, I was pleased to announce the establishment of the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit on behalf of government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: I was joined at this announcement by two incredible community advocates: Duane Morgan, CNIB vice-president for Atlantic Canada, and Dennis Gill, the father of an adult son living with disabilities, as well as being past president of Inclusion Newfoundland and Labrador and chair of Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board – a wonderful volunteer.

This benefit will come into effect in less than two months and will include up to \$400 per month to persons with disabilities and \$1,200 in the Registered Disability Savings Program, which will begin January 2025 for those who qualify; that's already happening. For the monthly payment, qualifying persons must file their income tax, have a valid Disability Tax Credit certificate, be a resident of the province and meet the above-noted age and income criteria.

The first monthly payment will occur in July of 2025 and people will need to be in receipt of the Disability Tax Credit as of that date to

receive payment in the first month. We've been out there working very hard to ensure that we identify as many people as possible. We will continue that until every person in the province that can and will qualify for this benefit.

For the RDSP contribution, qualifying persons must file income tax, have a valid DTC certificate, have an open Registered Disability Savings Plan, be a resident of Newfoundland and Labrador and meet the above-noted age and income criteria. Eligibility for the \$1,200 annual contribution is effective for 2025, administrative details into how this contribution will be made are being determined and that will be communicated. There's assistance available for all those that need support to navigate the Disability Tax Credit and RDSP, and there is more information available on our website.

I understand my colleagues will be hitting the road in the coming weeks to visit communities across the province – we all will be going, everybody – and that's an opportunity for us to talk about the Disability Benefit and decision-making as well. If you have an opportunity to attend any of these engagement sessions, I highly recommend it. I mean that for each Member here. If you can attend any of these sessions, they're online, attend them so you can go out and you can speak and help those people who are looking for these benefits.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I fully, and I mean fully, endorse the creation of the office of the advocate for persons with disabilities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Member for St. John's Centre and the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the creation of the office of the disability advocate was something that we had in our 2021 platform and it's again in our platform for this year. We have no problems with supporting this. It's something that's about advocacy. It's about making sure that government, whatever political stripe, is doing what it needs for inclusion.

I will give credit, certainly, to the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Community Engagement for the fact that there are a number of things that have been done, but we can be doing a lot more. I think, as a teacher, it was often pointed out to me that we can talk about inclusion or we can talk about inclusive education. There is I guess, a subtle difference in many ways because you can include people and that may not mean they're there, but you want them to participate. The same thing, too, with regard to an inclusive society. How do we go about making sure that society is inclusive?

Certainly, if you walked around the streets of St. John's, you'll find an awful lot of the curbs, especially at the intersections, they have those tactile, those bumps, the metal plates. They're for people who are visually impaired. Some of the intersections have sound signals that direct the people in the right way. It's all about making sure that people are safe and included.

In the school system, it was always about making sure the resources are there and it is often the parents who advocated for that. In society, I guess, I've heard the talk about the fact that some of these measures take time. Well, I will say that for people who are living with a disability, whatever it is, time is not always something that is a luxury for them because, as my colleague from Terra Nova pointed out, in some cases it comes down to their ability to participate.

I draw your attention to Rhonda Whalen, a person I've brought up in this House of

Assembly as well, who, for a year, was waiting for an accessible unit but it forced the separation of her and her child, the person she was responsible for. It took over a year to get her into an accessible housing unit and it took an awful lot of pressure to do so. That should not have had to happen.

Carter Churchill: The family of Carter Churchill, to get the supports for their son, for Carter, basically had to launch a human right's case for that.

I remind people of the Keane Place apartment building where the only elevator was out of service for almost three years. Basically, there were people there who were in wheelchairs, who had mobility issues, who were stranded on their floors. They could not get off their floors without having been taken downstairs or along those lines. I remember the provincial government, municipal government and the fire department seemed powerless, basically, to force that company to get the elevator fixed. There are significant challenges where people just cannot wait.

At the Aspen Institute session Laboratories of Democracy that I attended, 30 legislators from Germany, US and Canada were there. It's interesting, it was about social cohesion, Speaker, about how we make this society more socially cohesive so that people participate. One of the sub-topics was social inclusion and it talked about the need to reduce barriers for participation in society.

