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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Apparently, no strangers. None up there anyway.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're all in here.

SPEAKER: They're all in here, yes.

Government Business

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Order 4, Bill 10.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Good morning, everyone.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022." (Bill 10)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to start by briefly explaining how the Newfoundland and Labrador workers' compensation system works.

The system provides workplace injury coverage to employers and support workers who experience a workplace injury or illness. That support can include coverage for wage loss benefits or retirement benefits. A workplace injury or illness can have a lasting impact on a worker's life, affecting not just their ability to work, but their income, health and long-term financial security.

For many workers, time away from work can make it difficult to plan for the future or save for retirement. That is why it is so important that the system reflects the real, long-term impacts workers experience when faced with injury or illness.

Serving approximately 230,000 workers and 17,000 employers, WorkplaceNL administers an employer-funded, no-fault workers' compensation system that promotes safe and healthy workplaces.

WorkplaceNL provides return-to-work programs and offers compensation to workers and their dependants. The injury fund is a dedicated fund that pays for workers' compensation benefits in Newfoundland and Labrador. As mentioned, it is funded solely by employers, plus returns on investments, and is managed by WorkplaceNL to ensure benefits are available when workers need them most.

WorkplaceNL is governed by a board of directors that reports to the provincial government. Through my role as the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL, their appointment is recommended through the merit-based process of the Independent Appointments Commission.

The board is established under section 6 of the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022*. Members include the chair, three worker representatives, three employer representatives, three public interest representatives and two ex officio members. The board of directors provides strategic oversight and governance and

WorkplaceNL's chief executive officer is responsible for the day-to-day operations of WorkplaceNL.

The provincial government is committed to effective, accountable and transparent governance on all of its agencies, boards and commissions, including WorkplaceNL. We thank them for their service to the people of our province.

As I say that, I'd like to encourage the public to check out and consider the appointment opportunities available for government agencies, boards and commissions on the Independent Appointments Commission website. There are lots of opportunities to share experience and expertise, as well as diverse skill sets.

Under the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022*, the provincial government is required to appoint an independent review committee every five years to assess the workers' compensation system and make recommendations on how to improve the system.

One recommendation from the last review in 2019 is to include time spent receiving temporary earnings loss benefits beyond 24 months when calculating a worker's retirement benefit. Temporary earnings loss benefits, as the name implies, are temporary benefits paid to a worker who has a loss of earnings due to an injury while they recover.

Right now, currently under the system introduced on January 1, 2019, only extended earnings loss benefits are counted when retirement benefits are calculated. Time spent on temporary earnings loss benefits does not currently count toward a worker's retirement benefits.

I'm here today to propose a change to the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022*, to implement this recommendation that changes how the retirement benefit is calculated that came

from the legislative review. The retirement benefit is a one-time lump sum payment workers receive at 65 when their extended earnings loss benefits end. Currently the legislation does not include a definition of temporary earnings loss. The calculation of the retirement benefit at age 65 does not include temporary earnings loss benefits.

This change means that once Bill 10 receives Royal Assent, the legislation will include a formal definition of temporary earnings loss benefits, and these benefits paid to a worker beyond 24 months will be included in the calculation of a worker's retirement benefit.

In addition, adding specific wording in respect of an injury to the legislation ensures that temporary earnings loss benefits are counted for the same injury that extended earnings loss benefits were paid to the worker when calculating their retirement benefit.

Both types of benefits – temporary earnings loss and extended earnings loss benefits – can be paid to a worker for many years. Both affect a worker's ability to save for retirement. This proposed change recognizes that reality and makes the system fair for workers with an injury or illness.

If approved, the change would apply retroactively for January 1, 2019, which is when the current retirement benefit was introduced, so it makes sense to make this calculation change retroactive to that day.

That also means hundreds of older workers, those who have already reached age 65, are not left out. As a result and once the bill receives Royal Assent, 3,100 workers in our province would see a one-time increase to their retirement benefit now or when they turn 65. Over 700 of these workers will receive a retroactive lump-sum payment later this year. While the amount a worker receives depends on their temporary

earnings loss benefits, on average, that increase would be near \$5,800 per worker.

With this change, the cost to WorkplaceNL's Injury Fund would be approximately \$14.3 million. The Injury Fund is in a strong financial position and can absorb this cost. This change is strictly about how retirement benefits are calculated. It does not affect who is eligible for temporary earnings loss benefits, extended earnings loss benefits or the retirement benefit.

Retired workers have spent years, often decades, contributing their skills, experience and labour to our workplaces, communities and economy. Affordability was a pillar in our government's platform and we're taking action to ensure that all seniors in this province have the means to live a healthy and full life.

When a worker is injured or falls sick on the job, it's important that the system continues to fairly recognize the value of that contribution, even after their working years have ended, ensuring workers can retire with dignity as a way of honouring the service and commitment and acknowledging the role they played in building our province.

Time away from work due to injury of illness can significantly limit a person's ability to save for retirement, regardless of which benefit they receive. This change recognizes the reality by ensuring all long-term wage loss support is reflected when retirement benefits are calculated. It provides greater financial security in retirement for workers who were injured or became sick on the job and could not return to work as expected.

The retroactive application means older and long-serving workers are not left behind simply because of how benefits were categorized. For many, the one-time increase will provide a meaningful financial relief and greater stability at the time when income is often fixed.

Overall, this change strengthens the workers' compensation system by making it more consistent, more equitable and more responsive to real-life impacts of workers experiencing a workplace injury or illness. For those reasons, I am recommending that we approve Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022.

This legislation is to address how retirement benefits are calculated for injured workers here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a targeted amendment, but one that has a meaningful implication for fairness, clarity and the overall integrity of our workplace compensation system. This bill represents a fundamental commitment to fairness, ensuring that our provincial workplace compensation system truly reflects the lived realities of those who have suffered significant long-term injuries on the job.

This legislation is to address how retirement benefits are calculated for injured workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a targeted change, but one that has meaningful implications for fairness, clarity and the overall integrity of our workplace compensation system. This bill proposes three main changes: first, it introduces a formal definition of temporary earnings loss benefits into the act; second, it modifies how retirement benefits are calculated for injured workers when they reach the age of 65; and third, it makes these changes retroactive to January 1, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, this discussion and bill is really about supporting injured workers. When someone is injured on the job, they are often placed on temporary earnings loss benefits at the beginning of their recovery. These benefits are designed to support workers while they are off work, receiving treatment or participating in return to work or labour market re-entry programs. In some cases, those injuries persist and workers transition to extended earnings loss benefits.

One of the core issues we're looking at here in Bill 10 is about addressing the systemic gap in how we calculate retirement benefits for injured workers. Under our current framework, when an injured worker reaches the age of 65, they're entitled to a lump sum retirement benefit. This is a vital safety net intended to compensate for the retirement savings they would be unable to accrue due to their inability to work.

Previously, the calculation to this benefit is focused almost exclusively on extended earnings loss benefits. While that sounds logical on the surface, it did not fully consider the reality of the recovery process, or that so many workers who eventually moved to extended benefits began their journey on temporary earnings loss benefits.

Currently, the time a worker spends on these temporary benefits, even if it lasts for years, is effectively invisible when they reach the age of 65. A significant portion of their actual wage loss is simply ignored. Mr. Speaker, temporary should mean not forgotten.

Bill 10 fixes this by ensuring these years of recovery are finally recognized in the retirement formula. To achieve this fairness, the bill proposes structural changes, statutory clarity through definition, updating the calculation formula and retroactive payment.

In clause 1 of this bill, it amends the act to include a formal statutory definition of temporary earnings loss benefits. By tying this definition to the policies established by the WorkplaceNL Board of Directors, we provide much-needed clarity in legal recognition to these benefits, ensuring there is no ambiguity about what counts towards a worker's future.

Clause 2 repeals and replaces section 85(1). The new formula acknowledges that if a recovery is prolonged, the benefits received during this time are a reflection of a permanent impact on the worker's life. Specifically, if an individual receives temporary benefits for more than 24 months, the portion beyond that two-year mark will now be factored in to the retirement payout.

Clause 3 makes these changes retroactive to January 1, 2019. We are not just fixing this for the future; we are reaching back to help those who have already retired.

Speaker, we have to consider who these changes actually help. These are workers who have faced long and difficult roads to recovery, individuals who were off work receiving medical treatment and heroically participating in the early return-to-work or labour market re-entry programs. For many of these 700 individuals, the temporary phase of their injury was anything but brief. It involved years of medical appointments and rehabilitation.

To tell a worker that those years of their life don't count towards their retirement because of a technicality in benefit classification is an injustice we can no longer ignore. While we, in the Official Opposition, support the intent of this bill, we do have several questions we intend to raise during Committee stage to ensure the implementation is as effective as possible.

Speaker, Bill 10 is about alignment. It aligns our provincial legislation with the actual lived experience of injured workers. It

ensures that those who have endured the most significant workplace injuries are not penalized for the nature of their recovery process. By broadening the benefit base and recognizing the reality of long-term temporary benefits, we are strengthening the integrity of our compensation system and providing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with the retirement security they have earned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always an honour to rise in this House and speak to any bill and get a chance to talk about your constituency and support the good work on this side of the House.

We're here talking about Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act. I think all of us in this House, we've had a constituent come in who has had some interaction with WorkplaceNL. They've had an injury; we've all seen that. We've seen the frustration. We've seen the pain. We've seen the suffering that the family endures. I'll be quite blunt in saying it, Mr. Speaker, sometimes interactions with government, especially when somebody is injured, hospitals and all those things are not a very pleasant experience.

When we get a chance to make a change to a piece of legislation like we're doing here today, in the words of the Member for St. John's West, we're talking about fairness. We're talking about recognition. If you've met these people in our offices like we have on almost a daily basis sometimes, Mr. Speaker, they're looking for just that; they're looking to say that my time served was valued by this province and by whatever their contribution to our economy was.

They want to know that their lived experience, as the Member for St. John's West said, counts for something. What it means is that, regardless of the nature of their injury, they're respected. We're saying that what they've contributed to society was valued and that we're going to give you recognition for that retro back to a certain point in time, which I believe is January 1, 2019, according to the amendment here to this legislation.

Basically, I guess what we're trying to say here is, we're making some small amendments to the piece of legislation just to clear up some definitions. We're going to put in the actual amounts that are going to be affecting people, and we're going to be talking about the average increases and how those payments are going to start to be issued this year.

So back to earlier, Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the assessment of these injuries and interacting with the department in government. They often take time. There are a lot of necessary steps. There's validation from the medical side if an injury occurs. It's a lot of paperwork, and they need support. I'd like to think that, just like my office engages everybody in the constituencies, that our constituency assistants and whether or not you've got other staff there as well, we're there to help assist them in this process as well, because it's not the easiest thing to track all the emails, especially if you're hurt, and all the paperwork, all the reports to help liaise with the doctors right through to the government department.

It takes a lot of effort, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to think that everybody is willing to help anybody that is in need; because, if you've ever been injured, if you've ever been secluded from the rest of your team, your workforce, what you're going to see is that it's a very lonely feeling. You don't feel like there's anybody there with you, and if your MHA can help bridge those gaps between the services you require, it's time well spent.

It's a job well done, and I believe it makes us all more effective in terms of the service that we have for the people of the province and the people in our constituencies.

So with that I'd like to say, 3,100 people, that's a sizeable number. Anybody who is 65 and older in this challenging economy, with the cost of goods so high, and these people on fixed incomes, like we said, there's not much room for any extras. Perhaps this lessens the damage caused by the injury and the economic hurt, you could say, that might have been put on the household. That average of \$5,800 per worker, that's a nice shot in the arm. We'll just put it that way.

Again, like the Member for St. John's West said, and the minister said in his preamble, it's about recognition of what happened. It is about validation of the events that occurred which led to them being taken out of the workforce. It is, again, acknowledgement that time spent in the workforce, time served, if you will, there's a value placed on that, and the government recognizes that. We're making changes in our legislation to reflect that, Mr. Speaker.

It might be only a small amendment, but I think it's a major change going forward. It might only be 3,100 people that we help now, but, as this goes on in the future, we're going to see a lot more people, hopefully, be given the respect they're due after they've successfully negotiated the back and forth of going through an injury and liaising with government and hopefully getting a positive income for their own individual situation and their family.

With that said, nothing too detailed and in-depth here today, but a good move. I commend the minister on that. Again, the validation, the recognition, the acknowledgement of people going through an injury. If this eases their interaction with government and it eases the burden on their family, this is good work by all. I'm pleased to be a part of it, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to

thank all Members in the House so far for their commentary.

With that, I'll take my seat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

This is – yes, I would agree with the previous Member – a small but important piece of legislation.

I will speak from a teaching point of view. When so much of your identity was tied up in your classroom and who you are as a teacher – and I would say my colleagues who are in that profession probably still identify themselves as teachers even though we've been out of the classroom for quite a while.

I would argue that we've all had colleagues who probably had to leave the profession and probably retired in that way. It's not the way we want to go. More or less, we want to be on our feet, we want to be part of that staff and the community and, in many ways, I would say there is a sense of loss when you lose that part of your identity, part of who you are, your profession and so on and so forth. It hurts even more, of course, if indeed your pension then is affected as a result of it.

Most pensions are not indexed, so any cut is going to have a long-term effect. Maybe not in the first few years, but over a period of time it will, especially if you're still dealing with the effects of the reasons as to why you were off work, either temporarily or long-term.

So this bill then amends the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act to add a definition and to modify the calculation of retirement benefits. In 2019, the government at the time amended the

benefit calculation mechanism for those relying on workmen's comp due to an injury. Under the old system, the wage loss benefits at age 65 were paid a pension benefit if they're able to demonstrate that there was an actual loss from the Canada Pension Plan or their own employer-sponsored pension plan was affected. It was a monthly or annual benefit paid for life.

In 2019, that changed to, basically, when an injured worker turns 65, who receives or had extended earnings losses, a one-time benefit based on 5 per cent of their total EEL, or extended earnings losses, benefits plus interest, or 10 per cent if they were part of the employer-sponsored pension plan. Not a whole lot, especially if you plan to live any length of time.

Now, one common method, I guess, if you look at compensation – and maybe this is the thing here – compensating injured workers was through the payment of temporary earnings loss benefits, and you had to be receiving medical treatment, taking part in early and safe return to work and participating in the early re-entry program for back to work.

I will say this, for a lot of people on workmen's comp, there is a cap on it as well. I'll speak to it again as teachers; we found that if you had your Level VII Certificate, then this will have a significant impact on the income that you're bringing in, because it was capped at a maximum and many were earning over that maximum, and that would have an impact on their quality of life, especially if they still had to pay a mortgage, still have to pay the bills, still raising children and so on and so forth.

So the bill codifies the existing practice of extending pension benefits to those receiving the temporary earnings loss after 24 months and amends the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act to add a definition of temporary earnings loss benefits to modify the calculation of retirement benefits to include temporary

earnings loss and also to make it retroactive. We have had a couple of calls to the office when this was first indicated that government was going to bring this in. This is the very thing that they were speaking to, you know, to rectify that unfairness that they thought.

There will be, by amending the rules, approximately 700 workers who will be able to claim their TEL benefits when calculating a pension. We have pushed ourselves to increase the income replacement rate from 85 per cent to 90 per cent. We know, and we argue this because workplace health and safety is highly solvent, it's well over-funded and it should be able to afford this.

We welcome the legislation. We know that it does nothing to address the numerous cases of injured workers who lost out on years of claiming pensionable income when the old system offering the retirement benefit payments was switched to the current one in 2019. This loophole opened because there was no requirement at the time under the pension benefits for employers to count a period of disability leave for the receipt of workmen's compensation, so many were left out. This situation was unjust and unfair.

We know – and here's the interesting part when we're talking about the workmen's compensation. As part of the 2019 Statutory Review, Morneau Shepell basically was engaged to calculate the total potential liability of grandfathering these workers into the new system and compensating them for pensionable years lost. At that time, they calculated the total liability to be between \$47 million and \$68 million. They argued that it would put the compensation system at risk and voted against any compensation for those affected by the change in the system.

At that time, Morneau Shepell also noted that the WorkplaceNL had a funded ratio of 123.4 per cent. At that time, I would argue that if we had pension plans throughout our

careers, that funded ratio would be fantastic. If they grandfathered those workers into the new system, the ratio would decline between 117.2 per cent to 119.1 per cent. At the year end of 2024, the funded ratio had reached 131 per cent and, for years, it has remained well above 110 per cent.

Now, I think, if anything else, there's room there to make sure increased benefits for workers, not only in the replacement rate but also in accounting these temporary earnings loss payments as part of a pension. Yet, WorkplaceNL continues to offer discounted rates to companies paying into the system as opposed to increasing benefits for workers.

Last week, we had the Day of Mourning for injured workers and workers who died as a result of their workplace injuries or workplace disease. We have these moments to reflect on the importance of workers. Well, I think, Speaker, there comes a time here in this that legislation like this is a small way of demonstrating a very practical term, the value of and importance of our workers, not only for what they do for the system, but also the fact that each worker represents a family. They have a spouse, a partner. They have children. They're contributing to the community.

In many cases, these workplace injuries really takes a person out of their workplace, out of that community, out of the thing that brought meaning to their lives, and that's difficult enough to deal with without a loss of income or reduction of income, especially if you're forced to retire as a result of it.

So, for that reason, we will support this legislation. We still have work to do in this area, but it's a start for sure.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Thank you, Speaker.

Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act – as most of you know, I come from a very heavy industrial town and communities, and this bill is going to impact Labrador West significantly in the mining industry and every industry in Lab West. But the mining industry is probably the heaviest in Labrador West, so this will impact our community greatly.

It impacts me on a personal note, too. In 2019, I was diagnosed with cancer. My cancer come from a result of firefighting over the years. So I was lucky. I'm a very lucky man. Early detection and, after surgery, I went back to work in three months. Most people say your best five years is great for your pension. So if I had to stay off for five years, those last five years would have impacted my pension significantly.

Like my colleague from Lake Melville said, you struggle a lot. Workers' compensation is nowhere near what your income is. I'll just use for an example, again most of you know I came from firefighting. There are firefighters in Lab West, volunteer firefighters that are earning \$150,000 to \$250,000 a year. So if they were to be injured as a firefighter and go off on workers' comp, their income is way, way down. Big impact on families. A lot of families are going to struggle, significantly. Again, personally, I would like to see compensation rates go up to compensate for loss of income when you do go off work.

I will say this, though, I don't care what side of the House you're on here today, but anybody who was here in 2015 that put the legislation through for presumptive cancer, I thank them. I really do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: I can tell you personally how much – again, I was only off for three months but I would not want to imagine being off for four or five years. You got a mortgage – and I'll say this: People in Lab West live rich. They do. You got a mortgage, probably have two cars, two trucks. You got Ski-Doos, boats and you have everything that you want. To go off on workers' comp and be off for a long period of time, you're going to suffer and your family is going to suffer. It puts a lot of stress on your household.

Coming from Lab West too, again, I'll go back to the heavy industrial town. I don't know how many people in this House knows it but Lab West played a big impact on workers' health and safety over the years. You can almost thank the unions in Lab West in the early '70s for the right to refuse. They played a big, important role in that coming into effect, workers' right to refuse. I will thank anybody that was involved in that as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: When a worker experiences a workplace injury or illness, it's important that the workers' compensation system continues to recognize the value of their contribution to the workplace, community and economy, even after their working years have ended.

Introducing this change strengthens the retirement support for workers experiencing a workplace injury or illness by recognizing their time away to recover. The retirement benefit is a one-time, lump-sum payment workers receive at 65, when extended earnings loss benefits end. This change means temporary earnings loss benefits beyond 24 months will now be included in the calculation of a worker's retirement benefit retroactive to January 1, 2019.

As my other colleagues pointed out, about 3,100 workers receiving a retirement benefit will see an increase to this benefit now and

when they turn 65. On an average, the increase is estimated to be about \$5,800 per worker. Payments will start to be issued this year. There is no change to employer assessment rates.

Again, I just want to point out that, personally, I know how people can struggle when they're off on workers' compensation and I just wanted to point that out to everybody here in this House today, it's not easy when you're off on workers' compensation. It affects your whole family.

So I will just leave it at that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Members that got up and spoke, especially the MHA from Lab West. Thank you, it's always great to hear stories from our colleagues, but real-life stories and the impacts that you faced personally, it's heart wrenching to hear. I am thankful that some benefits that come from this House of Assembly in the past have helped you and others, many more besides, but I can't stand in this House without saying a big thank you to someone who was recognized in a Member's statement just recently in this House of Assembly by one of our colleagues, who worked very hard and diligently with us in 2015 and onward and ever since then, advocating for this, Lieutenant Jimmy O'Toole.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: I know full well the meetings that I had, and I was going to recognize the former minister and MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's who worked very closely with Jimmy on this particular file and I happened to be her parliamentary secretary at the time and

it was amazing to see how passionate he was and educated us on what we needed to do. To hear you stand in the House of Assembly, years later, about the decisions that were made here, it's nice to hear. It's heart warming, I have to say.

This piece of legislation is a good piece of legislation. I thank the minister for bringing it forward. It's one of a recommendation that follows on a stepping stone of what we've been working on since the 2019 statutory review. I will have some questions, of course, to the minister when we get there. I am sure the MHA for St. John's West will as well. This is one of the 48 recommendations that came forward out of that statutory review.