They talked about people and, it was the recognition of the impact of social exclusion, that those who are systematically excluded or perceive being excluded from participation opportunities may be less likely to develop a sense of belonging or invest in collective goals. As a result, social exclusion often erodes social cohesion and it fosters alienation, distrust, isolation, loneliness and a sense of powerlessness. If anything else, I would say that at that level, there's a recognition here that participation, being

included in society, fosters that social cohesion.

We know that there are a number of organizations that are doing their best to make sure people with disabilities and of various abilities are included. I think of the Geraldine Rubia Centre on Shaw Street that I've had the pleasure to visit a number of times. One of the things we've been helping with is getting them a new kitchen for their service. If you ever attend any of these programs, you will see the sense of community that the director, Gary Furlong, on a shoestring budget, has done to make people and their families feel part of something bigger.

I think here, while you've got individual organizations doing this and they're doing remarkably good work, the institution of a specific advocate would be about making sure that there's an overall, I guess, plan. Where we fail as a society and where we fail as a government, that there is a continued voice of advocacy. We know that these groups are so busy sometimes, and the families of people who have a disability or people with family members with exceptionalities are already struggling with the day-to-day provision of health and well-being and so on and so forth, but it's important to have someone who has a separate office, similar to the Seniors' Advocate, to advocate for the families and for the people who – I won't say struggle – live and sometimes excel with the disabilities.

A separate office here would be essential, not rolled into the Seniors' Advocate. I know there's intersectionality where disabilities and seniors would intersect but, in this case, there are many families – and I've talked to a few of those whose adult children are heading into their senior years and it comes down to many families asking the questions: what are the provisions? How is my child going to survive? What will I need to do to make sure that they have the supports in place?

Recently, we wrote a letter to support the Autism Society for a grant for an age-friendly community, as they pointed out that there are a number of people who are on the autism spectrum who are approaching their senior years and the feeling is that the system is not prepared to meet the needs.

Having an advocate would be, again, making sure that the – not the small, I guess, the various things that we do day to day but, overall, that there's a coherent and a cohesive and long-term plan to address these issues.

We saw last year, as an example, that the federal government cancelled its \$16 million contribution to this province as part of the labour market transfer. We also saw that there was no immediate effort on the part of the provincial government to fill that gap and it became a bit of a political football but, in the process, Speaker, there are organizations out there that were paying the price.

From the NDP's point of view, that having a stand-alone office to advocate for people with disabilities and their families and the organizations that support people and their families, should have an advocate and let that office do the work of holding government, whoever that is, to account and making sure that they're doing right by those families and by the people of our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess the words that ring loud for me is, elected by the people to serve the people, and that's everyone. That's all 40 of us in this House. There's no short definition of

people; it's everyone in society that we need to represent.

To truly represent them, you need to be empathic. You need to be able to relate. You need to, as people would say, walk a mile in their shoes. When we talk about disabilities, of course, we have physical disabilities. There are intellectual disabilities. There are those disabilities that are identified and those that are not so visible and we have individuals who identify as having a disability, others that don't.

But one thing that we can hang our hat on is the statistics we get and knowing that those numbers are probably far greater – and we know that Statistics Canada had indicated that those with disabilities in this province is somewhere in the 30.9 per cent range – a huge chunk of society.

We're arguing here, we're debating for an office for the advocate for persons with disabilities. We have an office for seniors. We have an advocate for seniors who is doing a fantastic job, I might say, advocating for seniors. We do not argue that we need that office. We need that office for seniors. Seniors in our province comprise of 24.4 per cent of the population. By 2033, it will be somewhere around 29 per cent, but here we are with a population close to 31 per cent in terms of those with disabilities. When you look at Stats Canada, that will tell you that those numbers are going to increase even more year over year. In the last five years, I believe the percentage increased somewhere around 6 per cent.

We can talk about programming and you can go on sites and you can look at a far list of programs, tons of programs, but how do you navigate those? The people that call us as MHAs, we're the last resort in many cases when they call us. You try and relate. I can't relate. I remember having meetings with the CNIB a number of years ago when I served on the town council. We used to have a 90-minute meeting, and we'd put on

the blindfolds for a 90-minute meeting. I was going to say it was eye-opening but, in essence, it was for wearing those blindfolds and trying to run a meeting for 90 minutes without that visual. If we close our eyes for 10 minutes in this House of Assembly, what would get done?

You try and relate to individuals who are living with disabilities. I've been on crutches before and I know the trials and tribulations I had to go through to get around. I has a stick-shift car. There was no way that I could drive that because you need two feet. Think about individuals who are 24-7, all the time, facing barriers that, to many of us, are not barriers. Really and truly, we need someone fully and solely dedicated to helping individuals navigate programs out there and to speak up for these people who need things done.

Now, while I say that, many individuals out there with disabilities are extremely capable, but there are those who are not so much and need help. I think of Katarina Roxon, disabled athlete, swam against my daughters, fully able-bodied swimmers, very competitive. I think here in the gallery today we have Joanne McDonald, very capable and established wheelchair athlete not too long ago.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: So the key is when you look at the word "disability," don't focus on "dis," focus on "ability" because it's there. But there are individuals out there – and it's not just the disabled community; normal everyday people need help. But our disabled community really needs to have a sole office that's dedicated to support those people and to support the many groups that are out there helping those who are disabled, like Thrive NL, EmpowerNL and the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities. There are groups out there, but there are individuals who need some guidance, may need some navigation and need a sole voice that can speak up for them and get

them the answers they want and the answers they need. That's not something difficult to ask for.

I'm trying to keep politics out of this but, just as an example, we came in with a new Premier and, like every premier has the opportunity to shuffle around his or her Cabinet, and we see a number of different portfolios created whereby most Members have a portfolio – I'm not debating whether they're good, bad or indifferent but if we can do that in a week, what is keeping us from establishing an office for persons with disabilities?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: I find it so difficult to understand, especially when it's been in mandate letters that are four and five years old. What has been the barrier that kept us from getting there? Really, this should be a done deal. This should be something that you establish right away. This is not something you push off onto the advocate for seniors. She's doing an outstanding job with quite the workload and actually, as I said, dealing with a smaller population than those with disabilities.

Of course, we've got more complex issues because there's the physical, but also there's the intellectual disabilities, and it's become a broader scope. It's not getting any better, and we need to focus on that. We need someone who's laser-focused on that and nothing else to make progress and to make sure that everyone in this province is treated equally and has equal access wherever they want to go.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: That's what we're aiming at.

My colleague next to me, the lesser Dinn, from St. John's Centre, he talked about education, and this starts at education.

J. DINN: I heard that.

P. DINN: I know.

We talk about inclusivity – I’m actually supporting his comment now – and I look at the definition of inclusivity in education. Inclusivity in education ensures that all learners, regardless of their diverse backgrounds or ability, have the equal access to quality education opportunities and personal growth, and the same can be said for anything in life for anyone.

Everyone should have equal access to opportunities for growth. Everyone should have that. Is that something difficult to ask for? Seems quite common sense, but as my late father would say, common sense is not that common.

Before I sit down, it’s amazing how 10 minutes go, but I look at the Health Accord which came out and the fanfare around that, and it’s been mentioned already, one of the main mantras in that accord, Nothing About Us Without Us. Unless we do something, unless we support that with action, the unfortunate thing is, they are just words.

Let’s act on this and establish this office.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It’s always an honour to stand in this hon. House and represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue, and today, I really want to lend my support to the disabilities community that I feel I’ve been a part of for a long time. To build on my colleague from Placentia - St. Mary’s, I am a parent of a child with autism. I guess the advocacy that she did 26 years ago, I picked up 13 years ago and it’s not easy, I can tell you that.

We’re here to do a PMR about the disability advocate which is a very important office. As I get started, I wanted to make a shout-

out to a couple of people: Starr Smith and Connie Fewer with the Burin Peninsula Voice Against Violence. What they do for our disabilities community on the Burin Peninsula is second-to-none. They have Halloween parties, Christmas dinners, everybody gets a gift and all this and then last summer we did a Purple Gala. I’m actually wearing my purple tie today for the disabilities community to let them know that you do have my support.

The Purple Gala night was just like they all walked the red carpet. They all wanted pictures. They had on their beautiful dresses and suits, and it was such a beautiful night. It was, honestly, enthralling. I commend Starr and Connie and their support staff. There are volunteers as well, but they bring on other volunteers to help out where they can and their kids are involved in it too. They’re creating a social circle that is very-well attended and very-well anticipated. As soon as one event is over, they’re waiting for the next one because it’s such an empowering night every time.