One thing that I called the attention to – and I think the MHA for St. John's Centre brought it up, a little bit, about the funding nature of the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission fund. It wasn't too long ago that we looked back and the fund was underfunded, quite significantly – somewhere around 72, 73, 74 per cent. There had to be some changes made, unfortunate changes. We're slowly bringing back some of those things, as a government in the past and, hopefully, as we see here today, moving forward on some of those as recommendations as well.

The funding nature now being in the 131.5 or 0.8, I think, per cent funded gives you the opportunity, and it's all about balance. As a former Labour minister, one of the things I'm sure the current Labour Minister hears from his staff all of the time is about balance. It's about looking at the needs and wants of the employers versus the needs and wants of the employees. They've got to find some balance that works for all parties to ensure that there's a balance in the system.

When the system is unbalanced, we get into a situation where it becomes underfunded but we're in a situation now where we're overfunded. That gives us an opportunity to do more for the people that are receiving

those benefits, and we should and we are. Presumptive cancer being one of those that we've looked at.

Just a little over a year and a half ago, that same firefighter came in to see in our offices and asked for 16 cancers to be covered. We, as a government, decided, at the time, to not only cover those 16, but put 19 there to lead the country. I think everyone in this House of Assembly was proud of us that day. I think we can all get behind good things, which is why I'm excited that 3,100 people are going to get extra benefit out of this and more besides.

It's going to be important for the people of this province and it's also something that – and I'm sure the MHA for St. John's Centre would agree with this statement – we want to be faster at doing these things. This was a statutory review in 2019. We want to be faster at getting these things to the table where we're seeing them today. But sometimes when actuaries are involved and things like that, levels of bureaucracy gets involved and we've got to be a little bit more nimble, we'll continue to try to push as fast as we possibly can to make those benefits get to the hands of the workers where they need to be.

So I'm just very supportive of this piece of legislation. I look forward to more pieces coming from the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act to come forward to this very House where we can debate and try to make this piece of legislation stronger and better for the people that we all represent.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: I rise today to speak to an important amendment to the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022*, Bill 10. At its core, this legislation is about people. It's about the men and women who go to work every day, contribute to our economy and support their families and build our communities.

Mr. Speaker, when a worker is injured on the job, the impact doesn't end when their shift ends. It doesn't end when their working years are over. In many cases, it stays with them for life. I can speak personally about this. I spent 35 years at the mill in Corner Brook and the number of injuries I've seen there are way too many to count. Unfortunately, I was part of a couple, and the last one was probably the worst one.

I was a stevedore at the mill. I loaded up the trailers for MSC. When we first started loading these cans, I guess for one reason or another, we weren't getting the top-end cans with the load and sometimes the floors were weak. I had a floor give out underneath me when I was loading – an abrupt stop. I can't remember; apparently I struck my head, back.

We talked about cellphones here yesterday. Thankfully I had a cellphone on me. I sent my coworker to go over and put the kettle on because we were getting ready to go for break about 11 at night. I had to call him to come get me out of the truck. I physically couldn't get myself out. It just hurt.

I made the mistake. I thought I was tough. I thought, oh, there's nothing to this. I'll get through this. The investigation came in. The mill done the procedures. They sent me to the hospital to get checked out, but I came back to work the next day. I had the papers for workers' compensation to fill out. I said, oh, there's nothing to that. I won't bother with that. I'm going to go on back to work. This is not going to bother me. I'm Hal. I'm tough.

I'm feeling the effects today and every day, and I'm very thankful for my physiotherapist in Corner Brook, Tommy Farrell.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: And even today, unfortunately, Tommy goes out to Codroy Valley, Port aux Basques on Fridays, and when I get home, he's not around. I can't wait when I get past this week coming up, I can get on his back rack and get stretched out again. I get relief from that, and that's important.

It's a lived experience. I understand it, but I'm one and if anybody is out there that gets injured, make sure you fill out your papers and put them in. Create that paper trail so you have it. You need it, and that's so important.

This amendment strengthens our retirement support for workers who have experienced a workplace injury or illness. It acknowledges something that is often overlooked. The time a worker spends away from the job recovering is still part of his story. It still matters, and it should count.

Speaker, too often in the past, there were gaps. Gaps that didn't fully reflect the reality of what injured workers go through. Time spent recovering, time that was necessary, time that was unavoidable, was not always fully considered in the calculation of retirement benefits. That is what we're fixing here today.

These changes ensure the temporary earnings loss benefits beyond 24 months will now be included in the calculation of workers' retirement benefit. Speaker, that might sound technical, but the impact is very real. It means that workers who have spent extended periods away from their jobs recovering from their injury or illness will not be penalized when they reach retirement age. It means we are recognizing their full contribution, the full journey, not just the parts that fit neatly into a formula; and

importantly, Speaker, this change is retroactive to January 1, 2019. So this is not about future fairness; it's about correcting past inequities as well.

Let's talk about what that really means in practical terms. The retirement benefit in question is a one-time, lump-sum payment that workers receive at age 65 when their extended earnings loss benefits end. With this amendment, approximately 3,100 workers will see an increase in that benefit. On average, that increase is estimated to be about \$5,800 per worker.

Now, Speaker, \$5,800 might not change the world, but it could certainly make a difference. It could help cover the cost of living. It can ease financial pressures, and it could provide a bit of security in retirement. It says, we see you, we recognize what you've been through, and we are committed to treating you fairly. I think that's important, because when we identify something that needs fixing, we should act and we should act in a timely way.

Speaker, another key point here is that there is no charge to employer assessment rates, and that matters. We can support workers, we can respect employers and we can build a system that is balanced, and that is exactly what this amendment achieves. I want to take a moment to step back to reflect on the broader principles at play here. Workplace health and safety is not just about preventing injuries, although, that is, of course, critical and important.

I want to talk about my time on an OHS committee. In my 35 years at the mill, I probably spent somewhere around 15 or 17 years on that committee, and some of the incidents that I had to come in and get called into the mill to investigate would frighten you. You would wonder how someone survived it. A fall – when you look at the ceiling in this Chamber and you add probably another 20 or 30 feet to it and you see someone came through a roof to a concrete floor. Amazingly, someone was

taking care of that contractor that was working that day. He fractured his ankle; that was it. He had a fractured ankle and fell well over 50 feet to a concrete floor, bounced off a few platforms and a couple of rolls.

I'm telling you, some of them had digits, fingers tore off, caught and pinched. So, I mean, when people can't keep continuing to work and, at the age of 65, got no way about it, these amendments help those people, those very individuals who no longer can work. I'm very thankful for that.

It's about how we respond and how we support and how we ensure that workers are not left behind, because the reality is no system is perfect. Accidents happen and illnesses happen. When they do, the measure of a system is how well it takes care of the people affected and, today, with this amendment, we are strengthening that care. We are closing the gap. We are improving fairness. We are reinforcing the principles that workers deserve to be supported, not just in the moment of injury, but throughout their lives.

Speaker, I always want to acknowledge the many workers who will benefit from this change. These individuals, who have already given so much – they have contributed to our workplaces, they have contributed to our communities and they have contributed to the economy of this province – many of them face challenges that most of us hope we never have to face, recovering from serious injury, adjusting to new realities and navigating complexities of the compensation system, as the Member for Lake Melville discussed earlier.

This amendment, in many ways, is about recognizing that journey. It is about ensuring that their time away from work, time spent healing and recovering, is not treated as a loss or irrelevant, but as a valid and important part of their working lives.

I think this is the right thing to do, and I'll say this: Legislation like this doesn't always grab headlines. It's not flashy, it's not dramatic, but it matters. It matters for the people who will see the extra support in their retirement. It matters to their families. It matters to the integrity of our system as a whole, because small changes, when they're the right changes, can have a meaningful impact.

I've always believed that a fair system is one that evolves. It listens, it learns and it improves over time; no different than my OHS Committee. We met every month, the same day of the month at the same time, and we, as a committee, evolved. We brought forward changes to how we operate inside that mill, making that mill safer, because, at the end of the day, every worker that goes to work in this province deserves to come home to their families healthy and safe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: I'll add this: While the language of legislation can sometimes feel distant, the impact is very personal. Behind every number – 405632 – is a person. Behind every benefit is a story. In this case, behind those 3,100 workers are 3,100 stories of resilience, recovery and perseverance.

Speaker, if I could add just a light note, because sometimes we need some in this House, this might be one of those few times where doing more math actually makes people happier. Usually when government starts taking calculations, people get nervous but, in this case, a better calculation leads to better outcomes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: That's something we can all support.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, this amendment is about fairness. It's about recognizing the full contributions of the men and women

working in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's about strengthening retirement support. It's about correcting past gaps. It's about ensuring that our system reflects the values we hold as a province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

This morning, as we're here in second reading of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, I'm just going to take a tiny window as a former minister of Labour in the province like my colleague, the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, that spoke before.

I was there, I think it was July to last May, when I moved down to FFA, but it gave me a window over a few months to appreciate the work of the folks in workers' comp, to appreciate the work of the folks in labour and to really see how challenging some of that work is.

This is a great move; this was well on the way when I left in May. This is, as my colleague mentioned, one of the recommendations that came out of the Statutory Review, but even then, there are endless, endless emails that come to the minister every day. There are many, many sad stories. You can't fix them all but this, as was already said – I don't want to be redundant and speak to things that have already been said in this House – is going to help about 700 workers right now, and I'm sure there will be more going forward.

I do want to acknowledge the staff and the drafters of this important bill and the amendments to Bill 10. Like I often do when I'm having conversations with people around the province, sometimes we use

languages that they're not quite sure what that means, I'm always trying to bring things down to a very plain language.

Somebody could be watching today and say: What are temporary earnings loss? It's the short-term income replacement and, most often in our province, that comes through workers' comp, depending on, I guess, what insurance you might have in your workplace. What we're doing here today is discussing amendments to when someone can't earn their regular wages.

A number of us in this House from all sides just attended the ceremony of the National Day of Mourning, and while some paid the ultimate price and we honour their memories every year when we come together, the families live with that every day. We heard from folks like Darren Ryan's wife; how someone in your family can go to work and they don't come home the end of that day the same. Not only is that injured worker's life turned bottom up, but the entire family is thrown into upheaval and there are many, many, many challenges around that whole piece. But, while a family is trying to navigate health and physio and rehab and daycare, children in school, a long list of things, the bills keep coming after the paycheque stops.

I heard so many sad stories, people that really, really, really struggle, so I'm very pleased that the minister is bringing in this amendment today. Many personal stories shared here, and I appreciate the personal stories because I believe, as Members that serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, it shows that we're relatable. I bet if everybody could have got up and spoke, probably everybody here has got a story.

My husband has been with Transportation since the 90s. He was a part of a small group that was putting the centre line through when we were marking where the Trans-Labrador Highway would run down the coast. So him and two or three, they would go in helicopter every day, summer

after summer. He spent a lot of years in summer maintenance and summer engineering before he moved to winter maintenance up on what we call the barrens. He had an incident on the job, put out his back and he spent months and months over years on the floor in the living room, you know, waiting for help, waiting for surgery, and it was very difficult. I was working. We had a little girl; Natalie was pretty young at the time.

It also impacts people's mental well-being. When you're used to getting up, running out the door and going to work, and then all of a sudden you're stuck in a spot. You can't really get the help you need in the time that you need it.

It is super important that Workers' Compensation, which is one of the things that I was often reminded of when groups reached out to me, it would be a little bit of a frustration on their part, is well-funded. Due to the potential volatility of the investment market returns, the board had established a funding target of total assets equal to a 110 per cent of total liabilities. Since 2015, WorkplaceNL has maintained a funding level well above the 110 per cent target and has implemented employer premium discounts to reduce that surplus. That's another area that folks would often reach out to me on.

I think what's really, really positive here is that this bill expands what can be calculated as part of the lump-sum calculation for the retirement benefits for injured workers. What's new here, that's going to be so well-received, in this amendment, is that it clarifies that the worker must be off work in respect to an injury. It adds a clause that if an individual received temporary earnings loss benefits for more than 24 months, the portion received beyond 24 months will now – it's something that I heard a lot – be included in their lump-sum retirement benefit calculation, regardless of whether they received the 5 per cent or the 10 per cent.

Previously, Speaker, the legislation did not clearly include temporary earnings loss benefits in the retirement benefit calculation. The legislation only clearly defined retirement benefit of injured workers in receipt of their extended earnings loss.

So this is positive. I know that it will be well received. I'm just not going to belabour this other than to say I am happy today to see the change coming in and happy to support Bill 10.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll only speak for a moment, because I think everything that needed to be said certainly has been said here. This is an important amendment in, obviously, supporting workers.

I, too, as the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, am very proud to be here to ensure that we are working together to support workers who obviously are supporting their families and their communities. I really do appreciate the personal and professional stories that have been shared in this House today.

I think it's absolutely wonderful to continue on this route of cleaning up the amendments and information that is required, and to ensure that we are going to see these individuals enjoy the benefits that they should have access to. Certainly this is important.

I'll just speak personally about Occupational Health and Safety. I've been a self-employed small business woman for most of my life prior to getting involved in municipal governance and, of course, that opened up a whole world of workforce and

administration as well. I do have personal stories in my own world about workplace injuries, but I'm not going to share all of that here right now.

My point in actually standing at this venture is to talk about how this is something that we can certainly get behind, but I just want to also mention that we can continue to work on these issues for workers down the road. The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour have made a statement, certainly in some of the budget consultations and otherwise, about the importance of covering chronic stress and mental health injuries when we talk about occupational health and safety.

I think I would be remiss if I did not mention it here at this point in time that, basically, there's a fundamental obligation to injured workers when it comes to chronic stress, burnout, anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions. Certainly, as the critic for Mental Health and Addictions, it is within my purview to ensure that those issues are certainly brought into the House, and that they're recognized. These are very real issues.

Oftentimes with workplace injuries, we see, you know, when you have an injury on your arm or your leg or something, that's a physical injury. That is something that's very tangible that we can get our head around and, of course, we need to support those individuals, individuals who have contracted cancer and who have had injuries to limbs or otherwise. These are crucial things. We need to support our workforce, because they are impacting our community. They're impacting families.

But mental health issues are the unseen injuries. I think this is my opportunity, certainly, on behalf of the labour movement who obviously have advocated in this regard, it is something that we need to keep on our radar and we need to continue to advocate for, because mental health is one of those unseen issues. It truly is something

that needs to be tasked in our workplace safety as well and, from my experience in municipal administration, I know and have come across that time and time again.

I won't speak much longer on this issue. I'm happy to see that justice will be served in this amendment. It's a long time coming. I'm happy to support the minister in this bid, but certainly with the caveat that we consider, in the future, our mental health component when we talk about occupational health and safety.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, if the Minister of Government Services speaks now, he will end the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Government Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd first like, in closing, to thank my staff. There has been a lot of work put into this. Obviously it has been since 2019, but there has been a lot of conversations.

I've learned a lot in the process. I'm not one to profess that I know every piece of legislation but, even as my time as the mayor, deputy mayor and councillor, back to a lot of comments, we all heard from constituents that have been impacted by workplace injury. Today is a proud day for this House, I'd feel to say (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: On that note, I would like to thank all the Members here for their input and the important work that's happened here prior to my time and into the future.

Obviously, you'll hear me say passion; I see a lot of, we'll call it heckling or whatever, but it's a true meaning that people are really here, that you care for your constituents, you care for the province, you care for the work. It doesn't mean we're all going to agree. We got better ideas this time we sit here and vice versa, I get it, but this here is extremely important and, once this bill receives Royal Assent, the numbers that we're speaking about are going to be very impactful in our province.

I questioned, when I saw the bill in 2019, and now we're into 2026, and you'll note in the bill it says a review is done every five years. So I asked the equivalence of why all that happens, and it goes back to years of COVID, I guess, and other things but, most importantly, I'm happy to see that it's going to be finalized and there will be another review this year so it won't be stagnant. As Members opposite said, they'd like to see more progression, I look forward to progressing to improve the lives of the people that we serve.

I'm extremely proud of this legislation. It's my second bill. I've been reading it over and over and over. I do look forward to Committee and, as the Member opposite said, we can't solve it all. I agree, but every day we can improve the lives of others. That's what this bill is going to do and I'm proud to be a part of this House to bring it forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are Members ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion, 'aye?'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022. (Bill 10)

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

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

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House. (Bill 10)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I move, seconded by the Minister for Government Services, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 10.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 10.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

The motion is carried

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 10, An Act to Amend The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022.

A bill, “An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022.” (Bill 10)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John’s West.

K. WHITE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

A few questions for the minister.

Minister, why is the retirement benefit set at 5 per cent for some workers and 10 per cent for workers with an employer-sponsored pension plan?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

Great question. That ultimately comes from the review held in 2019. That numbers stays as it was. This is all part of the Statutory Review from 2019 that it stays how it is.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John’s West.

K. WHITE: Thank you.

What is the policy rationale for including temporary earnings loss benefits only after 24 months?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Chair, could you repeat that question, please?

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

K. WHITE: I'm just wondering, what was the policy rationale for including temporary earnings loss benefits only after 24 months?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

Again, this all comes back to the 2019 Statutory Review. It's captured within there.

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

K. WHITE: Minister, can you tell us how many workers are expected to benefit from this amendment retroactive to January 1, 2019?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

A great question, once again, and I thank the Member opposite.

It's 3,100 people approximately. With Royal Assent in this year with this bill, we'd be looking at over 700 people that would be affected.

Thank you.

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

K. WHITE: Thank you.

Can you tell us, Minister, what is the projected financial cost of the retroactive change?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

Just for clarification – I'm just going to say, no need to go back, you can nod – the question in hand is to the fund, the total cost?

K. WHITE: Yes. What is the projected amount?

M. GOOSNEY: The projected cost? Near \$14.3 million from the fund.

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

K. WHITE: Thank you.

Can you advise if previously settled or calculated files will be reopened and reassessed?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

I'll take that back and be glad to follow up with the Member opposite.

Thank you.

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

K. WHITE: Will there be any additional resources assigned to this division to assist with reviewing closed case files?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: This bill, ultimately, today, here, is in retrospect of the 2019 Statutory Review. Again, we're here to progress, to help injured workers, and that's something they can take away from here.

Thank you.

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

K. WHITE: Minister, can you tell us why the definition of temporary earnings loss benefits is left to board policy rather than it being set out directly in legislation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Yes. Again, this would come back again – this is going to sound repetitive – from the review. The Statutory Review held prior was the same status, and that's where they followed through in here.

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

K. WHITE: Minister, can you advise how will workers be notified if they are eligible for an increased lump sum payment?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Anybody that would have been already registered within WorkplaceNL will be notified. We're going to use multiple tools. We've spoke about that. Using the Internet, obviously, that's a great place, a web that catches people, but you'll see announcements come out about it.

We've also made sure to identify with our comms team that we get written letters sent out, if we feel that there will be anybody missed.

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

K. WHITE: Thank you.

Does this bill create any inequities between workers with and without employer-sponsored pension plans?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: I'd like to give you a concrete answer but, to the best of my knowledge, no.

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

K. WHITE: Workers who face an injury when they are close to retirement age could lose out on retirement benefits if they haven't been transitioned from temporary to extended earnings loss benefits. Was there any consideration to include all individuals on temporary earnings loss benefits for more than 24 months?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

It was a stringent review of the act, obviously, that was held from 2019. At that time, everything was given oversight and overview.

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

K. WHITE: Final question, Chair, are there any other categories of benefits that government considered, including the retirement benefit calculation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: That would come from the 48 recommendations – obviously, this would be 46 putting through today. The other two still are active as we speak.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I might be asking some similar questions to that just to make sure I heard it correctly. I'll start with the first one, overall. Is your government considering increasing the income replacement rate from 85 to 90 per cent, considering the funded ratio of WorkplaceNL, the compensation fund?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

The Member opposite is asking about the two other outstanding recommendations under review. That's where they currently are right now and I'll be glad to follow up once I have the answers for there.

Thank you, Chair.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Okay, I'm not sure if this one has been answered. I think the minister mentioned something about a strategic review of the act, so here it goes.

We've heard complaints from members of the public regarding the replacement of the old system at the end of 2018, the new legislation didn't include TEL or temporary earnings loss in calculating pensionable earnings. Some of them have been on the TEL for several years. So the transition to the current system resulted in them losing out on claiming those TEL benefits as pensionable earnings.

So will this bill mean that they can receive back payment or some form of reassessment on what their pensionable earnings are, especially given the retroactive date of 2019?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

A great question. This change supports back payment, but it's retroactive to 2019.

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

J. DINN: So those on those TEL benefits will be covered in this, correct? Thank you.

My next question is how many workers have fallen into the loophole that existed beforehand? I know we've talked about 3,100 and 700. I'm just trying to make sure of the exact number that were caught in that loophole that existed as a result of 2019.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

I can follow up with the Member. The exact number which, I guess, would be fluent, I would have to follow up. But 700 retro-plus is what the answer would be here today.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

The other part is to have an estimate of the cost – I guess the cost, if I understood it, for grandfathering in would be about – did I hear it correctly – \$50.3 million? Was that the number?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

Just for clarification, it was \$14.3 million from the fund.