Then we have the Special Olympics. I’ll make a quick shout-out to Rosanna Mitchell and Trudy Power on their contributions towards our Special Olympians because that’s a very important program that gives people with limitations an opportunity to participate in sports that they love and want to be a part of. The thing is that without core funding these organizations, that are integral to our disabilities community, are finding it very difficult to operate, even to the point where they have to lay people off until they find out if they’re approved for funding this year and all that stuff.

The thing is that if they’re tried, tested and true and they’re in good standing with the province, then there’s no reason why we can’t extend, let’s say, a three- to five-year contract so that we can include core funding because a lot of times they’re getting it every year. The bureaucracy of the whole thing in knowing that they’ve got to apply

each year is kind of cumbersome on each organization and it takes away from their ability to serve the people that they're there to serve. I would say the core funding is a big one.

I just want to read into the record – because it's in the *Accessibility Act* – a definition of a disability. It “includes a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation that is permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that, in interaction with a barrier, prevents a person from fully participating in society.” So when we look at that lens, we have to also realize that a society is only as successful when they respectfully look after the most vulnerable in their society.

The thing is, for me, that's why we feel so strongly about a disability advocate having a stand-alone office. Putting it into the Seniors' Advocate's office, that's a policy office, so they bring forward policies that would adhere to everybody on a global level, I guess, for the province. Then we have the Child and Youth Advocate that actually does individual advocacy for individual people that need to navigate the system, whether it's a child in care or anything like that or if they have to go to court or anything like that, so they have somebody that helps them navigate the system.

That, again, is the reason why we need a stand-alone disabilities advocacy office is because right now, the disabilities advocacy – it's like my colleague said from Placentia - St. Mary's, it's no different than myself – is left to the families. If somebody doesn't have that person to advocate on their behalf or doesn't understand the whole realm of the situation that they're dealing with, then they're probably going to fall through the cracks. That's very unfortunate because the thing with a disabilities advocate is that while we look at it as a person that's there as an advocate and has that title, they also have a support staff for administration and

navigators and stuff like that. Because, as I just said in the definition, some people are nonverbal, so how are they navigating a system? Maybe they can't use a computer; how are they navigating that system?

The whole point of an advocacy office and a stand-alone office, it sits more like the Child and Youth Advocate, not necessarily the Seniors' Advocate, which both offices are doing a great job, but when people present with a disability, every disability and how it's handled and how it's diagnosed and everything is all individual, very unique to that person. It might look similar to what somebody else is going through, but most times it's very different.

That's the reason why a stand-alone advocacy office is so important, especially to the families that are trying to understand that they have somebody with Autism or spina bifida, or whatever it is. At least then they have an opportunity to not be bewildered and to get out of the gates and be able to advocate for that family member or the person that they're looking after. The navigators would help navigate the system so that all benefits available to a person identifying as a person with a disability is eligible and can access and receive benefits. We can let everybody live their own best life.

We can break down barriers when it comes to employment. The advocacy office, people can go there and say that we're looking for this person or that person for this need or that need. The advocate might be able to navigate that rather quickly instead of having to worry about the bureaucracy of getting them to sit down in front of that person and secure employment.

Also for living, and I was very interested to hear what my colleague from Terra Nova had to say, because I think it's very much a disservice that we would rather give somebody a ramp or lower their light switches instead of giving them a prosthetic so that they can fully participate in the

world. I mean, while my colleagues says he learned from me this week, I certainly learned from him. I guess what I learned more than anything was that I take things for granted that I'm not – or the stuff that I guess I never had to step around or get around or anything like that, but I realize that the things that we take for granted sometimes are the biggest barrier to somebody in the same society, somebody standing right next to you.

That's the reason why I always say that if you can be anything in this world, just be kind because you don't know what somebody is after dealing with in their past. You don't know what news they got today and you don't know what they're facing tomorrow, so if you can be anything in this world, just be kind; and there are no kinder people than the people in our disability community.

Like I said, kind of like my colleague, again, from Placentia - St. Mary's, you become an advocate. It's a trial by fire kind of thing because after my son was diagnosed with Autism spectrum disorder, he was just barely two years old, people wondered how we could navigate the system so quickly. It really irritates me to be quite honest to hear this week in Oral Questions that it takes 2½ years to get an assessment, and we're not talking about from birth. We're talking about from the time that they realize there might be something cognitively different. If you go 2½ years out from that, a lot of kids are ending up in school before they even get diagnosed.