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

J. DINN: I think this one has been answered as well. How many workers will these amendments help? We're looking at 700 retroactive and, basically, a total of 3,100, something along those lines. Would that be correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Yes, that's correct, Chair.

Thank you.

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

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

J. DINN: Sorry about that, Chair.

So we know it's \$14.3 million. That's the cost of grandfathering in, if I understood it correctly. Right now, in total, going forward, how much will these amendments cost WorkplaceNL?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: If I got that correctly, the total here is \$14.3 million going forward. The addition, total payout to each person affected with \$5,800 plus the \$24,000 would be close to \$30,000, but it will still encompass and this will be added to costs forward annually in perpetuity.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Just to make sure then, \$14 million, basically, that's the total cost for the retroactive and going forward. Okay, and if I understood you correctly, this would not

result in a change to the employer assessment rates, correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, that's correct. The assessment rate would remain at \$1.73 per \$100 for assessable payroll.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

On average, how long does a person receive temporary earnings loss benefits? Would your department have that data?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

M. GOOSNEY: I don't have that in my – I'm trying to recall. We did speak about that, but I'd be glad to follow up with the Member opposite.

CHAIR: Seeing no more speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 and 3 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 and 3 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 3 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022. (Bill 10)

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 10 without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report the bill without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that the Committee recommends Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 10 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

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

L. PARROTT: 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. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 12.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 12 and that I do now leave the Chair.

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.'

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act." (Bill 12)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall cause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

It's a very good bill, Minister, very in depth; very good bill. I do have a few questions.

Section 24 defines family violence and staff have advised that this definition was taken from the federal definition. I'm just wondering, given that we do have a provincial act which already defines family violence, the *Family Violence Protection Act*, why would we change the definition for the purpose of this particular act?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: This particular definition, section 24(1)(i) outlines a very broad definition of family violence and, in it, it includes examples of coercive control.

It is very important to note here, when we look at this particular section, that the courts have to consider whether it's in the best interest of the child to compel parties to cooperate and whether to put the child at risk.

Family violence is much broader here in line with the *Divorce Act*, especially when it comes to examples of coercive control. It includes things like isolation, financial control, threatening self-harm, threatening to have children taken away. For that reason, it is a more effective provision and that's why it's included.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

Clause 31(4) requires that the courts consider family violence when considering the best interest of the child, will this require families that have already gone through the

court process to confirm incidents of family violence to be considered in context? Do you have to have previous incidents documented, and how specific when proving family violence? Can you just elaborate on that clause?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: First of all, with respect to this particular clause and the best interest of the child, we know that it is a key change that was made to the *Divorce Act*. It's an essential concept to incorporate this into our provincial legislation so as to align with it.

When we see a lot of these changes in our act, first of all, we have to keep in mind that is why it is to align with the federal legislation. This new section requires courts to consider only the best interests. So that is really important when we're looking at decisions about, for example, parenting and contact orders. Parenting arrangements for a child would have to be what is in the best interest for that child. Essentially, this is to align the legislation with the federal legislation, and I think that's the most important thing that we have to look at here. That's what the purpose of this legislation is.

When a judge considers all of these factors – and you see a lot of them outlined here, the many factors that a judge must consider as important considerations determining what is in the best interest of the child – you see that there are numerous considerations, whether it's needs, relationships with each parent, plans for the care of the child. Other factors that the judge must consider are each parent's ability and willingness to care for the child, to support the child's relationship with the other parent and to cooperate and communicate about parenting issues. Those are many of the considerations when we look at this particular section that the court has to consider.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

My biggest concern there was the parent having to prove previous incidents and how specific, but you have outlined a number of reasons and incidents that can occur, so thank you very much.

Clause 33(2) deals with parenting orders. Now, just go back to 31(4) first. So I'm just concerned. The risk is there and may be longer, but is this going to cause the potential of more complex hearings and more evidence to be required?

Is there anything in place here for low-income families? Is there a potential here to disadvantage a low-income parent if the parent of higher income has capacity to have their own legal counsel? The parent of lower income, do they have access to any legal counsel that would assist them here, if you were trying to prove or not prove, of course, that there is actual family violence there?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: The legislation is intended to provide equal opportunity for all children. The ultimate goal of the legislation is to divert people, essentially, from the courts whenever possible. There are a number of provisions built in with respect to alternative dispute resolutions. Whether that would be family justice services or other types of counselling or mediation.

The ultimate goal of this legislation is to actually reduce the reliance and the dependence on the courts and, essentially, to reserve the court time for more complicated and difficult cases.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Having said that, to reduce the reliance on the courts, does that mean that one of our primary intervenors in all of this would be our social workers or social worker assistants, or is there another intervenor that could be there?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: When we look at this legislation, I think it's important to remember that the court, the judge, will ultimately be considering all of these factors when making these decisions. There are a number of factors that will be assessed by the court, by the judiciary, in making these decisions.

They will rely on the legal advisors of the individuals as well, but they will be looking at what is in the best interests of the child, and looking at the level of co-operation as well with the parents.

The legislation is meant to encourage co-operation with the parents, so that would be in the best interest of the child. Again, the focus is completely upon that when assessing what's in the best interests of the child here.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I just have some questions about some of the definitions. I assume once this works its way through the court system – and I appreciate the point of the bill is to avoid court and use mediation and ADR options, which I know we all agree is a good thing, so I appreciate that.

Some of these definitions, as is the case with all legislation or most legislation will be left up to the interpretation of judges, but just for the family's sake, who might be going through this initially, might want to

know what some of this means, I'm wondering if you could elaborate on some of the definitions. I'll start on page 7 of the bill, which talks about a definition of decision-making responsibility.

It means “responsibility for making significant decisions about a child’s well-being, including decisions with respect to” and then it lists some things.

Just on the word “significant,” I bet you if you asked one parent what’s significant and another parent what’s significant, you will probably get two different answers. So is there any interpretation help you could provide at this point in time?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Sure, fair enough. When we have legal language, often, it's difficult in terms of interpretation but I think that's one of the things that's really beneficial about this legislation is because we're moving away from that adversarial win-lose type of language, like, for example, custody and access, ownership type of language.

There are many differences between the former language that was used in the current bill and this new legislation. When we look at, for example, decision-making responsibility, I would give an example for that. It says it means responsibility for making significant decisions about a child's well-being, including decisions with respect to health, education, culture, language, religion and the spirituality of significant extracurricular activities.

What that would really mean would be decisions about, for example, whether a child should participate in sports or other extracurricular activities; or whether they go on a school trip, that would be another example; or even something like should the child get their ears pierced, things like that.

This is a new concept, decision-making responsibility, that term, and it's from the *Divorce Act*. Again, though, anyone who is granted this responsibility of decision-making has to or must, as the language says, make all of these decisions based on the best interests of the child. When we go through all of these definitions, that will be the overriding principle, whether that decision was made in the best interests of the child.

So that's with respect to the first definition that you're asking.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, and turning the page, I think, does help clarify that the significant decisions have to do with health, education, culture, language, religion and spirituality, but then it does say, again, the word: significant extracurricular activities.

It's just funny that you noted ear piercing. I disagree that my daughter should have her ears pierced and my wife thinks she should. So whether that's a significant – it's significant for my daughter. But it is just an example of how parents or people who have the charge of children can disagree.

So I appreciate the elaboration. I guess it will work out through the system eventually, what significant means. But, in the meantime, there's some clarification, but I guess still open to interpretation.

Minister, if you look on page 7, just above – and it's hard to read without the original act – section 3(1) says: "... the Act is amended by deleting the words 'the person having' and substituting the words 'a person having,'" which I guess what it talks about is providing consent for blood tests. We're changing it from "the person having" to "a person having," which more than one person can have charge of the child.

My question would be if there's more than one person and there's a disagreement about something, like giving consent for a blood test, you only need one person – does that risk the other person not knowing it's happening?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I think we can relate that, if I may – this is my interpretation – to section 26(2). Because in that section, if no court order is placed and more than one parent shares legal authority to make decisions for a child, the law allows either one of them to make decisions on behalf of both but the law assumes co-operation until a court says otherwise. That, I think, is important to look at in connection with that, because that is meant to prevent a paralysis, like a failure of a meeting of the minds. Without it, parents could be stuck needing mutual agreement for every decision.

So to your point, delays could cause delays in medical care or other examples. Of course, we know that children shouldn't be caught in the middle of those unresolved adult conflicts. Hopefully that elaborates a little bit. That would be my interpretation, to bring it to that section just to understand it better.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you.

We have these bills amending other bills; that's difficult.

I'm not sure of the phrase you used, but assuming co-operation, I think, is important. We should assume people are doing things in the best interest of the children, so that's a satisfactory answer. Thank you, Minister.

If we look at page 8, it talks about the definition of a family member. It includes, "a

member of a household of a child or of a parent.” You know, household could also be a vague definition as well. It doesn’t necessarily mean people living under one roof. Household could be much broader than that.

Could you give any context about the definition of what a household would mean?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: This, again, adds a new definition to the legislation. It could include a parent or a partner of a parent. To expand upon what would be considered family violence to align with the federal legislation, I think that’s why that is there.

The defining family member, that includes a parent or a dating partner of a parent. That would be within the household, I guess.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you.

Without knowing where the term “family member” is used throughout the legislation, when it does talk about a dating partner of a parent who may or may not have ties to the child in question, my question would be then, is that appropriate to leave that open to include a family member of someone who is dating the parent, that the person that’s dating the parent has no ties to the child.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I just need to clarify; so what this definition does is it adds to the legislation so that we can include like a parent but not only a parent, a dating partner of a parent. I think that’s important because we have to consider that in connection with the provision with respect

to family violence. Again, that aligns with the federal legislation in the *Divorce Act*.

Those issues would have been examined and canvassed when the *Divorce Act* was considered and, basically, I think what it does, it gives the courts the most flexibility perhaps to ensure that the definition of family violence is as broad as possible to protect children. So that’s why they have included the dating partner of a parent as well. That would be my understanding of it.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you for the context.

Page 10 – this is the last question I have – I’m looking for some clarification. It talks about: The purposes of this part. If you look at section 25(b), “recognize that the concurrent exercise of jurisdiction by judicial tribunals of more than one province, territory or state in respect of parenting orders or contact orders respecting the same child ought to be avoided” – which makes sense – “and to make provision so that the courts of the province will, unless there are exceptional circumstances, refrain from exercising or decline jurisdiction”

I wonder if the minister, or anyone in the department, if you’ve contemplated what, potentially, those exceptional circumstances could be?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Section 25, in regard to the purposes of the act, are to ensure that the courts take into consideration only the best interest of the child in making parenting orders. Then it goes on to talk about what you’re inquiring about, the concurrent exercise of jurisdiction.

Primarily, this section is to update the old terminology from custody to the new

concepts of parenting time, decision-making responsibility and contact, but these changes do not otherwise change the section. It aligns with the CLA, with the *Children's Law Act*, and with the *Divorce Act*.

Really, all it is doing is updating old terminology and existing definitions in the legislation to use the less adversarial. That's essentially the same as what's been in place before with the *Divorce Act*.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, in sections 33.1 and 33.2, while I have great faith in the Minister of Social Supports to get us some more social workers, I'm just concerned that it deals with the parenting orders. There are requirements when parenting time or transfer of a child between parents needs to be supervised. Are there any concerns about the social work shortage and whether there will be any impacts on being able to carry out that function?

I've been the minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, myself, in the past. I do know in the City of St. John's it's not as difficult, because we have offices and means for visitation and transfer, but when you get into rural Newfoundland, it often becomes an issue and, of course, now we're using social work assistants to help with that.

In this transfer, will social worker assistants be used to assist with that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Can you provide what exact section you were asking in relation to the social work question so I can specifically –

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The Parenting orders on page 17 of the bill –

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you, Chair.

It's the parenting orders, section 33,1 on page 17 and section 33.2.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Again, I'm just going to first of all go back to those concepts, the parenting orders and the contact orders. Those terms, again, just for clarification, they replace the old terms of custody order. That is to align with the *Divorce Act*, with the federal legislation. It's intended to promote relationship building with the child. That's the parenting orders. It's limited to parents or those who may or intend to stand in the place of a parent. For example, that could be a parent or a step-parent that may apply.

That's an important distinction I think we need to make from the old language that was used, the parenting order. That includes, when we talk about the parenting order, the decision-making responsibility and parenting time.

Then, when we talk about the contact orders, I just want to give this background, just for context, so people understand. Then, the contact orders, that's a new section as well, with the *Children's Law Act*. That's in alignment, again, with the *Divorce Act*. That is unique from the parenting order because that allows someone other than a spouse, for example a grandparent, who wants to have time out of the child's schedule to visit or communicate or whatnot with the child. Of course, any decisions of that nature, again, will be made in the best interest of the child.

When we're looking at those two sections that you referred to, I think it's important to add that this is aligning with the federal legislation, which has been in place since 2021, and it aligns with that legislation. So someone, aside from a parent or a parental figure, may apply for a contact order when we're talking about section 33.2.

I'll give you an example of that. That's a family member like an aunt or an uncle, or a grandparent or even a close loved one may apply for a contact order. I just wanted to give that background when you speak about those sections.

As far as the social work piece of it, we're not expecting any operational change or impact, but that is a question that we'll refer to the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being and, of course, our officials will be working with the minister and his officials in that department.

J. WALL: (Inaudible.)

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Actually, I'm just conferring with the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being and he also said that he can advise on this as well.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the Member opposite for the question and I'm happy to support my colleague on the answer.

Currently, we have just under 300 social workers within the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being. We are currently filling the social worker positions that are posted right across our province and that includes the hard-to-fill positions in rural areas, with the signing bonuses that are present. We're also hiring social work assistants to assist with the workload that the social workers are facing.

We certainly appreciate the amount of work that they do and the work that they do. We want to make sure that we can assist them wherever possible, and social work assistants are being hired currently to assist with the workload.

With respect to the graduating class of social workers for 2026, there are 80 – I stand to be corrected. I think there are 80 graduates from that social work class. Over half the class have applied for positions within government that are currently posted.

We are optimistic that the positions right across our province, we'll get those filled. As the minister said, there are no issue with respect to the social work positions currently, no change in that whatsoever, only to hire more. Back in October, we had a 30 per cent vacancy rate with social workers; we are now down to a 21 per cent vacancy rate. That is encouraging.

From my department, my officials and I will certainly do our best to make sure that those positions are filled to supplement the work of my colleague from Justice and Public Safety on this very important file. I'm just happy to be part of the conversation this morning.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Under 33.2(b), it says: "require that contact or the transfer of the child from one person to another be supervised." The supervision will be by a social worker or a social worker assistant; is that correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: When I look at that section, it doesn't have to be, would be my response to that. It could be

supervised by other than a social worker. It could be supervised by another third party. It can be a family member, for example, or I suppose anyone that the court determines as appropriate, I would think.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister. That definitely answers my question.

Clause 33.1, under Parenting orders again, it talks about any means of communication. So I just want some clarity – and I guess that's between parent A and the child, parent A and parent B, the child and any family members. When they talk about communication, do they mean communication by technology too, like texting, Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, all those means of communication that children use today and that parents use today as opposed to just verbal communication?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Can you identify which section or subsection you're referring to in 33.1, please?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 33.1(c): "include requirements with respect to any means of communication that are to occur during the parenting time allocated to a parent, between a child and another person to whom decision-making responsibility, parenting time or both, is allocated."

I'm just talking about the actual means of communication between parent to parent, parent to child, parent to another family member who may have decision-making responsibility, like a grandmother. I just want to know if technology – Messenger, Snapchat, Facebook, all those things that kids use today.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: We know that that is vast and changing as we speak, I'm sure. There's no limit in the legislation on the type of communication involved with respect to this subsection. It could be any type of communication, in other words.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Section 36(1), Assessment of needs of child – you did allude to this earlier when you were speaking to my colleague. It talks about the needs of a child and the impact on the transition – like the physical address change. I've seen a case where a mom was concerned, repeatedly reported her concerns but they were small concerns, each and every one. However, sadly, today, the child is no longer with us and the dad is in jail.

I'm just wondering about the concerns that parents put forward to the social workers, to the justice system and how the needs of the child are measured. I'm just trying to figure out – and I know there are changes in this and that's the positive part of this bill, the changes that we're making that, hopefully, this will never happen again because of this.

I'm just trying to get your opinion on the measurement of these changes that are happening to this bill to prevent cases like such occurring again.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Again, when there is an assessment of the needs of the child – you're talking about section 36(1). First of all, let me just preface it by saying this is updating old terminology in existing definitions. We want to have less adversarial language and this will occur

once the amendments to the *Children's Law Act* come into effect.

Again, in assessing the needs of the child, I'll bring you back to the section 31(1) and the best interests of the child. The court shall only – and that is directive language “shall” – take into consideration the best interests of the child in whether it's making a parenting order or a contact order. It's required and it's mandated that they have to consider all factors related to the circumstances.

That is important because that means that the court will have to go through all of those and consider all of those things that you're talking about, the needs and what are those needs. It will be their age, their stage of development. It will look at the child's physical, emotional and psychological safety, security and well-being.

The court must – again, directive language – look at the relationship with each parent, the relationship with siblings, with grandparents, other people in their lives. It has to look at care arrangements before the separation, what was in place, what are the plans for the care of the child. I mean, it's a very important list and it's very exhaustive.

It looks at views and preferences, if it is appropriate, based on the child's age and stage of development and the circumstances of the case. The court has to look at cultural, linguistic, religious, spiritual upbringing and heritage, including Indigenous upbringing and heritage.

Other factors that the court must – which means it's directive language; it's not subjective – consider is each parent's ability and willingness to care for the child, each parent's ability and willingness to support the child's relationship with the other parent. It looks at each parent's ability and willingness to co-operate. Are they both co-operating and communicating about parenting issues?

It goes on and it's very important, but this bill applies to all family law matters, and it involves not just those involving child protection either. I think that's an important thing to note as well. The bill applies to all family law matters.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

The next question probably – and the Minister of Social Supports is not here right now, but I'll just put it out there. If assessments are required but not available in a timely way, what happens to the child in the interim?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I think that would perhaps be best answered by the minister. We can discuss that with him, for sure.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

I will remind the Member that we don't acknowledge who is in and out of the House.

J. WALL: Yeah, I'm here.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Oh, I'm sorry. He's here, sorry.

CHAIR: Okay.

Thank you.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I apologize for that. There was no intent. I was just trying to decide whether I'd ask the question or not.

CHAIR: I felt it was an innocent faux pas, so no big deal.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, it definitely was. Perhaps the minister – we can ask it again.

Clause 41 deals with enforcement of parenting time. There's reference to wrongful denial of parenting time. How will parties be expected to prove wrongful denial of parenting time?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

You are referring to – I am just looking the section up – 41, which subsection, please?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Good question, Minister. Section 41(1).

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: This is about enforcement of parenting time or contact. You are referring to: "A party to a parenting order or contact order may apply to a court for relief where the party has been wrongfully denied parenting time or contact with the child by another party to the parenting order or contact order."

Just to elaborate on this, section 41 of the CLA actually has been repealed and replaced with a new section, and this new section aligns completely with the *Divorce Act*. There were not actually many changes made to this section, except to change the references to the terminology, like custody and access, to the *Divorce Act*. Terms like concepts of parenting time, parenting order, contact order, so those are all new.

This section concerns what to do where one party may deny parenting time or contact with the child, like you are asking about. The actual procedures, though, remain similar between the previous version of the

CLA and the amended version. So, essentially, the procedures addressing the denial of parenting time or contact, that will remain the same, and this is just a change in the terminology and have the wording align with the federal legislation.

This has all been assessed previously through the *Divorce Act*.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: On that note, I just ask the minister how courts distinguish between legitimate safety concerns and wrongful denial?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Between what exactly? Again, could you repeat that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: In particular cases, as pertaining to children here, how will the courts distinguish between legitimate safety concerns for the individual child and wrongful denial to a parent to have access to the child?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: That question, that will be up to a court to determine. They will look at the circumstances of the case and assess those factors in making that determination. The court will determine that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So clause 47.1(1) requires a person with decision-making responsibility to notify other parties at least 60 days before the expected date of the

proposed relocation. So 60 days seems like a little bit or a short timeline, given potential issues around real estate transactions and moving logistics.

I am just wondering about the 60 days. Like, sometimes parents know half a year before if they're going to move or not. How did we arrive at the 60 days?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: As I said previously, these amendments have already gone through analysis when the *Divorce Act* came into play in 2021. Again, this is just aligning with the definitions in the federal legislation. But I can say when we talk about relocation and family law, it's determined strictly by the best interests of the child. The court will prioritize physical, emotional and psychological safety and stability of the child.

As well, when the court is looking at this section of relocation, they analyze reasons for the move. They'll look at the impact on the relationships. They'll look at the child's views and so forth. But again, this has all been assessed through the *Divorce Act* and what our language is doing is basically aligning with the federal legislation that's been in place for five years now.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: On that, Minister, I'm just wondering, simply because I don't know, is there a distance outlined in the act or in the regulations regarding relocation notifications? For example, within a municipality, if there was someone moving from Mount Pearl to St. John's, I mean, it's pretty close. So is it the exact address that they have to notify the other parent of if they're moving? Is there any distance included? Do you not have to notify if you're just moving up the street, or if you're just moving, point blank, you have to notify?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I think when we look at this section, and to expand on what your question is, relocation is considered a move that would likely have a significant impact on a child's relationship with someone who has or is applying for parenting time or decision-making responsibility or contact. We know those categories. It would be considered a move where the current parenting plan would no longer work.