Like I said, a stand-alone disabilities advocate office is something that we, as the PC caucus, have been talking about, advocating for and have been pushing for, as we did to replace the Seniors' Advocate and as we did to replace the Child and Youth Advocate. I implore the government, let's get away from the red tape, bring the legislation and let's get down to business and get a disabilities advocate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Families and Affordability and Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Some great conversation so far. I'm very pleased to stand and speak here today and acknowledge the significant number of people in our province that identify with having a disability. As stated already, that number is around 30 per cent.

Like many people here, I'm sure we don't know just one person that identifies having a disability, we know many. I've had childhood friends, Ed, a neighbour and lots of people in the curling community, the wheelchair curling group. We all know lots, and I'll take a bit from my time on St. John's City Council, just shy of seven years. I was on the Transportation Commission for a while – that's Metrobus but also paratransit – getting to work with people with disabilities. Learning about it through their lens when it comes to mobility, how they get around the city and having an equitable busing system.

One of the things at the city was the Inclusion Advisory Committee. That's a group of individuals, stakeholders and organizations that give advice to city council on things like city programming, policies and services. One of the great things there is, although I never sat on the committee, just about every decision we made there had that lens of inclusion. From those seven years, every decision, learning how they look at things, how they would like to see things done in our city, that was something I really took from that.

Speaker, as a government we're committed to an inclusive and accessible Newfoundland and Labrador. We take a holistic approach to policy and development

which helps set the framework for strategic direction for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The Department of Families and Affordability has a Disability Policy Office which works closely with all government agencies, as well as persons with disabilities, outside organizations and many advocacy groups representing persons living with disabilities.

The Disability Policy Office offers education and guidance to public bodies, and development and implementation of the Accessibility Plan. Staff in my department are there to ensure that our government policies and programs and the people with expert, lived experiences with persons with disabilities are identified. They remove and prevent barriers of accessibility. I'd like to thank my department for the work they've done. They're some great staff; they're doing fantastic work.

Our government is committed to achieving an inclusive and accessible province. We support the community and persons living with disabilities through various programs such as: the Summer Camp Inclusion Grant, Accessible Taxi grant, Paratransit Grant and the Accessibility Grant. My previous minister of this department mentioned the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit, which includes up to \$400 a month to those that qualify and \$1,200 a year for the Registered Disability Savings Plan.

Although our government is working on behalf of persons with disabilities, we recognize the great work of the many advocacy groups in our province who are doing work here in our community. This includes the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, Epilepsy NL, Autism NL, Inclusion Canada NL and Easter Seals NL just to say a few, Speaker. There are many more. Not only do these groups help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with living with disabilities, but they also educate and take that advocacy work to the whole population.

Outside advocacy groups were instrumental in the development of groundbreaking legislation, the *Accessibility Act*. This enabling legislation outlines the principles and goals for an accessible province to improve accessibility by identifying, preventing and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society. We engage extensively with the community and persons with disabilities to advocate a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador approach following the principle Nothing About Us Without Us.

The key element to our legislation was the establishment of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board. The board was established in 2022 and is responsible for advising and making recommendations to the Minister Responsible for the Status Persons with Disabilities. I want to thank the board for the invaluable role that they play in a development of standards to identify, prevent and remove barriers to inclusion throughout the province.

Speaker, my department meets regularly with advocacy groups and other stakeholder groups to get a better understanding of the issues, including advocate of persons with disabilities. Now I'm the minister for the Status of Persons with Disabilities and I'm beginning to do that and doing the same. In fact, my first meeting as the minister was with the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities just yesterday. That was with Nancy Reid, Roger Head and Syd Wilanksy. Among the issues we did discuss was the subject being debated here today, the creation of an advocate for persons with disabilities.

As it was stated in the hon. House last week, it wouldn't have made any sense to create a new advocate while there was statutory review taking place. The review has now been done by Justice Fowler and, as we know, the recommendation was to broaden the advocacy. He said the focus of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate would

include the persons with disabilities. While the Premier, just last Thursday, was here, and you heard it from him about the disability community, that he doesn't feel that's the right thing to do.