I will give you an example: a parent with 50-50 shared parenting time who moves from St. John's to, say, Mount Pearl may not be considered a relocation under this section, as the current parenting plan could still be maintained. You wouldn't have to change it because it's not significant. But, say for example, a parent with a similar parenting plan who moves from Clarenville to St. John's may not be able to maintain the same level of parenting time due to the distance.

Those are just some ways to elaborate. We could go to section 47.3; that identifies the change in residence versus location. That also gives us more of an understanding of circumstances that would fall under whether it's a relocation or whether it's just a change in residence.

Those are the sections that would help delineate what circumstances would apply.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, again under section 47.1(5), what happens if a parent misses the 30-day objection window? Are there any safeguards in place?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'll just review this. You're looking at section 47.1(5), correct?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay.

"A person with decision-making responsibility, parenting time or both, in respect of a child, who receives a notice of a proposed relocation under subsection (1) may, not later than 30 days after receiving the notice, object to the relocation by (a) doing the following."

Basically, the elements of the relocation here include various things: They provide notice requirements, and that has to be at least 60 days. There is an objection piece here, so a person receiving notice has 30 days to object to the move by serving a notice of objection. If no objection is made, then it's okay to proceed with the relocation, and then, again, it goes to the best interest of the child. When deciding whether to allow a relocation, the court will consider that.

To answer your question, this would be entirely up to the courts if there was a disagreement over it that the parties couldn't resolve amongst themselves. Again, the point of this legislation is so important because the goal is to try to encourage co-operation. It's a shift in terms of what the old legislation was. It's about encouraging that level of parenting, responsibility and co-operation, which would be that the focus is on the child, the best interest of the child and it's child-centred to ensure that that occurs, that the child is cared for.

If the parents can't resolve amongst themselves – and that's the hope, but if there's disagreement over it, it's going to be up to the courts and the judge.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Under this particular section, I just want to go back to my question regarding the Minister of Social Supports. I'm just wondering, if assessments are required but they're not available in a timely way, what happens to the child in the interim?

Sorry.

CHAIR: I'd ask the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's to repeat the question. I don't think the minister was expecting it.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: This is just a question pertaining mostly to Social Supports.

If assessments are required for the individual child but they're not available in a timely way, what happens to the child in the interim? What will be in place if a decision cannot be made because assessments are required?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

That will be as a result of a court decision, with respect to that timely response, and that's what we'll be held to. So it will be up to the courts.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

I believe my colleague has some questions in this area before I move on to the *Family Law Act* part.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: No, he's good?

Okay, I'm going to move on to the *Family Law Act*, which is towards the back there.

AN HON. MEMBER: I believe it's the Leader of the Third Party –

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, yes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sure, and come back to me. Yes, that's good.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, under clause 5, section 24(1)(n), I think it's on page 9, a proposed change in residence has to have a significant impact on a child's relationships to meet the definition of a relocation, and meeting this definition has a significant impact later in the bill.

What practical measures will be used to gauge whether a move has a significant impact? Who decides what a significant impact is? I think in the end the courts could end up deciding, but what would be considered there?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

Again, with respect to this definition, it's a new definition to the legislation to align with the federal legislation, the *Divorce Act*.

We know it defines what relocation is, and you've just stated that it would likely have a significant impact, so what does that mean? The courts would actually decide that. The courts must weigh the best interest of the child when approving a relocation.

I'll give you an example. If a parent relocating say from Clarendville to St. John's, they've got certain requirements that they

have to do. They must provide notice. The parent who is relocating must prove how it is beneficial to them and the child. They must also propose new parenting and contact arrangements. Why? So as to mitigate any potential harms to the child.

I think that answers your questions with respect to who determines that significant impact. It would be for the court to do. Again, it goes back to the best interest of the child. It's child-focused and the court will look at and weigh the interest of the child when approving the relocation. But there is an onus on the parent who is relocating to do certain things, as well, to prove that the move is beneficial.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I guess this would depend on the age of the child, what weight is given to the child's reaction to the move?

It's one thing if the child is young, but if it's someone prepubescent – 13 – they might have a completely different view of this in total. That's the key thing I'm looking at there, and how much would those factors weigh into it?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: When the court is considering the making of these decisions, they will look at the age and stage of development. They'll look at things like the child's physical, emotional and psychological stage of development, their safety, security, their well-being, all of those things. They look at the totality of the circumstances really, but all with that focus of what's in the best interest of the child. When you look at all of the section 31, it's very exhaustive. It goes through all of the things that the judge must consider when making any of these decisions.

So the level of the child's development, it will be taken into consideration. They'll weigh that in their determination.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Just to further clarify –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

It's a little noisy in here. I need to hear the speakers.

Thank you.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I guess what I'm going at, as well, is the stage of development but if that child says no way, no how, I'm not moving, along those lines. Now I know that can have an effect in the classroom as well in terms of the child's willingness to engage in school and so on and so forth.

When you're talking about the courts will consider the age, the stage of development and so on and so forth, that will factor into them giving credence to or weight to what the child says in this case, or the children say. Would that be correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: It depends on all of the circumstances. The courts will consider all of these factors and they'll weigh that. I can't say for sure that they're going to make a determination if the child says absolutely no. They're going to look at everything when they make that decision and they'll weigh what is in the best interest of the child when doing that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Section 24(3) page 10, I think, it's more of a request for clarification. This section states that this bill doesn't constitute a material change in circumstances under this part. Section 35 establishes that existing orders may not be varied unless a material change occurs. This bill is adding requirements for the court to consider family violence and protection orders in their deliberations.

So will children and parents who are subject to existing parenting orders, parenting or contact orders, that would now be considered against the child's best interest, due to the new consideration for violence or protection orders, be unable to appeal for new parenting contact orders when this bill is passed?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: So you referred to two sections. Can you just identify what those sections are again so that I can give you a fulsome answer?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Section 24(3), page 10, but it also refers to section 35 and I think section 35 – I don't have the page here for it. sorry. I think it's later, page 19.

I can just repeat the question again, Chair, if that's all right and if that helps.

Basically, the two sections – this is more of a clarification – section 24(3) states that this bill doesn't constitute a material change in circumstances under this part, but section 35 establishes that existing orders may not be varied unless a material change occurs. So the bill is adding requirements for the court to consider family violence protection orders in the deliberation.

Will children and parents who are subject to existing parenting or contact order that would now be considered against the child's best interest – grandfathered in, I guess – due to the new considerations for violence protection orders, would they be unable be able to appeal for new parenting contact orders when this bill is passed?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: No, they would not. They could go back to the court and seek an order at any time.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Section 26, page 11, and again a request for clarification. This section has been rewritten by this bill and most of the content from the current act is present in the bill except for section 26(4).

Can the minister explain why this section wasn't reconstituted in the bill?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Just for clarification, you're referring to section 26, did you say subsection 4?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, except section 26(4), this section has been rewritten by the bill, and most of the content from the current act is present in the current act except for section 26(4), so why was that section left out of the old bill from the new bill?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'm going to have to look into that further because section 26: equal entitlement to decision-making responsibility and parenting time. You're talking about subsection 4, "Unless a court orders otherwise, an entitlement to parenting time includes the exclusive authority to make day-to-day decisions affecting the child during that parenting time." Is that what you're referring to?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: I think this has to do with the previous bill, the section 26(4) from the previous one wasn't included.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: When we're looking at the previous bill, I just want to be clear about what you're talking about here. The previous bill, 26(4) stated, "Where the parents of a child lives separate and apart and the child lives with one of them with the express or implied consent of the other, the right of the other to exercise the entitlement of custody and the incidents of custody, but not the entitlement to access, is suspended until a separation agreement or order otherwise provides." Is that the section that you are referring to?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: That was, yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Just to be clear, you're asking why that section is not included in the current act, is that your question?

J. DINN: Yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay, yes, this is just rewording and the intent of the section is still the same.

J. DINN: Thank you.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: You're welcome.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Section 27(1), page 12, I believe, the current act references sections 69(4) to define who's permitted to make an application for a parenting or contact order. The bill changes the language to allow parents or persons who stands as a parent or intend to stand as a parent.

What is the purpose of this language change and were certain people being unfairly prohibited from applying to the court before?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: The changes in this section are amended to align with the *Divorce Act* and again it's replacing the old terms of custody and access with new terms of parenting orders, parenting time, decision-making responsibility with respect to any court applications.

So alignment with the *Divorce Act* added some additional orders that could potentially be applied for beyond parents. So it's not just parents, such as contact orders, which is including grandparents, for example. These are now included in our current legislation that we're hopefully passing, the CLA, and that's why they're referenced here.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Section 31, page 14, this may have been answered in some form in other questions, but the current act states that application will be based on the best interests of the child.

The bill rewords and reiterates this directive, with attention drawn to the addition of the word "only" – and only the best interests of the child shall be taken into consideration. Can the minister explain how this change is practically important to the function and deliberations of the court, and what other factors are considered?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Yes.

I think I referred to this before, but it certainly bears repeating because it is so important. The CLA, the *Children's Law Act*, reflects the best interests of the child and, as you've pointed out correctly, this is the only consideration really for parenting arrangements. It has to be about the best interests of the child.

There are important considerations that are outlined in this section. The critical foundation of the act, really, is this section which outlines all the considerations that a judge must consider. I've referred to them previously, but what this does is it provides clarity of the importance of the best interests of the child. That's why this is so important.

It gives that clarity to that section and it goes through all of these other factors and considerations that can exist to guide a court, and the section outlines the factors that the court will consider. It's not limited, even, to important relationships in the child's life, their age, their maturity and needs; it includes so many other things. It

outlines that the court as well, as I've mentioned before, must consider family violence in making decisions in the best interest of the child. The court must look at including the frequency of that violence, the recency – how recent it was – the nature of the violence and what steps are taken to prevent the violence.

Of course, another very important point in this is the introduction of coercive control. That is also an important and necessary addition to this legislation.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Chair, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, Chair of Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed them to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that we do now recess.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that we now recess.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The House is now in recess until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I'm now prepared to rule on a point of order raised by the Member for the District of

Waterford Valley on May 5, 2026. The Member for Waterford Valley raised a point of order under Standing Order 49, which prohibits the use of unparliamentary language or offensive words against any Member of this House.

The point of order was based on comments made by the Government House Leader, in which the Government House Leader referred to Members of the Official Opposition as a bunch of fools. In response to the Member's point of order, the Government House Leader did not apologize or withdraw his remarks, but, rather, indicated that he stood by his words.

The use of offensive or provocative language in the House is prohibited, and personal attacks, insults or obscenities are not in order. The use of the word "fool" in reference to Members opposite has been considered on multiple occasions in this hon. House and, on each occasion, offending Members have either voluntarily withdrawn their remark or withdrawn the remark after the Speaker has deemed it to be unparliamentary.

Taking into account the foregoing as well as the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking, the person to whom the words at issue were directed, the degree of provocation and the degree of disorder created in this House, I find that the Government House Leader's comments were indeed unparliamentary and I ask that he withdraw them unequivocally.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I unequivocally withdraw my remarks.

SPEAKER: I'm now prepared to rule on another point of order, raised by the Government House Leader, on May 5, 2026.

The Government House Leader raised a point of order under Standing Order 49, which prohibits the use of unparliamentary language or offensive words against any Member of this House. The point of order was based on comments made by the Member for the District of Waterford Valley during Oral Questions.

The Government House Leader stated that the Member made the comment "this is not the Premier," and that the comment questioned the role of the Premier as an elected official and undermined the individual Member, this House and the electorate.

I have reviewed the archived webcast for May 5. During Oral Questions, the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island posed a question to the Premier and the Government House Leader rose to answer, which is completely within his discretion to do. It is at this point that the Member for Waterford Valley can be heard to say: That's not the Premier.

When viewed in context, I find that the Member was commenting on the fact that it was the Government House Leader who chose to respond to the question, as opposed to the Premier, to whom the question was directed. I do not find that the question was intended to undermine or question the role of the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port as the Premier. As such, there is no point of order.

I will add, however, that this point of order and other points of order and disruptions that we've had in this House of Assembly have been the result of Members speaking in this House when not identified. Clearly, in this case, there would not have been a point of order had the Member in question not been chirping across to the other side. I think all Members need to continue to keep this mind.

This is supposed to be an hon. House. We're supposed to be acting like hon.

Members and, quite frankly, I am getting tired of addressing these types of issues. We are wasting a lot of the House's time and, certainly, my staff that have to research these matters for me. We have to have meetings on it, discussions, write up the orders and so on, it's a complete waste of time for my staff, myself and this whole House of Assembly dealing with these kind of trivial, often childish, matters.

I ask all Members to bear that in mind as we move forward.

Today, I would like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery, Auditor General Denise Hanrahan and Andrea Milley, Manager of People and Culture with our local Auditor General's office. They are accompanied by Elsie Daniel and Judith Lauma.

Elsie and Judith are auditors with the Vanuatu National Audit Office and are here on a five-month placement with our office through the federal government's International Migration Capacity Building Program. This is the first time, by the way, that the Newfoundland and Labrador legislative audit office has been part of this program.

Welcome to our House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Certainly, to Elsie and Judith, welcome to our beautiful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are very pleased to have you here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Ryan Harding, who is the subject of a Member's statement.

As NTV's weatherman, I'm sure that Ryan is a familiar face to all those present today. Thanks for bringing us some sunshine today, Ryan. We appreciate it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: And a good Mount Pearl man to boot, I might add.

We also have, visiting our public gallery today, several individuals who are involved in the correctional system throughout the province. They're visiting as part of a Ministerial Statement recognizing Corrections Week.

Welcome to Greg McGuire, superintendent of Her Majesty's Penitentiary; Christy Spracklin, provincial senior manager for employee wellness; Trina Hedderson, provincial manager of corporate services; Susan Green, provincial manager of institutional programs; Terry Stone, corporal and president of Local 7701; correctional officers, Chris Simms, Karrissa Jacobs, Lieutenant Amelia Danial and Matthew Hanlon; and classification officers, Jenna Neville and Candace Rideout.

Welcome to our House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

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

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a group of young ladies from Corner Brook Intermediate that prove heart and a great work ethic pays off.

The Corner Brook Intermediate 14U Volleyball team, or better known as Storm, recently won a silver medal at the 2026 U14 Volleyball Canada Nationals held in Moncton, New Brunswick. A silver medal at a national level is an achievement which we

are all proud of. It is hard work and commitment to do your best that brings this great success.

Corner Brook Storm were second in their division at the end of the round robin, but their grit and determination became evident when they won their quarter finals, semi-finals and ended up in the finals. The tier 3.0 silver medalists included Sophia Wilton, Abby Etheridge, Macy Hynes, Evie Ash, Brianna Ereaut, Zoe McCarthy, Quinn Griffin, Juniper Hengeveld, Ava White, Claire Hamlyn, Hailey Locke and their coaches, Finton Gaudette and Felicia Park. I am so proud of these young ladies and dedicated athletes and their coaches as this is just the beginning for this great team with the sky as their limit.

I ask all Members to join with me in congratulating the Corner Brook Storm team on their outstanding performance at the national tournament.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: Thank you, Speaker.

Labrador West was alive, this past week, with the sound of music. Music and the arts in Labrador West are as vibrant as ever, and the recent achievements of our students are a testament to the strength of our creative community.

I would like to extend congratulations to the Menihek High School senior band for earning Gold Standard and to the Menihek choir for achieving Silver Standard, with Colby McGrath also being recognized with an Outstanding Soloist Award.

I would also like to congratulate the J.R. Smallwood Middle School performance choir on their Gold Standard achievement.

These honours awarded at the Atlantic Festivals of Music in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from April 29 to May 1, reflect not only exceptional talent, but also dedication, discipline and a passion for the arts. They have represented Labrador West and, indeed, our entire province with pride and excellence. I hope all the students had an incredible and memorable experience.

Achievements like these do not happen without strong leadership and support, so I would like to sincerely thank two educators in my district, Dr. Kerri MacPhee and Ms. Brittany O'Keefe, for their outstanding work directing these groups, along with the many chaperones, volunteers, parents and supporters who make these opportunities very possible.

Again, congratulations to all.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to pay tribute to Catherine Burry, a resident and dedicated advocate from Churchill Falls who has supported and guided countless women as they navigate menopause.

As the founder of the NL Menopause Support Group, she has created a safe, welcoming and inclusive space where women can ask questions, seek advice and share their experiences. Through her willingness to share her journey, alongside evidence-based information, Catherine offers support that is compassionate and non-judgmental.

A consummate mentor, Catherine empowers mid-life women and advocates

for their health, joining with others to feel less alone in what can often be an isolating stage of life. Her leadership fosters confidence and resilience among women across the province. As a founding member of the Menopause Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Catherine has played a very active role. This past February, she joined fellow members, Cathy Hoyles, Courtney Rowsell, Stephanie Ryan and Deeanne Feltham-Scott, in meeting our Minister of Health, bringing forward lived experience, insight and a shared commitment to improving care for women.

I ask members of this hon. House to join me in recognizing Catherine Burry for her tireless efforts and advocacy for women in our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the Herring Neck Dory Festival held on July 16 to 19, an annual community-driven celebration held in the historic community of Herring Neck, the birthplace of the Fishermen's Protective Union founded in 1908 by Sir William Coaker.

The festival began in 2014 during the Herring Neck Come Home Year when the now-famous Rodney Races captured the imagination of residents and visitors alike. Encouraged by that success, a dedicated group of volunteers committed to carrying this event forward, building on what has become a signature celebration in our region. Now entering its 12th year, the festival has grown to a four-day event, welcoming more than 3,000 attendees in 2025. It showcases the very best of

Newfoundland and Labrador through traditional music, kitchen parties, community gatherings, a parade, artisan markets, family programming and the iconic Rodney Races, highlighting teamwork, heritage and pride.

At its heart, the Dory Festival remains accessible and community-focused, driven by volunteers, local partnerships and sponsors. It supports tourism, local artists and the rural economy; it stands as a powerful example of grassroots leadership and cultural preservation.

Mr. Speaker, Herring Neck should be very proud of this remarkable event.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. STOYLES: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a very successful, young man from Mount Pearl.

Ryan Harding grew up in Mount Pearl and still calls Mount Pearl home. He's part of many homes each evening, while being a reliable source of information on something that is critical to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the weather.

Ryan graduated from Mount Pearl Senior High and has learned a lot through his young life. With a degree in creative broadcasting from Ireland's Limerick Institute of Technology and a broadcasting journalism diploma from Loyalist College, Ryan has experienced a lot of what this country has to offer.

Making his first ever weather forecast in Winnipeg in 2018, he also worked in Toronto, Edmonton and Calgary covering major league sports and news. Ryan has

always had a special interest in his home province. He's first and foremost an ambassador to our beautiful Newfoundland and Labrador.

Since returning home in 2024, he has been welcomed with open arms. Ryan enjoys reporting on people, places and events that make our province a great place to live. Welcome back, Ryan, and we look forward to your daily forecast and, hopefully, good weather.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in wishing Ryan much success in his career as the weatherperson on NTV.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Here in the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, I extend my congratulations to the Honourable Louise Arbour on her appointment as the 31st Governor General of Canada.

Ms. Arbour's distinguished career reflects an unwavering commitment to justice, human rights and public service. From her service on the Supreme Court of Canada to her leadership in advancing international law and accountability, she has consistently demonstrated principled leadership and a deep respect for democratic values. In her new role as the King's representative in Canada, she will uphold the Constitution, safeguard our democratic institutions and carry out the duties of the office with impartiality.

Speaker, I also extend my gratitude to Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon for her service as Governor General since 2021. As the first Indigenous person to hold this office, she has made history while representing Canada with dignity, empathy and quiet strength. Her dedication to advancing Indigenous reconciliation will leave a lasting legacy.

I offer my best wishes to Governor General-designate Arbour as she prepares to assume her duties, and my sincere thanks to Governor General Simon for her service to Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

I join the Premier in congratulating the Honourable Louise Arbour on being named the next Governor General of Canada.

At this critical time in our country's history, her experience, principled leadership and long-standing commitment to justice will serve Canadians well. As Canada navigates complex challenges, we are also presented with significant opportunities to strengthen our country and build a secure and prosperous future.

Ms. Arbour's integrity, dedication and perspective will be a meaningful contribution to our nation's continued growth and unity. Her distinguished record of service inspires confidence at this pivotal moment. As she prepares to take on her new role, I hope she takes pride in the trust placed in her to serve as the King's representative in Canada,

I would also like to offer since thanks to Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon for her devoted service to

Canadians. Her leadership and advocacy have left a lasting and meaningful impact across our country.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

We, too, congratulate the Honourable Louise Arbour and wish her all the best in this prestigious job. In an increasingly hate-filled world, her track record in the defence of human rights is unparalleled. We look forward to her serving as a beacon and as an advocate for the principles that define us Canadians and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on the international stage once more.