I'll read this, Speaker, the Premier said: "I don't think we, as a government, should ever force something upon the disability community that they don't want. So now it's time to continue to work with the disability community, have discussions with them about what a specific advocate would look like and I'm happy to do that with them."

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. KORAB: So, Speaker, when I met with COD NL, we discussed various issues, like I said, including the disability advocate, and there was a recognition about the creation for an advocate of persons with disabilities, and that this would happen. We discussed timing. Obviously, the creation of the advocate would require drafting and tabling of new legislation here in the House, and this will need to be brought back to the House for a vote, which I'm sure won't be a problem.

While COD NL discussed the importance of the advocate and what they'd like to see in the role, I asked them to submit a letter to my office. I want to hear from them, and not just them, other groups that this impacts. We want to hear from you, what you would like to see in this advocate. I do have other meetings that are currently being set up and we now discuss the same. Just this morning, Speaker, I was talking with a group about something similar, looking to set a meeting up.

While the creation of an advocate for persons with disabilities will not solve the problems in the disability community, such an office will work greatly to improve the organization and help with the groups that play an instrumental role with disability advocacy in this province.

So, Speaker, in closing, I want to thank the community of and for persons with disabilities, not only for their passion and their tireless advocacy, but their spirit of collaboration we work towards to build a more accessible Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. KORAB: I want to thank the organizations that came here today and stuck around, realizing debate took a while, and the people that are watching at home or from their offices.

While, Speaker, I don't have a mandate letter in my hand physically, I've been told the creation of an advocate for persons with disabilities will be in that letter. My meeting with COD NL and officials in my department have me well on the way to fulfilling that objective.

As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I am pleased to say that I endorse the creation of an advocate of persons with disabilities, but, Speaker, it has to be done right. This government and my department will ensure it is drafted and it is done correctly.

I'll certainly be voting yes to this PMR brought forward by the Opposition and, Speaker, I'm happy to say that the wheels for that disability advocate in this province are well on the way.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

This is certainly my greatest honour since I spoke in this House – the one on disabilities. I'm the dad of a child with disabilities. I'll go back to the story. In 1989,

my wife was on her fifth pregnancy and when she went into labour, it was in March month on a Saturday night, they realized there were some problems. They realized there were difficulties.

They called the air ambulance and the air ambulance flew us out to Gander. Right away, they took her into the delivery room and there was a long time after before I got any news that there was anything wrong, but they informed me there was some difficulties with the baby. There was storm on the same night and when the storm was over, there was team coming in from the Janeway to take her to the Janeway. At the same time, thank God for the two top specialists, I would say surgeons, in Gander that they had to take my wife into surgery – maybe about two to three hours. They barely saved her. Anyhow, thank God for that.

We didn't know anything until we got a call from the neurologist in St. John's. They wanted a meeting with us. So myself and the wife went in and met with the neurologist and they told us there was a lot of difficulties, a lot of disabilities, more than what they realized. At the same time, they didn't have any prognosis of what it was or anything like that.

They started running tests, doing muscle tests. They used to send the muscle out and before the muscle would get to some lab somewhere, it wasn't fresh enough to do a proper diagnosis. They wanted her flown into Montreal and thank God, at the time, with the burden we had with the – because we had five. Like I said, four other girls at the time besides Candace. My sister offered to fly up with her to Montreal.

They did a fresh muscle test and they came up with a diagnosis that it was congenital muscle disproportion. Now, what they meant was that in your nervous junctions, there are two types of fibers. Only 50 per cent of her fibers developed. They had no reason why it happened or anything like

that. They could never tell us that. Anyhow, we know that we were in for a long ride.

As a family, we didn't want Candace to not know her family, so every month I take my family and go to the Janeway in the intensive care unit and we spend time with her. We wanted her to know her family.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: So, some 3½ years later, they decided that they would take a chance on sending her home to our home on Fogo Island, and back then, we had no supports, none whatsoever. So we took on a major risk bringing her out, but we wanted her home, and they were going to provide care workers and things like that.

Anyhow, they flew her out, and I can remember the air ambulance coming first, and then right behind them was another one, CBC flew in Pauline Thornhill, who did an interview with us. It was all on TV one time after. But anyhow, we stuck to our guns, and we said we were going to give her not only accessibilities, we were going to give her the best quality life that we could give her, and that was our –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: As she got older, and we realized how intelligent she was – but I'll just go back a little bit on the story. She couldn't breathe on her own; she was on a breathing machine. She was tubal fed. She had pretty well total paralysis. She couldn't even blink her eyelids, but intelligent-wise, above average.