We, too, wish the outgoing Governor General all the best in her next endeavours.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs, and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise to recognize May 6 as Hope Air Day and to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Hope Air and its invaluable service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

For 40 years, Hope Air has helped residents access essential medical care by supporting non-emergency travel for MCP-insured services, particularly for those living in rural and remote communities. By reducing the burden of distance, Hope Air helps ensure patients can focus on their health, not the cost of getting to care.

Through our ongoing pilot partnership with Hope Air, now extended until March 31, 2027, eligible individuals from low- to moderate-income households may receive up to 100 per cent of approved travel costs for specialized MCP-insured services. These are shared between Hope Air and the Medical Transportation Assistance Program with our government.

Speaker, in 2025 alone, Hope Air supported 896 patient and escort trips for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, representing 3,406 medical travel arrangements. These numbers reflect real people receiving timely health care and real families supported during challenging times.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing the vital role Hope Air plays and to congratulate that organization on 40 years of changing lives with such meaningful impact. I look forward to many years of positive service ahead.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement and I thank the minister for recognizing the 40th anniversary of Hope Air and the important role the organization continues to play for people across Newfoundland and Labrador.

For many residents in our province, accessing medical care means long and

expensive travel. The numbers shared by the minister highlight how significant this need is in our province. That is why our government was happy to partner with Hope Air to introduce this pilot project in 2025 to bridge the distance between home and hospital for vulnerable people living in rural, remote and underserved communities. We are happy to see this government has continued this pilot because never has the mission of hope been more important than it is today.

I join the minister and all Members of this House in congratulating Hope Air on 40 years of service and thanking its staff, volunteers, donors and partners for the difference they continue to make in the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

We, too, join the minister in recognizing the 40th anniversary of Hope Air and its service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We also call on this government to make sure that all costs associated with medical travel to make our public health care system truly universal be covered once and for all. We also ask that the government please expand the list of services and costs that are eligible for reimbursement or, better yet, pay for these upfront so sick people don't have the added burden of dealing with endless paperwork.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, correctional staff across Newfoundland and Labrador are important members of the justice system and our communities. They work in difficult circumstances every day in supporting some of the province's most vulnerable people.

May 3 to 9 is recognized as Corrections Week. This week aims to acknowledge the contribution of correctional staff in facilitating rehabilitation and making communities safe. The complex world of corrections demands far more than security services. It requires empathy and compassion as they provide an integrated and supportive service to those individuals in our correctional facilities.

While there are plenty of challenges, we also know that the job can be very rewarding. Staff have an opportunity to work with inmates and help them make changes and grow into contributing members of society.

Speaker, correctional staff show their commitment not only on the job, but in the many contributions they make to their communities through various community events and initiatives. Their efforts have a direct, positive impact on all of us.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in recognizing Corrections Week in this province and sincerely thank everyone who works in our corrections system for their hard work and continued dedication.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I join the minister in recognizing Corrections Week and acknowledging the important role correctional staff play across our province.

Those workers in our correctional system face difficult and, often, dangerous circumstances every day. They are responsible for not only maintaining safety and security, but also for supporting rehabilitation and helping individuals reintegrate into society. That work requires professionalism, resilience and compassion. However, recognition must be matched with action. Unfortunately, this year's budget included no new positions and no new initiatives to support workers within our correctional system.

While the minister can acknowledge the difficulties these workers face, words alone are not enough without supports to back them up. It is essential that appreciation for these workers is matched with a commitment to ensuring they have the resources and supports needed to do their job safely and effectively.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I thank all correctional officers throughout the province for their dedication and service.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

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

We, in the NDP, recognize the work of our corrections officers and are grateful to the

staff that keep our corrections system functioning. In supporting them, we must provide them with added tools that help support inmates in turning their lives around and not reoffend.

In that spirit, I invite all of you to our restorative justice panel next week, where we will hear about practical solutions to many of these challenges.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, we found out that the Premier had made secret hirings to advise him on the MOU – one, a former Cabinet minister during the Muskrat Falls boondoggle and, another, a vocal critic of the MOU.

Did the Premier hide these appointments because he knew the public would be outraged?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, one of the things that I said to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador during the election campaign is we would always put their interests first. We would always look to seek to get the best deals we can for the resources of Newfoundland and Labrador.

While they're focused on individuals, we're focused on issues: better health care, lower taxes and safer communities for all. Yes, we

are very concerned about the resources of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's why we'll go out and hire the best people we can.

There is no secret that government always uses lawyers at any different time and hires them to do all kinds of projects.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, if the Premier wants to do what's best for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, doesn't he think Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should know who's giving him advice on the most important project in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Why did the Premier fail to disclose that these advisors were hired back in January to tell him how to deal with Churchill Falls?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I say again, there has been lots of lawyers hired to talk about the MOU, on both sides of the House, prior to us winning the election. So I'm not so sure that all of that information was ever disclosed.

This is not about disclosure; this is about making sure we get the best deal possible for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: So if he wants to talk about that, that's fine. They're not the only two people we've hired. We've hired lots of people.

Let me tell you about Dan Levert. Dan Levert, a very prominent lawyer, a seasoned construction lawyer with over 35 years experience, but as an engineer and as a lawyer. We've brought him in to help us with this file. We've also brought in Vanessa Newhook, a well-known person in the oil industry here, most recently vice-president of Atlantic Canada.

We have lots of people that we continue to hire –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Premier's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I've learned a lesson. When the Premier says it's not about disclosure, it is about disclosure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: What is the role of these advisors? We have a Premier who won't tell the public what he thinks about the MOU, who hired a panel to tell him what he thinks and now has two advisors to review the work of the panel.

Speaker, is anyone in charge? Is anyone going to make an actual decision or are we stuck in review mode for four years?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, what we have is an MOU. We have no deal; there has never been a deal. There was not one definitive agreement signed – not one. When we took over in October, not one definitive agreement had been signed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We've brought in a team to work with Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro to talk about where we go and what the next steps are and to review exactly what's been done. That's exactly what they're doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I should hope no definitive agreements were signed because they stopped negotiating. One of the panel members has said the MOU is a betrayal and one of the new advisors has said it is the biggest strategic error.

Why is the Premier paying people to give advice, when these people have already publicly expressed their opinion at no cost to the taxpayer?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: I find it somewhat hypocritical for the Leader of the Opposition to stand and talk about people with opinions. Let's not forget the opinion of the person who they put in charge of their independent review committee, a former client of his. Not only that, the ink wasn't dry on the MOU when that former chair of the independent appointments committee was out talking about how wonderful a deal it was and then he was appointed as the chair. So you tell me that that's independence.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, if the Premier feels that the Consumer Advocate in this province, whoever he or she may be, is not independent, we have a bigger problem.

Why doesn't the Premier finally come clean and tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians he's abandoning the billions of dollars and the thousands of jobs, the economic upside that the MOU can deliver for our province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, in 1949, we joined Confederation. We had the richest fishing ground in the world. We had hydro resources. We had forestry resources. We had mining resources. Along came oil and hydroelectricity and, after 76 years of Confederation, what do we have to show for it? After 10 years of Liberal government, our deficit is doubled.

Well, I will tell you that I will not be pushed, I will not be forced and I will not be rushed into giving away the resources of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: As Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, we're going to take our time to make sure that it is the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that —

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Premier's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, do not worry. It is very clear he will not be rushed. He spent the first seven months of administration hiring advisors to tell him what he thinks. This deal is not going anywhere.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: He keeps hiring advisors to tell him how to think, to review one review to do another review. I can guarantee you, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know there's no rush here dealing with Churchill Falls.

The Deputy Premier tried to defend the Premier this morning on the radio and when asked why his government didn't announce the hirings back in January, he said we communicate when the time is right.

So I ask: Why wasn't it the right time to say this when these advisors were actually hired, rather than to wait to get caught in Question Period?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, once again, let's talk about what we're trying to do. We want the best deal for Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Leader of the Opposition agrees with us because on September 15, he said: Make sure that the deal we sign is the right deal for Newfoundland and Labrador. That is exactly what we're doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Yes, as everyone has said in this province, we want to sign the right deal.

However, you can't sign the deal if you don't negotiate and you will never sign the deal if your advisors tell you not to do it.

The Deputy Premier also said this morning, when asked why these advisors were hired, that the talent pool in our province is not deep.

Why does the Deputy Premier not have faith in Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to do important work related to Churchill Falls?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, he's talking about not negotiating – 173 days, he didn't do one definitive agreement. One hundred and seventy-three days as the Premier, he didn't talk to Bay du Nord, he didn't talk to Equinor or BP – 173 days.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: We brought that deal forward. He didn't even have a conversation. He talks about deals being done, here's the deal that was done. He hired his former boss –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm asking the Member for Burgeo - La Poile for your co-operation. If I have to ask again, you will not be speaking anymore today.

The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

L. PARROTT: He hired his former boss, dismissed the LeBlanc inquiry, one that he sat on for the entire duration and billed close to \$1 million. Now he's in here trying

to turn around and say that there were never people hired in secret.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Let me say one thing to the minister, it's the last time he's going to say things that aren't true about me. I did not hire a former boss. He said yesterday that I was employed by him, that is not true. He said I did not meet with Equinor, that is not true. He said that there was a national energy agreement that I did not sign, that is not true.

I say to the minister, stop saying untrue things in this House about me. Do your job, show some credibility and stick to the facts. I'm not standing for it anymore.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I would say if that was addressed at me, perhaps the former premier should stand up and talk about the secret bonuses that they gave and how he came in as Premier and said he knew nothing about it. He never got an update from his own staff and after he found out, he didn't dismiss any of them for not updating him as the Premier.

They didn't vote for it, none of them knew about it, but they all would have accepted it. So if he wants to talk about people telling lies –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – he should have a look in the mirror.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

Nice deflection there by the minister.

The Conservatives have now appointed former Conservative Cabinet ministers, Ross Wiseman, Darin King and Jerome Kennedy, to powerful positions within government. We know, of course, that the former Premier Danny Williams has had a lot of input in this government as well.

What we don't know is what the Premier's plans are to develop the Churchill River. So are they bringing in these ministers to turn Gull Island into a boondoggle like they did with Muskrat Falls?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, it's funny how they sit over there and they talk about the boondoggle that is Muskrat Falls, yet they fail to say how they failed to execute on construction. They fail to say how there would be absolutely no possibility of a conversation about Gull Island if Muskrat Falls does not exist.

The only reason we can have that conversation is because it comes under the previous EA for Muskrat Falls; it's why we are having those conversations.

If he wants to know this Premier's plans for this province, he has said he will electrify

Labrador. We will build Gull Island. We will develop our resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: And we will make the best possible place for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

It's going to be a neat trick. We'll wait and see.

Speaker, it is very concerning that the Deputy Premier, this morning, and the Premier for that matter here in the House of Assembly, did not know if these new advisors from a previous PC government are actually being paid and how much.

So can the Premier tell us how much the Conservatives are actually paying these new reviewers to review the work they've also paid other reviewers to review? It's ongoing.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS:

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll talk about a neat trick. I'll talk about the trick that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador did. They made them disappear. I'll talk about another neat trick.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: I'll talk about the \$22 million hotel that was leased to their buddies by that previous minister which we could have bought for \$4 million. We can talk about another neat trick in Snow's Lane, how land was bought for more than it was sold for, for their buddies.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: We can talk about another neat trick with Marco and all of the business they got and how we had proponents leave this province because of the unfair bidding process.

Speaker, there are lots of tricks. The only difference is we're not pulling rabbits out of our hats; we're pulling deals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, again, more deflection, more deflection.

We're happy to talk about land deals, big land deals, if you want to, at any point in time.

Chris Huskilson, an architect of Muskrat Falls from Emera, is chairing the biased review panel, which also includes Michael Wilson, an outspoken critic of the MOU; Bern Coffey, now being paid by the taxpayers, was paid as a Conservative staffer, also a critic of the MOU; Jerome Kennedy has close ties to Danny Williams, who has said the MOU is dead. In fact, he said it was his greatest single accomplishment. What a thing to say, to take away \$225 billion from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Is the Premier simply cherry-picking advisors to tell him what he wants to hear, that he won't deal with Quebec?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: It's funny how we forget about things like Kenmount Crossing, but I'll tell you something about two individuals that he's mentioned. I'll tell you something about two individuals –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – he's mentioned. Two very esteemed individuals, one a lawyer and one a former minister of this House, Ross Wiseman and Bern Coffey who both come here to work with us for the betterment of this province and you know what they both have in common, both former Liberals, both seen the light, like the people of this province and they're both on this side doing the work for the people of this province that will get us the best deals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, they may have seen the light but they've also seen the cash, is my guess.

Why did the Premier and the minister fail to disclose the identities of these advisors during Question Period and only to confirm that they had been hired afterward to the media? Do they have no respect for the House or did they just have to get their stories straight once they got caught?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Let's talk about respect for the House and let's talk about last December when this MOU was brought to the House. So the MOU was brought to the House with Liberal insider John Samms being a part of that and the other negotiators that were part of it, that nobody knew about. These guys did this for apparently over two years.

They said they started in 2022. So from 2022 to 2024 they had all these individuals hired to negotiate this contract and it was a negotiation, it was commercially sensitive. It was legally sensitive. It was technically sensitive. All of the things that they should understand and because they don't understand that stuff, they're over there and we're over here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, they ran on a platform of transparency and this is what we get. We don't get to see agreements, we get to see redacted papers, page after page after page with Bay du Nord.

The Conservatives failed to admit that Bern Coffey was a paid political staffer for them during the MOU debate. He was probably the person who advised them to walk out and not even vote on it.

If this process is truly independent why is the Premier now layering on political connected advisors, one of whom has already made his feelings known about the deal –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

F. HUTTON: – that it's a betrayal to Newfoundlanders and future generations?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I assume the Liberals don't pay their lawyers; they only pay their construction people. I don't know how this works. They probably only take the deals that they get, and get consultations from them. I don't know.

But, I tell you, if you want a lawyer in this city to consult or give you sound advice on a project, I would think you would have to retain and pay. I think that's how the process works. That's what I think.

And, you know, maybe – maybe – we could give them less money and sell it back for more money. I don't know. Maybe it's the same type of deal as it was with Snow's Lane or Kenmount Crossing. I don't know.

But we pay our people and we pay them very good because they deserve to be paid.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Premier, as it is taxpayers' money, why don't they just tell us how much they're paying them, or do they not know?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: These former ministers got to know. They know what happens with this: non-disclosure agreement. You can't disclose the amount of money. It's pretty simple.

Do we know?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: We can find out how much they're getting paid, obviously. We're not allowed to disclose it. He knows that – he knows that.

He signed it. He signed it with Mr. Browne. They signed it with the previous clerk who was negotiating. They signed it with everyone; they know it. To come in here and stand up and pretend that that's not how it works, it's entirely wrong.

Two years they had special advisors hired, doing this MOU, they never disclosed one thing. As a matter of fact, they never ever invited us to the technical briefing until we pushed for it. So to come in here and pretend that's not how it works is totally false.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, now for something completely different. Transportation and Infrastructure has recently changed the Multi-Year Capital Works program without sufficiently consulting the 22 communities that use it or Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. Now, the seven largest municipalities in the province will lose \$2.6 million per year and the other 15 will lose access to reliable, predictable infrastructure money.

Can the minister explain the rationale for this change and the lack of consultation with stakeholders?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I took over the department and I took over a municipal infrastructure program that was ripe for the picking for the AG, who happens to be here today. I didn't want my name attached to any report so I went and asked staff. We had to review the program and fix it. It needed to be reformed. We've reformed it. We did speak to Municipalities NL several times. We did speak to most municipalities, but what we're doing now –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: We are still working on solutions. I've talked to a lot of municipalities. There is a lot of misinformation out there, but I'm not going down that road. I've put the olive branch out to MNL. If they want to come in and meet with us and offer suggestions, our door is open.

We are only partway through the process, I say to the Member opposite, and we're always free. Any advice anyone would want offer, our door is open and our officials are more than welcome to talk to them and (inaudible).

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, this change also makes a three-year program into a four-year program, meaning that every community left in the program will receive less money each

year: St. John's will get \$560,000 less each year; Corner Brook, \$400,000 less; Grand Falls-Windsor, \$300,000 less; and Mount Pearl will get \$850,000 less each year.

Can the minister explain this arbitrary cut to the communities for much-needed water, sewer and roadwork?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you.

Speaker, what the Member needs to do, they need to do their homework. There are four years for this year because there's a lot of money on the books that we've had – the Minister of Finance would be happy. We were carrying over every year, borrowing and borrowing and borrowing. We're trying to stop that.

So this is only the four-year – they've got to use up the money they had left over this year. Then they'll kick into the three-year fund and it'll be three years every year thereafter. As for all the seven municipalities losing money, there's one. Mount Pearl lost money, unfortunately, because they were getting more than they should have got for years passed.

I explained that in the House of Assembly yesterday and I know the Member opposite was listening and that's the reason why. It was not anyone picked on. It was done per capita, \$233 per person. That's how the formula comes up, and whatever comes out of that formula, that's where we're to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister was full way through the cuts but only part way through the consultations.

Urgent Care in our community has closed early twice in just the past couple of weeks. What immediate, concrete actions will the government take to retain front-line health care workers to stop these service disruptions from being the norm?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I spoke on this in the House earlier because, actually, we had a couple of recent closures where they didn't have staff to be able to extend the hours. So for us, Speaker, we're dedicated to actually making sure that there's proper recruitment and retention for the urgent care.

We're gone back now. There's going to be a human resources investigation into the resources allocated for the urgent care and how they're staffed and call-ins and what to do if a physician calls in sick or a nurse practitioner calls in sick.

Our government is dedicated to providing health care, Speaker. We're not going to allow this Urgent Care Centre to continue closing early.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

We're seeing closures in St. John's while the Urgent Care Centre in Mount Pearl still hasn't even opened as planned?

How can the minister claim progress when existing services are faltering and new ones are delayed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Seriously, Speaker – seriously – it's kind of puzzling when I talk about how this government rolled out Family Care Teams but not put the cost in the budget – \$20 million deficit was what we were facing. These Urgent Care Centres – yes, long-term leases; buildings secured without adequate planning for staff.

One of the things we realized is that what we've been left with is there are problems in recruitment and retention and also, Speaker, things as important as patient relations. In actual fact, when they took the Health Authority –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Speaker, the Minister of Health told this House in April of 2022 that restoring the freight boat to the coast of Labrador was a reason for running for politics. She's now a front-row Cabinet minister.

I ask: Why wasn't she able to get funding in this budget for that?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Again, I say, really, Speaker. We're in government, what, seven months.

I don't know if people realize that that Liberal government eroded the dock services in Lewisporte. We wouldn't be able to put a boat in there right now if you wanted to. Also is the MHA that was part of that Liberal government, his district was promised \$10 million. In actual fact, he had to take action by himself to force the premier to deliver on their promise.

Freight is not going to be a problem this spring because we're going to address the needs for my district and all of Labrador, including the Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, the budget has a new MRI for Labrador and for Grand Falls-Windsor, but not for Burin.

Why is the Minister of Health playing politics with health? How did she break the news to my colleague, the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, obviously, the Member who asked the question doesn't understand how budgeting works and how government works. We are delivering two MRIs in our first year – I think that's unheard of – to the rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are going to increase access for health care in rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador where we have a mandate –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: – a four-year mandate. Our blue book is for a four-year mandate – two MRIs for rural parts of this province. We're actually lifting up rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and we're very proud of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

When in Opposition, the Premier railed against the lack of transparency of the previous administration, yet he has failed to work with Opposition MHAs in striking a new independent review committee. He's refusing to hold a special debate in the House of Assembly on the report and now we learn that he secretly hired two special advisors to review the report.

I ask the Premier: Why should people believe that he and his government are any different than the last government?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we continue to hire people every single day. There's nothing secret about it. At the end of the day, though, what we did do is live up to our commitments, because when the election started –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – we said we would order an independent review to make sure that the MOU was the best deal possible for Newfoundland and Labrador. That MOU has been delivered to us on April 30. It will be made public on May 19. It will be tabled in the House and every Member of the House will have an opportunity to ask lots of questions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, the well-respected advocacy organization for all Newfoundland municipalities big and small, have vocalized deep concern with the changes made to the province's Multi-Year Capital Works program, highlighting the lack of meaningful consultation in the development and changes. They say they do not reflect the priorities or recommendations consistently brought forward by municipalities.

I ask the minister: Why weren't key municipal groups consulted before changes were made and should we be concerned that there are other changes in the budget that we made without proper consultation?

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, sometimes you have to make changes for the right reasons, this is one of them changes. I have no qualms, I have no regrets on making it, it needed to be done because that program was really, really in bad shape. There were no parameters. There were no guidelines. It had to be changed.

All we've done now is we've changed the structure. Outside of Mount Pearl, there are no other municipalities losing funding. The smaller municipalities should benefit because there is more money going into that program.

We're working on guidelines because I think we need to help small municipalities. That's my issue. I think small municipalities are struggling with the consultants, with the

engineering work and they need our help and I'm willing to help them. That's part of the process we're working on.