So we decided that we would check with schools and see if we could get some home schooling, and that's what we did, we put home schooling in place. After they did their assessments with her, they realized that maybe she should go back to school, but at that time, there were 17 72-passenger school buses on the Island and not a wheelchair lift on either one of them. That's

how far back we were when it comes to accessibilities and disabilities.

Then the school board decided that they'd put it to a tender, which they did, and nobody bid on it. They called me and said, look, sorry for the disappointment, but nobody bid on it. We were wanting her to go to school. She was wanting to go to school herself. They said to me, you know, you have the right to put in a tender yourself. I said, is that right? So I talked it over with the wife, and I did. I put in the bid what I thought was reasonable to be able to buy a wheelchair lift bus.

I flew to Montreal and bought a used bus, drove it down and between me and the wife, we'd take her to school in the morning. If I was busy at something else, the wife would drive her to school. We did that for a number of years. She was the happiest child that you could ever see, never disappointed, never upset, always full of humour, smiling, never let her condition bother her at all.

I've gone ahead a little bit now because I've got to tell the other story, too. My wife never got to hold her from birth and the wife was very upset for the longest time until she finally told me that she wanted another child. So way to go.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: So then we borne another baby girl and here was six girls. They were really good. When Candace came home, basically, we had two babies because Candace was only 3½ years old and Chawna was just born. Chawna was a bit hardier then. Chawna might have been about one or something like that by the time Candace came home. They bonded. They were good for each other. That's what helped Candace through was my youngest daughter, Chawna.

Through the years, we did everything we could. We took her to everything we could

take her to. She graduated from high school with a real top-notch average.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: I'll never forget her graduation. Because of her air flow, because she's on the machine, they had a speaking valve, so she did have something to say at her graduation. There wasn't a dry eye in the auditorium. Not only that, but she also took part in two of her sisters' weddings and at one of the weddings, she wanted to sing. She got up – well, she didn't get up. We wheeled her up to the mic and my other daughter played the guitar and she sang for her other sister who was just married.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: We didn't know how long Candace was going to be around us because she had what you call scoliosis. Her spine was going into an S shape and it was placing a lot of pressure on her chest cavity. For her to take surgery, it would be a high risk – a very high risk. We said no, we'll leave it alone. She was in a mould all of the time, different moulds, so as she got older, go in and change it to a different type of mould.

Anyhow, I've got a little over a minute left, I suppose. I've got a job to see that clock.

AN HON. MEMBER: A minute and a half.

J. MCKENNA: A minute and a half.

It was November of 2007 at our home on Fogo Island she went into congestive heart failure and she passed away in our home. We are happy that's the way it happened because if she had to go back to St. John's, she'd know that something is not right. So she died peacefully and happy, and, of course, we are very happy to this day to give her that quality of life. This is where it's very, very important (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: So, you know, I'll tell you what she did for all of us. She put a drive in my family, my wife and girls because I would not be here today where I'm to if it wasn't for Candace.

Thank you, Candace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Member for Harbour Main speaks now, we'll close debate.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, this has been an incredible debate because we've heard from 10 of our Members who have joined together and united for the need for a disability advocate, and we've heard some incredible, incredible stories of lived experiences, and the most recent was the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels. That was the most heart-warming story of human spirit –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – and it demonstrates what the power of love of a mother and father and their family can do, and the experiences –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: So when we look at this, we see from these stories, whether it's from the Member for Terra Nova, as well, and his passionate story about his lived experience – when he says it's been tough, he's been courageous, and I know for me, he's given me and our caucus a better understanding of how it is to live with a disability.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: We're hearing lived experiences whether it be from the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's or the

Member for Placentia West - Bellevue who are also parents of persons with disabilities and the difficulties and the challenges that they have as caregivers with persons with disabilities, yet the joy and the beauty of it all. It only goes to show, Speaker, that the necessity of a disability advocate is clear.

When I think of some of the speakers and some of the things that they've stated here, today, the Leader of the Opposition talked about the importance of core funding model, and that's why we need to have more financial supports for families, for persons with disabilities. If we had a core funding model, that would clearly provide the necessary assistance to people.

Unfortunately, and I have to say this, and I know that we are all working together, but we cannot use excuses. We cannot say that it's okay. We cannot continue on with this. We cannot say and use the same language that we're working on it, and we're going to meet again. The persons with disabilities and the disability community are tired of hearing those excuses, Speaker. It's not good enough.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: It's been years since it's been worked on. When we hear from the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, I mean, he talked about a very important point. He said, really, as hon. Members of this House of Assembly, if we want this done, then it can be done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: All we have is to work together. The Member for Burin - Grand Bank, he referenced the programs and all of the things, and there have been. We'll acknowledge that there have been steps that have been made by the government, but it's not enough. It's not enough for the disability community.

You gave the examples of the disability benefit. Well, that benefit alone has problems with it. It has barriers, and if we had a disability advocate, that advocate would help navigate persons with disabilities in accessing that benefit.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: When we look at, for example, the Leader of the Third Party, he talked about inclusion and he talked about safe places, but he made the perfect point of time is not always a luxury for many people living with a disability. He gave an example about being a year for one of his constituents to get into accessible housing. People cannot wait, especially persons with disabilities, time may not be on their side.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise talked about what has been the barrier. He asked the legitimate, sensible question: What is the barrier that has prevented this from happening? There is certainly a barrier here and he stated this should be a done deal. We have had time.

It's been years and now when I hear from the Minister Responsible for Persons with Disabilities, I have to say, I am disappointed. We hear the same words again and again. Yes, it's good that you endorse the creation of a disability advocate, but you're talking more about meetings and that you're going to have more consultations. These have been taking place for years and now is the time to act. Now is the time to act.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, we are united.

We are united; we are one on this, but it is not enough to continue just talking about it. It's not enough to use excuses or to continue with more delays. This can happen. We have the will to do it.

I am the critic for persons with disabilities. I've been very privileged to be in this position and I feel very privileged to have had the honour to present this on behalf of the PC Opposition. We need to see this legislation now, Speaker. The people from the disability community, they're counting on us and they're waiting. They've waited too long. Let's make this happen. They deserve nothing less.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before I call the vote, I'm just going to acknowledge some of the work that the House of Assembly has been doing also and I commend my staff in that work.

Since I've been Speaker, we've taken disabilities and the challenges that we face here in this House, the people's House, very serious. We have serious challenges when it comes to the disability population and I'm proud to see that up in the public gallery now, just recently we've been putting large-screen TVs with closed-captioning on them for people in the House. We've increased our capacity for persons in wheelchairs, to be able to accommodate more people in the House. We've changed our broadcasting now to make sure that our closed-captioning is basically gavel-to-gavel now, rather than just isolated parts of the House of Assembly.

Now we have more challenges; we've done some work with our automatic door openers but, as we all see, our Chamber is a challenge too. I am working with our staff, with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and the Disabilities Policy Office to see how we can overcome those challenges. I commend everybody for all the work they're doing, all the advocacy they're doing and also the people in the gallery.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour of the private Member's resolution, say 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in all Members, please.

Division

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Everybody ready for the vote?

All those in favour of the resolution, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: Lisa Dempster, John Haggie, Bernard Davis, Paul Pike, Scott Reid, Gerry Byrne, Siobhan Coady, Elvis Loveless, Krista Lynn Howell, Fred Hutton, Sarah Stoodley, John Abbott, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Jamie Korab, Perry Trimper, Lucy Stoyles, Tony Wakeham, Barry Petten, Lloyd Parrott, Paul Dinn, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Joedy Wall, Jeff Dwyer, Lin Paddock, Loyola O'Driscoll, Craig Pardy, Pleaman Forsey, Chris Tibbs, Jim McKenna, Jim Dinn, Jordan Brown, Eddie Joyce, Paul Lane.

SPEAKER: I don't think I need the Clerk to come to a formal count on that but I'll let her do her job anyway.

CLERK (Hawley George): Speaker, the ayes: 33; the nays: 0.

SPEAKER: By unanimous consent, the resolution is passed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

SPEAKER: Before I call for the vote, I was just reminded of one more thing. One of our Table Officers there today, the Proceedings and Information Services Officer, Kim Hammond, is celebrating her birthday today.

Happy Birthday, Kim.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: All those in favour of the adjournment, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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