So no municipality needs to be alarmed. I'm going to contact all mayors of the province and tell them –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party, for a quick question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Premier claims he wants the best Churchill Falls deal for the people of the province. So what does this mean, actually negotiating a deal with Quebec or developing Gull Island on our own and risking another Muskat Falls debacle?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

This government has been very clear where it stands on Churchill Falls and the Gull Island development. We have never once said that we were not going to try and get the best deal for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We've been very clear in our focus from January 6 of last year when we came in here and asked questions that these guys couldn't answer, when we asked to bring in our own experts and we weren't allowed, when there was a four-day debate that probably could have gone on for 14, we were clear as to what we wanted: the best deal.

Clearly, we didn't think it was the best deal. On May 19, we'll find out whether it was or wasn't.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the emergency department at the Corner Brook Regional Hospital is crowded on many occasions. One of the main reasons is that there are approximately 50 acute-care beds with long-term care patients in these beds. I've advocated for long-term care beds to be constructed at the old Western Memorial Regional Hospital. The Premier and the minister committed to this and they had it in the *Budget 2026*.

I ask the minister: Can you please update this House on the start date and when will these long-term care beds be available for these seniors to help alleviate the pressure on the much-needed acute-care beds?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, we'll live up to our commitments. In actual fact, Western Memorial, the long-term care beds, we're going to have 15 beds probably open up within the first 12 months, so 15 beds. The rest of the 30 will be done within the six months after that, so 45 beds in 18 months, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: I ask the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change on the status of any permits requested for the removal and the status of the *Baltic III*.

Mr. Speaker, the *Baltic III* shipwreck in the Cedar Cove was a disaster waiting to happen. With the great work of the search

and rescue and the Canadian Coast Guard, there were no lives lost and no environmental disaster.

I ask the minister: Can you give us an update if there are permits requested, the status of these permits, and can you please inform me so I can help get these permits to get this shipwreck removed safely in Cedar Cove?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. I know how important it is to him and the constituents out there.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize how challenging an operation like this is and we applaud the ongoing operation as it has ensured the least amount of environmental impact possible.

My Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change have reviewed the updated work plan submitted by the Coast Guard for any permitting requirements regarding the removal of the *MSC Baltic III* and we are dealing with them currently.

Also, Mr. Speaker, my officials are in contact constantly with the Coast Guard and the federal government because they are taking the lead on it, but make no mistake, we will keep the hon. Member updated as this goes so he can keep his constituents updated.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has now expired.

Orders of the DayPrivate Members' Day

SPEAKER: Given the hour of the day, I now call upon the hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels to present his Member's motion.

J. MCKENNA: Thank you.

I move, seconded by the MHA for Lewisporte - Twillingate, the following:

WHEREAS the food fishery is a long-standing cultural tradition in Newfoundland and Labrador, deeply rooted in the province's heritage and coastal way of life; and

WHEREAS the food fishery provides residents with access to locally sourced, sustainable food and supports food security, particularly in rural and coastal communities; and

WHEREAS current federal regulations limit the food fishery to designated days and periods, restricting reasonable access for residents due to work schedules, weather conditions and other practical considerations; and

WHEREAS adjacent jurisdictions and comparable fisheries regimes provide more flexible access while maintaining conservation objectives; and

WHEREAS the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have demonstrated a strong commitment to responsible harvesting and stewardship of marine resources;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House call upon the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to advocate to the Government of Canada, specially the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to expand the food fishery for Newfoundland and Labrador residents to permit access

seven days per week during the established seasonal period; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such advocacy emphasize the importance of conservation-based management, including appropriate catch limits, monitoring and enforcement measures to ensure the sustainability of cod and other groundfish stocks; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House affirm its support for policies that balance cultural traditions, food security and conservation in the management of the province's fisheries resources.

Speaker, it's an honour and a privilege, as the Member for Fogo Island- Cape Freels, to stand in this hon. House of Assembly and introduce this private Member's resolution on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This is a very important resolution for all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, during my campaign and after I was elected, this was an issue that always came to the forefront. I would like to think that this resolution will get unanimous support from both sides of the House. I would be appalled and dismayed if otherwise.

Speaker, my federal counterpart presented a private Member's resolution on the food fishery a few months ago and it was voted down by the House of Commons, by the Liberal government, which included four MPs from this province – how sad.

I'm asking the federal Minister of Fisheries, Joanne Thompson, who is from the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, to apply the right changes as requested by the people of this province. Treat the public of Newfoundland and Labrador with the same fairness and equality as the rest of Atlantic Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Why are we treated differently? This is why we should stand together in our fight. United we stand, divided we fall. Unity is strength, let's not show disparity.

The Newfoundland and Labrador food fishery is much more than a seasonal pastime. It's a fundamental pillar of the province's food security, cultural identity and connection to the sea. It's a heritage right. It's a link of 500 years of history that passes down knowledge and skills to future generations. It's about affordability, especially with the expected rise by 4 per cent to 6 per cent on groceries in 2026.

It is about safety and health. Getting out on the water fosters a sense of freedom and connection with nature. Community members often share their catch with those who do not have access to boats, strengthening social bonds in rural areas. This is our way of life and God-given right as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: All I say, right off the bat, in my district this is not an abstract issue. This is not something people talk about only in policy matters or around boardroom tables. This is something people feel. They feel it on Fogo Island. They feel it on Change Islands. They feel it in Port Albert. They feel it in Stoneville. They feel it in Horwood. They feel it in Gander Bay. They feel it in Frederickton. They feel it in Noggin Cove and they feel it in Carmanville. They also feel it in Ladle Cove and they also feel it in Aspen Cove.

They feel it in Musgrave Harbour. They feel it in Deadman's Bay. They feel it in Lumsden. They also feel it in New-Wes-Valley. They feel it in Indian Bay. They feel it in Greenspond and they feel it in Centreville. They feel it in Wareham. They feel it in Trinity and they also feel it in Dover and Hare Bay.

This is a part of who we are, I cod you not.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: It's in our kitchens. It's in our stages. It's on our wharves. It's in the stories people tell and it is the meal families still share.

The resolution before the House is straightforward, it asks the provincial government to advocate to the Government of Canada through Fisheries and Oceans to show residents of Newfoundland and Labrador access to the food fishery seven days a week during the established season, not year-round, not unlimited, not without rules, seven days a week during the season with catch limits, with monitoring, with enforcement, with conservation.

This is what this motion says and, to me, Speaker, that's just common sense. The people in my district know the fishery. They know the ocean. They know the weather. They know what it means to live by the water. For a lot of people the food fishery is not a hobby, it's not just a nice thing to do on a Sunday, it's how people stay connected to their families, their communities and their history.

It is a grandfather taking a grandchild out in his boat. It's a father showing a daughter how to jig a cod. It's a neighbour sharing fish with someone who can't get out anymore. It's a feed of fish on the table. It's a feed of fish in the freezer and it's a bit of independence and it's pride.

I can attest to taking someone out fishing, I did it myself. I had my own boat for a number of years and my children and the grandchildren just couldn't wait to get home to get out on the water. They learned a lot about our culture. They learned a lot about how to catch a cod. They learned a lot about how to clean a cod. They were showed how to fillet a cod. They were showed how to split a cod, salt cod and pure a cod.

AN HON. MEMBER: Life skills.

J. MCKENNA: Life skills, exactly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: This is very important if we want to carry on our heritage and culture. This is the way Newfoundland should be. The cod is what brought us here. The cod is what built our communities and the cod is going to keep us here – need not be afraid.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: So I'll reiterate the fact that this is a very important PMR and I'll ask all sides of the House to support this resolution so that we can get back to our normal way of life here in this province.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to speak to the private Member's motion on the food fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. The food fishery is not just a policy issue in this province. It is a deeply rooted part of who we are. It reflects our history, our culture and our connection to the sea. For generations, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have relied on the fishery not only for income but to help feed our families and, today, that matters more than ever.

From a social support perspective, access to food is a very real issue. Families across the province are facing rising costs of groceries, fuel and housing. In many rural and coastal communities, access to affordable, nutritious food can be very limited. So fish is a healthy, local sustainable source of protein.

Expanding access to the food fishery, particularly for individuals who work during the week or are constrained by weather, makes practical sense. Flexibility matters in Newfoundland and Labrador, weather changes quickly and work schedules are not always forgiving. So allowing seven-day access during the established season would give people a fair opportunity to participate.

Yes, Speaker, I support the intent of this motion. But support must also come with scrutiny because this is not just about access; it is about balance. It is about balancing access with sustainability, fairness and accountability.

We cannot discuss expanding the food fishery without also recognizing the reality faced by our commercial harvesters. These are the men and the women who make their living from the sea. They operate under strict regulations. They pay licensing fees, often for multiple species, such as cod, crab, lobster and the list goes on, Speaker. They are subject to quotas, monitoring requirements and enforcement measures. There are costs every time they go out on the water. There are rules they must follow. There is accountability built into every aspect of their work. That is the system that protects the sustainability of our fishery.

So when we consider expanding the food fishery to seven days per week, we must ask what level of oversight will exist there? What level of enforcement will ensure that this expanded access is not abused? How do we ensure that we are not unintentionally creating unfairness for those who are already heavily regulated?

Under the current rules, there are limits: five fish per person, 15 per boat. Those limits are manageable when access is restricted to certain days. But if access expands to seven days per week, the potential impact increases significantly. An individual could harvest 105 fish in a week using angling gear or handlines. A boat can go out multiple times with different people in it.

While some may assume that this will only be for personal use, we hear that that's not always the case.

We hear of situations where fish is sold informally, door to door, and that creates an unregulated market. It impacts local buyers and licensed harvesters. It raises concerns about fairness and about food safety and traceability. This is not about questioning people's intentions. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have demonstrated a strong commitment to stewardship. But good policy cannot rely on goodwill alone. It must include structure, oversight and enforcement.

Geography also plays a role here, Speaker. In some parts of the province, access will be limited more so by weather and conditions. But in other regions of our province, there is a potential for consistent, daily fishing activity, and that creates uneven pressure on the resource and uneven impacts on local economy.

If we are advocating for expanded access, we must also advocate for the safeguards that go with it. Without those safeguards, we risk unintended consequences. There are important questions that must be addressed. What enforcement measures will be put in place if access is expanded? Will there be increased presence from federal authorities? How will compliance be monitored across multiple days and trips? What steps will be taken to ensure that the food fishery remains for personal use and not commercial activity? These are not minor details; they are fundamental to getting this right.

We must also talk about fairness – fairness for families who rely on the food fishery to help put food on their table; fairness for workers who need flexibility so they can engage in this fishery; but also fairness for our harvesters, those who have invested their lives, their time and their resources in this industry. Harvesters in the districts like mine, Placentia - St. Mary's, are the

backbone of our coastal communities. They support local economies, processing plants and livelihoods right across our province. Any changes to the fishery must respect that reality.

This motion does reference conservation-based management, catch limits, monitoring, enforcement, and that is important, but those principles must be clearly defined and properly resourced. If we are calling on the provincial government to advocate the federal government, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, then advocacy must be comprehensive. It cannot simply be about expanding access only. It must also include a clear commitment to enforcement, to monitoring and to maintaining the sustainability of our fish stocks, because we know better than most the consequences of getting that balance wrong, Speaker.

I do support this motion because it recognizes the importance of the food fishery to our people. I support it because it can help improve access to healthy, local food sources and I support it because it reflects our culture and our traditions, but I also believe strongly that expansion must come with accountability. We must ensure fairness. We must protect our harvesters and we must safeguard the sustainability of this resource.

As we move forward, let us advocate not only for greater access but for the systems and the safeguards needed to support it responsibly, because this is about more than just today.

Speaker, I have a very deep, personal connection to the fishery, as most probably know here. It's not only an ancestral connection, but it has sustained my personal family for over 40 years. I'm married to a harvester, so I certainly understand the ins and outs of this profession.

Yes, cod has been around for years and cod is definitely going to be what keeps us here, as the Member has said. This is about ensuring that future generations can continue to participate in a fishery that has shaped this province for centuries.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today in support of this resolution that impacts many people across our province and especially in my district.

Fishing is not just simply a seasonal activity. It is a tradition passed down through generations. It is a part of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. For countless families in our province, especially in rural and coastal communities, fishing is tied to identity, self-reliance and deep respect for the sea.

Supporting the food fishery is, in many ways, about preserving that connection. It's also about ensuring that this tradition remains accessible in a modern context. That means recognizing the challenges people face today – busy schedules, economic pressures and the realities of life in a changing world and adapting our policies accordingly.

At its core, this resolution proposes a practical change, allowing residents to access the food fishery seven days a week during the established season and giving people the flexibility to fish safely, access affordable food while also protecting our resources through conservation-based management.

Across our province, families are feeling the pressures of rising costs. Food prices are increasing significantly and, in many rural and coastal communities, access to affordable, high-quality food can be limited. The food fishery helps address this in practical and meaningful ways.

It provides residents with a direct, local and sustainable source of food – one that is not subject to the same supply chain pressures or rising retail costs. For many families, a successful day on the water can supplement their food supply for weeks, easing financial pressures while ensuring access to nutritious, high-quality food.

Speaker, in my district, we have Icewater Seafoods and they rely on cod. What they process is predominantly cod, and I guess for the workers that work out there, their motto is kind of: In cod we trust. So we rely on it, we know that with scientific-based management that it is sustainable and that it is able to be harvested properly.

But like I said, this is a company that came and kind of changed the quality assurance of our cod fishery. I believe the last time I talked with Alberto Wareham, the owner of Icewater, I think right now we're at 99.8 per cent of every cod that comes through the doors of Icewater in Arnold's Cove is processed to the benefit of our economy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: So we've come from D, C and B products where we used to use a pitchfork and all that kind of stuff to throw up the cod, to all A, AA, AAA products that are really renowned all over the world. They have contracts with big food chains and grocery stores where the cod from here in Newfoundland and Labrador is sustained throughout the world. We have no intention of making it bad for the people at Icewater that work there or the owners. We want to fish side by side with them.

I remember taking my son Parker out to Arnold's Cove to do a bit of fishing and the now mayor, John Barrett – he wasn't the mayor then – he took us out in his boat. That was probably four or five years ago. To this day, my son Parker still calls him Skipper John because he was the skipper of the boat.

So it became a part of his tradition and, I guess, a part of my tradition without even realizing it. Because we were on the water, that was able to happen. So it was awfully nice of my friend to take us out on the water and to give us that opportunity. To see the excitement on my little feller's face, it was definitely worth the price.

I will also say that the high quality of the stock that's come back is certainly amazing, very high quality. As I was getting ready to speak, I was thinking, we talk about sustainability and stuff like that, but I personally feel that if I don't have a bit of fish in my freezer for a later date or whatever, then my household is without something.

I can just imagine what it is for somebody that's in their 80s or 90s, that grew up in the fishery and probably their parents fished, especially in rural Newfoundland. So, to me, we don't need two different sets of rules. If you're allowed to fish seven days a week in Nova Scotia, you should be allowed to fish seven days a week in Newfoundland and Labrador, no questions asked, dead stop, period. That's just the way it should be.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: We're not here asking for anything that – we want to be responsible. When the cod moratorium went on in 1992, we were more than compliant. When they brought back tags, we were more than compliant.

So the thing about it is, I do want to remind the people who are watching today, not only is it the processors and harvesters, as my

colleague alluded to earlier, which is very important to sustaining our economy, but I do want to remind the people watching that it's the fishery of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we all get to share it. We all get to sustain it. We all get to be responsible for it. If there's anomalies to that, then I think that we have 540,000 police officers or fisheries officers that should report if anybody is being untoward with our cod, because now that it's back and now that the stocks are improving and it's sustainable, then I think we've gone down the road where we lost it at one point, I don't think anybody wants to lose it again. It's very important to our heritage and culture.

As we are all aware, the weather in Newfoundland and Labrador is unpredictable, conditions can change quickly and requiring people to fish on specific days can create unnecessary risk. When individuals feel pressure to take advantage of designated fishing days, they may go out in less-than-ideal weather, simply because they don't know when the next opportunity will come and that's unfortunate. But if we were allowed to do seven days a week, except for probably a handful of people, I really wouldn't understand anybody that would want to go out and be part of the food fishery seven days a week. I think that people who own boats and that will be bringing people out are responsible. They do tours down in The Gut in Quidi Vidi and they're very responsible.

I've been lucky enough that when I worked at a business down in Quidi Vidi with the same name, they used to bring in – we'd have a fish fry. It was freshest that you could get. It was still wiggling when it was on the plate, but it was so good. I don't know if I've ever met anybody in my life that don't like cod, so if we were raised on it and it's our tradition and it's our heritage, then I think it's only right that we have the right to be able to enjoy our fishery.

By allowing access seven days a week, we remove that pressure and we allow people to make responsible decisions based on real conditions, rather than feeling obligated to go out simply because it's one of the few designated days. We give them the ability to wait for calm seas, clear skies and safer circumstances. In doing so, we are actively supporting safer practices on the water.

Flexibility also supports fairness. Designated fishing days may not work for everyone. Residents may be balancing shift work, seasonal employment, family responsibilities and other commitments that don't align with a fixed schedule. When access is limited to specific days, it can unintentionally exclude those who simply cannot make those times work. A more flexible approach ensures that access to the food fishery is not reserved for those with the most accommodating schedules but for all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador who wish to participate.

It also creates a more balanced and less-crowded fishery. When people are spread out over a course of seven days there is less congestion at wharves and on the water, which further contributes to safety and more manageable experiences for everyone involved.

I encourage all Members of this House to support this resolution and to continue working together to advance policies that reflect that balance, policies that respect our cultural traditions, address affordability and food security, prioritize safety and ensure the long-term sustainability of our natural resources.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels – I believe I got it right – for bringing this forward because I don't think there's any more important topic in this province than the fishery, for sure, because we were founded on it and you notice when all Members talk about the cod fishery, we've got a story. There's a story to tell.

I think what's important, as well, in this PMR and encouraging the federal government to make the decision to allow more days to fish, but we all want those that are out on the water to return home safe. That is a big element of what we're talking about here today.

In terms of stories, I did a Member's statement yesterday on J. Petite & Sons and b'y cod was an integral part of their business and the existence and the survival of the South Coast.

If you ask Google, or whatever, what is the food fishery, you will hear the words or see the words: food for the table. We all know it's always been a source of food for the table, and we love cod fish. It's a sport for sure. It's fun. And, as I think everybody referenced already, it's a way of life.

I'm telling you, my father, even though he worked with Abitibi Price, he loved to go cod jigging. I remember one day he took me out – I was born on the water, but I don't have sea legs. So sea sickness was a challenge for me, but we were out in the boat one day and the fish was good and he said, b'y, we're not going in yet. I was very sick.

There's a land point in our district called – well, it's the Connaigre Peninsula – Connaigre Head. On Connaigre Head grows a lot of bakeapples, so I said, Dad, you put me on land. He put me in on land. I didn't help him catch any more fish, but I did pick three gallons of bakeapples.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: We brought fish and bakeapples home that day. I'm sure everybody would have a story with a way of life in terms of codfish.

The other piece about making a decision – and you'll hear any minister of Fisheries say, whether it's federal or provincial, that we need good science, for sure – absolutely good science. My colleague from Placentia - St. Mary's, through her 10 minutes of speech, she stressed the balance piece here from the commercial fishermen and recreational fishermen. I think that needs to be pointed out as well.

But the science piece – and I always said, because former Premier Furey and I went across the province talking to a lot of fishermen in all areas of the province. At that time, the fishermen were saying cod is going to return. We're seeing signs that we never seen before in other areas of the province and it's coming back. Sure enough, a week later, the federal department makes the decision that there's encouraging signs of cod returning in the province.

My point is, listen to those who are on the water every day. They have the science knowledge. They're not qualified scientists as the scientists with DFO would say, but, in my view, they are beyond qualified in terms of giving good advice.

There's a lady in my district, Mildred Skinner, who has done a lot of research, not necessarily around cod, but around lobsters. I'm telling you her work has certainly benefited the long-term viability and sustainability of the lobster fishery down on the South Coast.

Just to speak to the survey that was done, note that 9,500 surveys were fully completed – and this is what the minister put out and this is what they heard, so hopefully she will make the right decision based on what she heard from that survey – and 95 per cent of the respondents residing

in Newfoundland and Labrador, participants emphasized that access to food is the primary reason for taking part in the fishery. So access to food, and we all know how important that is. There was unanimous support for continuing the food fishery.

When asked about potential changes to management measures, there was strong support for a longer season. So everyone is saying more days and not limited to weekends and Mondays, a higher individual bag limit and an increased no boat limit. But that's, I think, the point that my colleague from Placentia - St. Mary's was saying in terms a free for all is a concerning point when you allow every day to fish, the number of fish that's coming in is the point in terms of that balance of recording that. Because it needs to be some measure put there to know what and how many are being caught in different parts of the province.

I know federal member, Mr. Rowe, had presented a bill, C-237, and I think the government's response was that would involve way too much red tape – way too much red tape. Those going fishing don't want more red tape. That's not what it's about.

Again, it's the management piece, too much red tape, and we really need to strike the real balance here. In that survey that was done, if all of that information is taken into consideration, I think the minister will make the right decision. Hopefully she will.

The Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels said it's fairness. We want the same as Nova Scotians. That's really what they're asking for is fairness. It's going to be interesting to see what the decision is going to mean for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, if they feel that we got fairness out of it all. So, hopefully, there will be fairness when the minister makes her decision.

Just some background information in terms of the survey and different areas of the

province. Northern cod, Division 2J3KL – that’s NAFO Division – there are 3Ps cod, all NAFO Division, and then there are the Northern Gulf of St. Lawrence cod. These areas have different stages, critical and cautious zone, and the area that I represent is the South Coast, which is considered 3Ps.

It’s not what it was years ago when my father took me out in the boat and there was lots of fish. It’s not. The 3Ps in my area have seen a lot of numbers go down. It’s not the same as it was before, but they managed to get out. In terms of the numbers and the concerns of other fishermen in these areas, it should not be just dismissed in terms of those commercial fishermen concerns.

I use the word “balance” as well, because it needs to be balanced in terms of the solution here. From the report, the survey as well, the number of participants in the food fishery, each year, is not known. It should be known. There should be a process to know how many are participating in the food fishery. It may be difficult, but I think it’s necessary.

In 2025, to support accessibility and participation, 2,841 disability designations were issued to individuals with a permanent disability confirmed by a medical doctor. That’s important for them as well to be able to take part in the food fishery.

In the 2J3KL, it is in the caution zone. But if it’s critical or caution, it’s still in the caution zone in terms of numbers. So it goes back to that balance in terms of the decision, hopefully, that the minister will make that will be the right decision.

The demographics of that survey – the majority of the respondents: 74 per cent were males. Between the ages of 36 to 65 were 64 per cent of that survey; 8 per cent between 26 and 35; 20 per cent between 66 and 75. So interesting numbers, and 96 per cent of respondents indicated that they have

participated in the food fishery at some point since it was established in 2006. Over half of respondents, 56 per cent, reported fishing during both the summer and fall seasons, while 39 per cent fished only during the summer season and 3 per cent only in the fall.

We talked about cod fishing is a food source and, of that survey, there was 92 per cent and that was the primary reason for the respondents’ participation in the fishery; followed by recreation, 44 per cent; tradition, 37 per cent – you would think that would be higher – and the tourism 4 per cent – that needs to be higher. I think if the right decisions are made, we can get that 4 per cent of tourism up to a higher amount and we look forward to that.

A food source – it is the same as scallops in my district. Cod may be a food source but so are scallops, and there are some issues around there as well.

My time is up, but I’m hoping that the minister will make the right decision so fairness can be given to all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Dwyer): The Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O’DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It’s certainly a pleasure to stand here today on this PMR. It’s something that’s near and dear to my heart in our area. I stand here today; it’s a very important issue.

When I knocked on the doors in September and October, I couldn’t tell you how many doors they said, now you’re going to do the right thing if you get government, that you’re going to get in and change to give us a

chance to be able to go out and catch a fish on the water any day of the week.

Certainly in the last six months I'm here, I've met with the federal minister three times, maybe four times, and the first question was always about the food fishery here in Newfoundland and Labrador. That was always my first question because it's very important to people across the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: I've said it before here. On July 2, 1992, it was my birthday, and that's when the moratorium was announced. That was a bad day in the household for our family for sure.

AN HON. MEMBER: Did you take the fish out of the water?

L. O'DRISCOLL: Good point. He said: Did I take the fish out of the water? Well, I'm going to tell you, when the Minister Crosbie made that big statement, if anybody is watching, I can tell you where it happened. It happened in the Town of Bay Bulls, where I'm from, down on our wharf.

In the picture – I just looked it up that time – I can name five people that are in that picture, and the Labatt's Blue hat on – as a matter of fact, I just texted the deputy minister that I have in my department and said if it was okay if I mentioned it. His father-in-law was the fellow in the picture, so that's very coincidental. He said: If it fits in the story, throw it in there. I said: I'm going to put it in there. I thought that was pretty coincidental. He was a fellow, pretty vocal. I mean, it was a devastating effect in the whole Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was absolutely devastating.

It's something that's near and dear to people. I could go on for an hour telling the stories about fishing, and I probably will tell a couple before I finish. It's our resource. I will say to the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, that is our resource. It's the people

of Newfoundland and Labrador that should be able to go out and get their fish. You're right, the Member had said over there, they're looking for the right to be able to get out any day of the week, and hopefully the federal minister will give us that right to go out and do it. Maybe there's an indication that it could be coming earlier as an announcement.

I mean, people are out on the water. They just love to go out there. I go down in my community and you look at the boats that are over tied onto the floating docks, and for people to go out fishing, it's probably cheaper to go buy it than it is to go out there, but it's the pleasure and the love of going out on the water and being able to get a fish and be able to fillet it and go down on the wharf and watch people. That's what they enjoy. That's what they want to be able to do.

Again, back knocking doors, in September, there were people who told me that they were out on the weekend – this was on a Monday. They said: We were out yesterday. We had no business being out there but because you're not going to get out on a Monday, you're working, they're out on the water and it is a safety issue. They should never have been out there. So this is about safety.

The following day, the wind dies out and it was acceptable to go out there and they couldn't go out – four or five days that are very good and then they can't go out. So, for safety reasons alone, they should give the flexibility for people to go out.

To be able to not do this because we have a few people that are going to abuse the system, you can't shut that down because of a few individuals. We certainly try to catch them and track them, but you should never be able to shut this down. That's not proper. It should never happen. It's just something that we have in our industry.

Last summer, I'm going to say, I had the Member for CBS, we were out this summer – him and his wife were out with my uncle whose 81 and he would go out any time. We went out that day and I'm going to tell you it was absolutely spectacular. The whales were there. We caught our fish. We came in and had a fish stew. We sat there at the wharf. It was absolutely stunning, and that's just one day. I'd be like the minister over there, I don't really enjoy going out every day, I have to say. I enjoy to go out. We went out many times.

One time this summer, it was 6:30 in the morning, and we went down to the wharf and my brother said, well, there's an individual who lives across the way, if he's not going, we're not going. So we just got in the vehicles and went back. We know if he didn't go out, it wasn't safe to be out there. He's not going to go outside the head of Bay Bulls and go out in the waters that absolutely weren't safe. We turned around and went back home. I won't name the individual because he wouldn't be happy with me, but we knew when he didn't go out, it wasn't safe for us to go out, so we turned around and went back.

In this climate that I'm in – and I never thought for one second that I'd be the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Growing up in Bay Bulls and working in the fish plant, my father was a fisherman, my mother worked in the fish plant – we all did; everybody did. So when that shut down on July 2, 1992, that wasn't a great day, I have to say – it wasn't a great day – but we survived. We moved on. It's something that we certainly took a lot of pride in, I'll say that.

I did have a statement with the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's and just to give some political context on this, some historical perspective suggests that Newfoundland's fishery was treated as a sacrificed resource with federal Canadian policies prioritizing foreign, including Soviet, trawler access, in exchange for economic deals like grain

sales. We didn't, as the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, ruin the fishery. Foreign trawlers ruined the fishery, and we all know that.

We have it under control now and we should be able to keep it under control. There are trawlers out there now in the middle of the winter that are doing some trawling and that fish comes in here and is processed in Arnold's Cove. It's a year-round facility. It's pretty important. If we could get more of them, it would be great.

We have, I think as the Minister of Finance had said, a great story to tell. Our numbers in the cod fishery right now is 540,000 metric tons. That's a great story to tell. I mean, the rebound is here. We should be able to get more product, more cod in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it's a great success story. Let's make no mistake about it, it's a great success story.

Again, going back through the communities where I'm from, you go down – and I've said this before, touching my district – in the Town of Petty Harbour, there's probably one of the most – the Minister of Finance is going to say his community down in Bonavista. But I would say the community of Petty Harbour is the most visited area in this province in regard to a fishing village for people that come to St. John's and probably don't go across the Island. They go down to Petty Harbour and they see the stages. They see the wharves. It's just an area that people come to visit when they come to St. John's.

They go down through Shea Heights, down through Petty Harbour and back around. They can get to see what rural Newfoundland is like in about 10 or 15 minutes. Because you go down there, it's a beautiful, spectacular community where the fishing is great. They have some great fishing down there. Less water, I'm going to say, in regard to going out to be able to jig a fish. They have eight and 10 fathoms of

water, where you come up to Bay Bulls, you're in 20, 25 fathoms of water. A little easier to go down there and jig a fish, but it's a very, very popular area.

Looking at some of the fishing that goes on in the communities, and talking about down at the wharves, the cost and the love of going out on the water is what people look forward to. It's hard to describe, really. You have to be there.

Yesterday, I went down at the wharf in St. John's to look at a boat, and there was a tourist boat going out through the harbour. In the summer, those tourist boats would be going out with people to go jigging cod. They only go certain days. They're not going to have 100 people out jigging fish, but they will do particular tours to be able to take people out to jig a cod, and people will pay to do that.

I have relatives that come from away. They come home to visit for the summer, and the first thing is, when is the fishery open to be able to go out to jig a cod? They come home for a week, and the weather's not fit to go out. They're there for another four or five days, and you're able to go out. They go out in the boat, but they're not allowed to jig a cod. It's just unfortunate that we come in here and do a private Member's resolution for something that we should definitely have.

When I first got in as the Minister of Fisheries, I think one of the first questions I had asked, can you give me the regulations that are in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI for what they're allowed to catch? Most of them are pretty similar in regard to the amount of fish, but not the number of days. Their expansion out is more days to be able to fish, where ours is limited to eight or 10 weekends and one week in September, but they got more days that they can fish.

That was something that I checked into. I wanted to know. I brought it up to my uncle who is 81, or I said I would bring it up to him

and let him read it, because it does say on it what they're allowed to catch. You got five cod in Nova Scotia – I think with five hake, which they consider a whitefish. That was one of the ones that I was reading, but they're all pretty well five cod. The thing that they had an advantage over us, and it's something that we were pushing for, is to be able to get out every day of the week, and whatever day was fair to get out. So not keep us in through Saturday to Monday, let's give us the opportunity to be able to get out.

Again, I spoke with Barry Fordham who's on the Food Fishery and spoke to him on a couple of occasions. I was down at the minister's office last week and told him I would schedule a meeting, but I'm in here in the House and not having that opportunity right away, but I am going to meet with him. They're the ones that have been fighting for this. It's something that I'm glad to see the Member bring in, to be able to have our opportunity to be able to get out and jig a cod.

Anyway, I see my time is up.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader and the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

Any day that the representatives of Newfoundland and Labrador standing in this provincial Legislature and we're talking about cod, I think it's a good day. A really interesting debate and, of course, everybody wants to tell a story when we're talking about cod. Just listening to the speakers on all sides of the House and the more people spoke, the more reflection that I was having.

I grew up, just like many others, in an isolated community on the water. In the summertime, we'd move out to a little place, the headland, called Square Islands and my family had the last private-owned fish plant there.

Actually, because we had a business, I used to have to work every summer in the store. One day my uncle asked me to go jigging with him and when he paid me at the end of the day, I had to break the news to my grandfather that I wasn't going back to work in the store anymore because the money with cod jigging was much, much better.

Speaker, I actually spent 23 years as a career and employment counsellor. When the fishery closed, we were on the front lines. The Member for Ferryland just talked about that tumultuous time when the fishery closed, and we had a number of offices. I tell you, those were really difficult times to be on the front lines when 30,000 people found out they were out of work overnight. We saw very big burly, what we thought, were tough fish harvesters, come in and cry. We saw much, much anger.

As a matter of fact, a half a dozen of us that were working that became close friends, on the 30th anniversary, we went – a little tourism plug. In Conche, there's a young lady whose dad had to move away when the fishery closed, so she grew up in Alberta. He always talked about home and wanting to come home. She actually found a job writing for New York, a company down there, but she wanted to come back to her roots and what her dad talked about.

So for our 30th anniversary, as employment counsellors, we went to Conche. She runs a program: children of the moratorium. I would encourage any Member in this House, if you want to have a weekend away, we had a beautiful B & B there in Conche. Uncle Mickey is not there no more to entertain you with the accordion, but I'm sure someone is.

I want to thank the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels for bringing in this resolution today. It's a really important discussion when we're talking about the food fishery, and all of us have beautiful memories of going on the water with our families. Our families that grew up and moved away, when they come back, that's what they want to do. They want to go on the water and have nice family time, and sometimes if there's no fire ban, you can have a fire and you can cook your fish right while you're out in the boat.

Over time, it's also become much more than just going out and having that nice family time, which is so important, keeping your culture and your heritage alive. We've really seen with the rising costs, with affordability issues, in particular, almost half the province is seniors, so this is about food security for those seniors as well. So important about food security. As my colleague for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune talked about, people that can stock the fridge a little bit for the winter, it's so, so important – funny, I didn't cough all day, but I'm on my feet now and here it goes.

In addition to it being a way of life, we know that it's so much more than that. When I was the Fisheries minister, which was a short time, from May until October, I had many, many people reach out to me looking to make changes to the food fishery because of weather. They wanted the food fishery to be more accessible.

During my time there, I actually met with the federal Fisheries minister. I'm just looking for the letter there now, which I thought I had in front of me. In my short time, in four months, I met with the federal Fisheries minister on three different occasions. Each time, the food fishery was certainly front and centre.

The first time I met with the minister was on Father's Day of last year, Speaker. I remember that and people don't realize – sometimes people think the only time we

work is when the House is sitting. We met on Father's Day; we later met – again, that was virtual. We met face to face later in June and then I attended the Atlantic fisheries meetings in New Brunswick and, again, I brought it up.

Lots of correspondence that you can ATIPP and see of me writing the federal minister on a subject near and dear to the hearts of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Speaker. While people that I work for in Labrador, we welcomed the return of the northern cod fishery, everybody shared the optimism around the cod stock and the increase for the total allowable catch.

We encouraged the federal minister to bring back the food fishery; listen to the people; don't limit it to days that is forcing people to go out in bad weather. Speaker, I want to mention a name. During my four months there, I was inundated with emails of people that wanted us to raise this message, bring it to Ottawa loud and clear. Barry Fordham is a name that the next speaker probably knows well.

Barry was part of a group that was called Food Fishery Fighters and they did press releases. He wrote me time and time again and we did follow up. Residents called for the ability to fish during the week, as well as during the already established weekends, and such an increase, over a short time, would have a minimum impact – was the message that kept coming back to us – on the stock and allow participants in the recreational fishery to have greater choice on the days during which they would fish.

We all have stories as well about people that kind of felt regulations boxed them in to accessing even their fishery as their way of life, their earning a living because of dates and regulations. Everybody in this province knows the story of the *Island Lady*, two years ago, Marc and Joey, two young men from my district – we were so proud of them and the incredible summer they'd had, their big catch, but they were on their last day,

last trip. The weather wasn't fit, but the rules said that all of their gear had to be out of the water that day.

They went into Battle Harbour and they offloaded some things and said, we're going out for our final catch, it wasn't that good and they were not seen again. Terrible for their family who's been incredible advocates for search and rescue. Jeannette Russell has led that charge and still continues to this day and we're certainly with her in that advocacy.

When we look at those lessons, that is why we have to have flexibility. You might have a Sunday to a Saturday, the food fishery is open, the weather might be terrible for days. So that is what we're asking for, asking for people to be able to continue the way of life, going out celebrating their culture, their heritage, getting their fish for the winter, but also to have the flexibility. What we're talking about when we think about draggers and things like that, it's so, so, minimal the impact that this would have, Speaker.

I want to thank the Member for bringing in the motion, but two or three points I just quickly wanted to make before the clock winds down in what I didn't see in the motion, what the motion didn't do. This PMR does not commit the federal government to any regulatory change – I understand, obviously, what a private Member's resolution is – nor does it outline what advocacy the province has already undertaken.

After this PMR, that I believe all Members of the House is going to be very proud to support, I encourage my colleague on the other side to continue to advocate to the federal minister that we need to do this because it is the right thing to do. Of course, some speakers already talked about the additional enforcement and the monitoring resources and that's important, too.

One of the things that I hear in coastal communities in Labrador, more than I've

ever heard before, is around conservation, conservation, the lifestyle we enjoy. It's incumbent on us to pass along our knowledge to ensure that enough resource is left for those that are coming behind us, Speaker.

While those omissions don't in any way weaken the PMR, there are areas that we were sort of seeking clarification on, so I just wanted to raise that there.

I want to thank the Member for bringing the PMR. I think it's a great amendment and I'll be absolutely delighted to support it when the vote comes to this hon. House.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise here today to address the private Member's resolution advocating the seven-day food fishery.

For most Newfoundland and Labradorians, the food fishery is more than just a nice day on the water. It's about safety, accessibility and affordability with deep ties to our identity and traditions. The food fishery is woven into our history, our culture and our sense of community and many of us have grown up with.

Not so much in my family, I grew up in a family of teachers. Like the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, I've inherited the seasickness gene, none of my family has a boat but I'm lucky enough to have a brother-in-law who does, who will go out on the water at a moment's notice. So with the help of Graval, I'm good to go.

There's nothing better than going out the bay, out the harbour down in Durrell or, as we call it, the Arm and you head out to Spiller's, the fishing grounds. There's nothing better than the sun coming down, flat calm – flat calm for *Hansard* – sit there and you hit a fish, a good size one, nothing better. I can't even describe the sound of the line going over the gunwales as you're pulling up the fish – beautiful.

But as my colleague here from Fogo - Cape Freels will tell you, the wind can change quick on that part of the Island. When that wind changes northerly, you haven't got much time. You can see the change coming. The temperature drops, the wind picks up and you've got fog. The change of weather is the safety aspect. Where you're only limited to weekends, weather in Newfoundland is unpredictable at best.

When I think of this, I think of the gentleman in my district – I won't say his name – he's a retired fish harvester. He's probably in his early 80s. He's one of those gentlemen that always worked. In the winter, he cuts wood. He still cuts wood, packs up wood. In the spring, he gets ready for his garden. So he does his garden, plants it, maintains it. In the summer, during the food fishery, when the weather is good, only on weekends, where he lives close to the water, on the beach, basically, he actually rows his boat out to the grounds.

Now his grounds are not far offshore – close enough that his wife can watch him going out and getting fish. He's in his 80s and he rows his boat. I wouldn't be able to do that now. I wouldn't have a shoulder left. He can only do this on weekends. He refuses to use an outboard motor because the price of gas, number one, but like he said – I've been talking to him a number of times – you've got to keep moving. This is what he does. He rows his boat on weekends to get his fish to come home.

We can't change the weather but we can change the level of flexibility. With

expanding the food fishery to seven days, we're increasing safety. We get better weather. It's like the hon. Minister of Fisheries has stated, sometimes the weather is not fit to go out and you just go home. I've done that before. So there are better days during the week when you can get an opportunity to get out and get that fish.

It improves accessibility because now when you get a good day during the week, seniors can get out. Whereas, on weekends when the weather is not fit, it's not safe for them to go out. You have families with younger kids, they can get out when the weather is good, without that risk.

Also, for those who work irregular hours, the shift workers who can't get out on weekends. My wife, who is a nurse, some weekends when we have the opportunity to go out in the boat, she can't because she has to work, and weekends that she has off, the wind is northerly and it's not fit.

Right now with affordability, with the food fishery only on weekends, the days of dropping off feeds of fish to seniors, to people who are unwell enough to go out in the boat, who don't have the accessibility to get out in the boat, those days are far and few between. Because with the fishery being only on weekends, people have got to go out and get their own fish. With the weekends and the weather, they are selective. They can't go out every weekend. So they have to go get their own fish before they can help other people.

Now with the price of groceries increasing, a feed of fish is a good meal. In my opinion, there's nothing better than fresh fish. Fish and brewis and scrunchins – guaranteed heartburn but I loves it.

Increasing our access to our food fishery is practical. It's a meaningful way of stretching your daily food budget with good, healthy food for the table.

The food fishery is a cornerstone of our cultural identity in rural Newfoundland. This is where you learn to fish. I can remember times of my uncle coming out from Gander, who doesn't have the seasickness gene. He would come out when I was a younger boy, we would go out fishing just outside Long Point Lighthouse in Twillingate, my uncle, my father and my cousin. He taught me to fish; Dad taught me to fish. Dad also taught me about Graval, too.

Anyway, I learned to fish. We learned to respect the ocean. I learned how to clean fish. I'm not good at it, but I learned it. Those are memories that are made and they stay with you. They make us who we are.

Saying that we must balance conservation with cultural tradition is an understatement. We have to be mindful of sustainability and the future of our fishery, while we support families and food fisheries that have sustained us for so long.

Everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy a feed of fresh fish, as the generations did before us. It's part of our heritage and it's something that we should be proud to preserve. The seven-day fishery supports safety, our traditions, our well-being of our communities and this seven-day food fishery respects our culture. It helps reflect our deep connection of people in Newfoundland and Labrador with the land and sea.

This PMR for the seven-day food fishery is a sensible and responsible step forward for our province for all of us.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We will be supporting this motion, this PMR. I would look at three parts of the resolution, which is about expanding the food fishery for Newfoundland and Labrador residents to permit access seven days and the reasons with regard to safety, the opportunity and so on and so forth makes sense.

The other part of the resolution, the second part, has to do with the advocacy and emphasize the importance of conservation-based management and appropriate catch limits.

Finally, I think, as well, balancing the cultural traditions, the food insecurity and conservation in the management of the province's fisheries.

Now you might think, well, St. John's Centre talking about the food fishery, but guess what? I do have a tiny sliver of the harbour in my district, so I do have access to the water in my district.

Before I really begin now, I want to give a shoutout to Fishing for Success in Petty Harbour because they've done an awful lot – and I've had a chance to go out with them – to promote the cultural values and the techniques of, let's say, cleaning a fish. Like the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, while he says, he may not be good at cleaning a fish, I'm pretty sure he's a lot better than I am at it or filleting anyway.

A few years ago, some friends of mine from Ontario were bringing friends of theirs from the UK into Newfoundland and Labrador and they wanted to – they were CTF, but the couple from the UK, he, actually, had a pheasant farm. He would sell the pheasants for hunting and then collect the birds after and sell them not the restaurants – pretty neat trick. He wanted to go deep-sea fishing, at the time. I was scratching my head, okay, where am I going deep-sea fishing? Tuna, shark and I was looking around as much as I could. I said, well, here we are and here's where we can go. He wanted to go cod fishing. I didn't have the

heart to tell him that, really, cod fishing is not what we would call deep-sea fishing, but I do remember I set him up in Salvage. I think he was out 15 minutes, had the fish, back in and crossed off the bucket list. It was the highlight of the whole trip. Even for, I guess, people from afar, it was the ultimate experience for him.

I guess the key part of my concern here comes from – because when we talk about food fishery, at times, I tend to think, well, is it food fishery or not, considering the equipment you need to get out on the water. I often think, like, salmon fishing. If I call salmon angling a food fishery, I would tell you the price per pound is the most expensive salmon you'll ever eat, whatever I catch, that's for sure.

However, I do like what the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate said, it's about dropping off fish, too, to the people who may not be able to get out and older people that may be on that fixed income. That makes a lot of sense.

I know there's the issue of fairness between us and Nova Scotia. I've been trying to understand that in so many ways in terms of the difference. Now, if you look at the map here in this report that was done, the study, and you can sort of see that the three fishing zones, 2J3KL, 3Ps, 3Pn4RS, they're all around Newfoundland. Nova Scotia is in a different zone altogether. I'm not sure, I've been trying to find out if the stocks are much different there or if it's a different fishery or whatever else.

I guess it comes down to conservation, what is the reason for that. If you look at this, read this report, you'll see that the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's hard to hear the speaker.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

If you look at this report, it talks about the three divisions and they're either in the cautious zone or under the precautionary approach, or in the critical zone under the precautionary approach, or it's under the critical zone under the precautionary approach and with rebuilding requirements for the 3Pn4RS.

I don't know what that means for the areas around Nova Scotia, if they're in that same critical zone. I get the feeling that some parts are. When we're looking at or comparing the different regions, I hope that we're taking into account the different statuses of the stock because in the end, we have a commercial fishery here, a lot of a people, fish harvesters who depend on the fishery for their livelihood.

I spent half my teaching career either down on the Burin Peninsula or on the Southern Shore and a lot of the students I had, their parents were in the fishery one way or the other. A lot of the parents I met, they were in the fishery.

You'd hear from them; certainly get you a feed of cod tongues from the students. Once they learned I was a townie and I'd pay for it, the price went up significantly. But I spent a lot of time traveling back and forth, also listening to The Fisheries Broadcast. One thing that always stuck in my mind, Speaker, is you hear from fish harvesters, they were already foretelling the disaster in the cod fishery, long before they closed it. We do need to listen to them as well; there are no two ways about that.

I will say this, one part with the report, I think when it comes to the conservation measures, I think those are being prudent because we want to make sure we protect this resource, not only for the fish harvesters but we also want to be able to take, yes, my children and grandchildren out on this and friends and family who come back home, who haven't been back to Newfoundland and Labrador a while or who have been out on a boat itself.

It says there on page 4 of the report that the number of participants in the food fishery each year is not known. That's a problem. In 2025, though, 2,841 disability designations were issued. I guess, without knowing that information, how do you know the number of people and, more importantly, the number of fish that are being taken? Because I do think you have to have some idea, some way of at least regulating that, but even counting it.

Now, I'm a salmon angler. I buy a licence; I have two tags, but I do have to record and send in the information either electronically or by paper, the number of fish I caught, the days I fished and so on and so forth, and even the fish I release. Nothing says I have to, I guess, but I do it anyway because it's important to me that that information is used in managing stocks. With salmon, by the way, it comes down to the catch per unit effort, so that's how they determine the quotas to help stock.

You have moose licences. You have licences for big game, but we do try to manage it. Now, I don't know what the answer is. I often thought, to me, here's your 200 tags, go out and catch whatever you want. I'm just picking a number out of the air there on that. Go out and catch whenever you want because I do agree that if you are confined to weekends or certain days, you're putting people into situations where they may just take the chance. I know we're responsible for our own health and safety; nevertheless, it's better to stay on the side of caution and go when we can and go when it's safe and go when we can take the family out.

I often think that there has to be some way, I guess, that we have to find a way to make sure that the stocks are protected. Accessibility only works if there's a stock there to catch, and we have stocks here that are still not really healthy. They're improving, but they're in the critical zone, and I think make sure that these stocks do

last and do thrive, more importantly, as we go forward.

From my point of view, I think the fact that this PMR is about expanding the food fishery, but it's balanced with an approach to manage and emphasize the importance of conservation, and those two approaches will make sure that we do preserve our cultural traditions and food security and they're balanced with conservation.

It's something that's deeply a part of our community here, even in St. John's. I still remember years ago with my father down on the wharf, and they'd be using the pitchforks to throw the cod up on the wharf. I can't say I loved fish at that time, but that's what came in, and that's what was brought home. Something that we want to see continue, and if this helps, let's do it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a great honour to rise today and be representing the people of the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and speaking to a very important private Member's resolution that affects many people in my district. I rise today to speak in support of this resolution, which provides an opportunity to rethink and improve access to a long-standing tradition in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The food fishery is a tradition that continues to hold importance across generations. It's not just about harvesting fish; it's about time on the water and how it helps support households and communities across the province. It reflects a way of life that has adapted over time, but still remains deeply

rooted in our coastal and our rural communities.

At the same time, we have to be honest about how much daily life has changed. Career paths look different than they once did, the cost of living is higher and people are often balancing multiple responsibilities at once. If we want this tradition to remain meaningful and accessible, the way it is structured has to reflect those realities.

At its core, this resolution proposes a practical change, allowing residents to access the food fishery seven days a week during the established season, giving people the flexibility to fish safely and access affordable food while maintaining our resources.

Across Newfoundland and Labrador, the cost of living continues to place pressure on households. Food prices have risen significantly and, in many smaller and rural communities, those costs are even more pronounced due to transportation and supply challenges. The food fishery plays a vital role in helping to offset some of that pressure. It provides a direct source of local food that does not rely on external supply chains or market pricing in the same way. For many families, it is a contribution to food security, particularly during the summer months.

Being from a small community in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, it's no trouble on a weekend now in the morning, 5 or 5:30, especially where I live to, to hear the sound of boats going back and forth the harbour. You can hear them when they go out, when they leave the wharf in the morning and, when they're coming back, some of them could be 15 or 20 minutes later when they come back with their quota for the day.

Speaker, from that same experience, I have fond memories of about 10 or 12 years ago when we used to participate in the same. It was some great memories that I had with

my parents and with family that we had that were visiting from away, to take them out and to have them experience one of the true rituals here in Newfoundland and Labrador, participating in the food fishery.

It's something that I will carry with me, something that I enjoyed doing and something that I continue to enjoy to do. Hopefully, with this, it will be something that we will continue to be able to enjoy more flexibility of into the future.

Speaker, we also know that conditions on the water in Newfoundland and Labrador are never guaranteed. Weather can shift quickly and sea conditions can vary widely even within a short period of time. Winds can pick up without warning, fog can roll in suddenly and waters that appear safe at one moment can become difficult to navigate shortly after.

I witnessed this this summer during my time campaigning. We used to spend days door knocking, especially in July month, and we'd go and speak to the residents of the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and many of them would say to me, I wish I could go out today and get a fish for my supper. That's what I wish I could do today. But it was a perfect day, beautiful day, no wind, warm temperatures but it was a Wednesday and they weren't allowed to do it. Then Saturday would roll around and it was blowing a gale, it was raining and you couldn't go out in that.

Expanding access to seven days a week introduces a more practical approach. It allows individuals to make decisions based on actual conditions rather than fixed scheduling. That means people can wait for safer weather windows rather than feeling pressured to go out simply because an opportunity is limited.

Speaker, sometimes, when I was driving around the district on the weekends, I would say to myself, my God, what are they doing out in boat in this wind today?

That change has a direct impact on safety. It reduces unnecessary risk and supports more responsible decision-making on the water. It also makes the fishery more manageable overall by spreading more activity across the week rather than concentrating it into a few high-pressure days.

Speaker, residents of the province are working in different ways than in the past. Some are on rotating shifts, some are seasonal workers and others have commitments that change week to week. A fixed-day model does not always reflect that reality. As a result, participation can become uneven, not because of a lack of interest or ability, but simply because of timing and availability.

This negatively affects, in particular, rotational workers who have to spend weeks away at a time. When they come home, they may only have six days out of the entire summer to be able to participate in the recreational food fishery and, simply put, that is unfair.

A seven-day access model helps correct that. It ensures that participation is not determined by schedule alone but is available to anyone who wants to take part.

From the conservation point of view, we are in a very different position today than we were in the past. Scientific assessments of Northern cod are showing encouraging results. The stock has rebounded significantly with spawning biomass estimated at approximately 540,000 metric tons, the largest of any cod population globally.

That recovery is the result of long-term management decisions, restraint and ongoing efforts by residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. It also provides an opportunity to examine how access can be adjusted in a responsible and measured way that aligns with evolving scientific data while ensuring that continued sustainability of the resource.

If the cod population is improving and if quotas are being reassessed, then it is reasonable to also look at how access is structured to ensure it reflects that new reality.

We have seen in other jurisdictions that more flexible access models can operate alongside strong conservation frameworks. Our government continues to engage with federal counterparts, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, on how best to move this forward. These discussions have emphasized the importance of ensuring that the food fishery remains both sustainable and accessible for residents of this province.

Speaker, what has been proposed is a straightforward adjustment moving to seven-day access during the established season, while ensuring that all necessary conservation safeguards remain in place. This adjustment better reflects our province's current realities. By moving toward greater flexibility, we are improving how the system functions. We are making it safer by reducing unnecessary pressure on fishing days and we are making it fairer by broadening access. We are making it more aligned with how people in this province live and work today.

I encourage all Members of this House to support this resolution and to continue advancing policies that reflect the balance between tradition and modern reality, policies that protect affordability, food security, support safety, respect conservation and ensure this resource remains accessible for generations to come.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you very much to the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island and I certainly appreciate the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels for bringing this PMR here to the floor of the House today.

I certainly want to start by saying I hope no Members in the House are offended by the tie that I have on today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: I know there are some Leaf's and Bruins' fans in here, so I know the tie may be offensive to those. The Leaf's did get first place in the draft pick last night, so at least they got first place in something, that's for sure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

M. KING: It's nice to know there are more Hab's fans it seems.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order and it isn't relevant.

M. KING: In light of that, Mr. Speaker, this is certainly an important topic to Newfoundland and Labrador and indeed the rural communities in this province, for sure. I represent a number of rural communities in the beautiful District of Burgeo - La Poile.

The food fishery has certainly been a conversation that I've been having for a number of years and certainly since the election, it's been brought up consistently to me by a number of residents in my district. I remember specific conversations in Burgeo, specifically of people speaking very passionately about this issue and the time that we have to participate in the food fishery, for sure.

I think the seven days is certainly something that gets brought up consistently. We see that in other Atlantic provinces, PEI, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick all participating

seven days a week in the food fishery. One of the first things that I always say to folks when they bring it up to me is that I haven't been told a good argument on why we can't participate seven days as well. That's certainly something they agree with, with me as well.

That's something that we're looking to the federal government, of course. We did see the recent survey that was taking place. We see the Minister of Fisheries meeting with folks in our community who are bringing this issue to the forefront. We've heard mention early, the Food Fishery Fighters group, they are consistently bringing this issue up. I certainly appreciate their passion and appreciate their support for this important issue, because it's more than just participating in a fishery. The first word is food, of course, and that is a very, very important part to many people in rural communities. They take the time to participate in this, to stock their freezers up, to prepare for the winter. We see the challenges at the grocery stores with prices. We see it faces seniors in our communities, those on fixed incomes, looking to participate in the food fishery, to provide for themselves, to get the necessities for the winter especially that they need.

Having that ability to participate more often is not only good for the food part of things, to help stock their freezers, but also from a safety point of view, that has been mentioned as well, the limited window that you have to participate in the food fishery in the summer.

I can certainly say from my district in Burgeo- La Poile, especially my community in Burnt Islands, the summers are tricky sometimes. We get those rainy, foggy and windy summers, the sunny days and the calm days are far in between and you take advantage of those when they come. So there are some risks being taken when you can only participate on the weekends and only get out those limited days during the year. So we want to be able to provide that

safety to folks as well, to be able to participate in a responsible manner and to protect those that participate.

I speak of Burnt Islands, coming from that community, as I've mentioned in my maiden speech before, the Kings are very synonymous in the fishing industry. Eric King was a titan in the industry, I would argue, and the fish plant was just down the road from me in Burnt Islands. If anybody does stop by my office, especially my colleagues, they'll see a painting from one of my good friends. It's actually a painting of my bridge in Burnt Island. Yes, to my hon. colleagues from town, we call them bridges but you would know them as patios.

But on my bridge, I always say that is my favourite view in the world, Speaker. When I look out, you look right out over the cove. You can see a big part of the community that I live in and we see boats coming and going all the time. I remember growing up with the window open. When the fish plant was very active and on the go, you'd hear the transport trucks coming over the road, the seagulls. That was your alarm clock in the morning and it was something I'll never forget. I don't know if my brother was very fond of the smell, but for some reason, the smell never bothered me.

AN HON. MEMBER: A perfume to your soul.

M. KING: Yes, that's right, a perfume to your soul, as my hon. colleague said.

But growing up, as I mentioned, and being a part of that community and seeing how active our fishery is, I know how vital it is to the community. It's still a very active industry in my district. I know that so many people, not only make a living, but as we're talking about here today, want to participate in the food fishery and how important that is for the residents of our province to have that responsible, safe manner to participate.

We've had many conversations and we're hearing from more people in the province, of course, on this issue, as I've mentioned, because the season is certainly upon us.

As has been mentioned also, I would like to highlight the tourism aspect. I think my colleague from Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune had mentioned a percentage. I think it was 4 per cent participation from a tourism perspective. We want to see that grow as well.

When people come to our province to visit, they want the authentic experience. Sometimes we take these things for granted more often because we can participate so often. But they want to come and participate. Taking them out on the water to jig a fish, to them, that is the most valuable experience. I think some of them would even pay very, very big amounts of money to participate in that because that's the experience they're looking for. They're looking for the sights, they're looking for the sounds and they're looking for the activities of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, to get away from the city, to experience life in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

That limited window, as we speak, is limiting that growth, I think, in the tourism sector for those folks who want to have those kind of enterprises, to be able to take folks out who are visiting to participate in our food fishery. So opening more days up, especially seven days a week, would allow for those sectors to grow.

As we've mentioned numerous times here, the tourism industry is not only so important to the province but, indeed, to the rural areas of Newfoundland and Labrador. I know it's an extremely important part of Burgeo - La Poile.

You can build on that, too, from a tourism perspective. I've talked about ecotourism. That is an increasing part of the tourism sector that's growing in areas like Burgeo and Ramea, for sure. Folks are kayaking

and other water activities – this could be another component to that, to help grow our tourism sector and help improve the lives of rural Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We're very pleased to see this PMR come forward here to the floor and to hear all speakers supporting the food fishery here in Newfoundland and Labrador and the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. We're very hopeful that the provincial government, of course, will take on that advocacy.

I know that it's mentioned in the PMR as well, but we want to see that strong advocacy for this industry. We want to see that strong support going to the federal government. Whether that is in-person meetings, whether that's writing letters, whether that's having phone calls and different bureaucrats and department officials, we want to make sure that the message is getting to the federal minister loud and clear on the support for this and the support for the people who participate in the food fishery.

I'm very optimistic, especially after that survey has taken place, and hopeful that the federal minister will make a decision that will be in the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and a benefit to the food fishery here in this province. I think that's very important to see going forward. We'll see that improvement in this industry for a number of folks who participate. As I said, this is a steep tradition in our province and one that it sounds, here today, that all Members in this House certainly support.

So I want to, once again, thank the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels for bringing this forward. It's an important PMR. The food fishery is not only important to the people of Burgeo - La Poile but, indeed, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm very pleased to support this private Member's resolution today.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand for a few minutes and offer support. I apologize to the House; I did not know that the Member for Burgeo - La Poile was going to go bragging about my tie I lent him. So I apologize for that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to stand and support this here today. The Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, this is a great motion to put forth because it affects most all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I won't be long. I'm just going to say that the people of the Humber - Bay of Islands are very much into the water. There are a lot of fisher people there. There are a lot of fish plants, a lot of small boats go out fishing. The biggest thing they always bring up is safety. When you only got a certain amount of time to go, sometimes people push it to the limit a bit more than they usually do, and that's a big concern they have.

They also look at fairness with Nova Scotia as compared to Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, that's a big concern that they brought up. Many people that I know, personally, they go out and they jig their cod – many people. Many people also, when they get five, they share. They share a lot. So this is not just one person trying to say, okay, I'm going to get a boatload. This is a person who shares what they got, and I know many people – I get cod dropped off to my house from some of my friends who go out also.

I won't belabour this point, but we should be treated the same as Nova Scotia. We should have more access and more open days, as the Member put forward in his motion, because of the safety and a lot of people are working and there are other aspects a part of that. Do I think it will ruin

the cod fishery? Not a chance. I sincerely doubt it. You can see some of the studies come back that northern cod has been brought up to the level before the collapse.

I'll stand and support this motion, and I thank the Member for bringing this motion forward. I look forward to all of this House of Assembly supporting this motion because it affects just about every person in Newfoundland and Labrador that spent any time on the water or is near the water.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, I ditto the speakers before me and the latest speaker from Humber - Bay of Islands. I would say the District of Bonavista would be totally supportive of what he just stated and would be fully supportive of the food fishery.

I stated at the board of trade – we didn't talk about fishery, but at the board of trade I talked and welcomed my colleague from Mount Scio. But I said there's more that we agree on than what divides us in the House, and I agree. Here is one situation today that we're all in agreement of: the food fishery.

A couple of quick points that I would like to make. Number one would be when we think about rules, and we're going to instigate or bring in rules for law-abiding people because we are fearful that there might be a handful that might break the rules, then I would say that is poor policy formation.

We can talk in this House and think are 100 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians going to abide by the regulations that we put out there? Probably not. Everyone in the District of Bonavista for sure, but for the entire district of

Newfoundland and Labrador, then I would say not. But if 98 per cent or more of Newfoundlanders would follow the regulations for catching fish, then don't let the less than 2 per cent, who may abuse it, stop the 98 per cent who are going to catch it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: If you ran a school that way, I would say I'd have a problem with school administration if that's what a school did. That's wrong.

Secondly, my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries, and I talk lots about seals. The latest report, we have about 11 million seals in our jurisdiction – harp, bearded, ring, harbour – 11 million. Thirty per cent of what they eat is groundfish. Cod is a groundfish. How much would that make up?

AN HON. MEMBER: Four minutes.

C. PARDY: My timekeeper is saying I'm running out of time already and I just stood up.

How much would that be? They consume four million metric tons of groundfish. Now, I can't tell you how much of the groundfish is cod but if cod is plentiful, seals feast on it. We wouldn't touch the redfish in the past because we wanted mature fillets. We wouldn't touch it. But then they really feasted well on the shrimp. We know that was the case. Balance got to be important in our fishery. Balance got to be important.

We, in Canada, keep the catch rate down for this cod. We'd be interested in seeing it down to about 10 per cent, 12 per cent. That is where we are as Canadians. Norwegians, if the stock presents itself, they're harvesting up to 80 per cent. If it presents itself, they harvest –

AN HON. MEMBER: Two minutes.

C. PARDY: Two minutes – don't exclude those in Newfoundland and Labrador from going out to catch the food for the table.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Don't exclude it. Some would say, well, how much? Is it a metric ton that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would catch? Is it two metric tons? Think of what the seals consume and I would say allow Newfoundlanders to go out and catch it when they wish to catch it on a fine day and put that food on their table.

As many speakers said, true to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, if Aunt Sarah next door, who is a widow living next door, I guarantee you she won't have to worry about a meal of cod and that is what our population is all about.

I think the Member for Mount Scio would have heard Alberto Wareham, Icewater. Every bit of fish now is processed in that 12-month-a-year operation out in Arnold's Cove. Icewater is Newfoundland cod. First time for a long time, our cod from our waters. So what that generates for the economy is phenomenal. We probably need a couple of Alberto Warehams that certainly can churn out the population.

I want to bring attention – this is the budget document and on page 55 of *The Economy* you will see the Butler family from Bonavista: five generations, harvesters, two boats, large quota.

Is Mr. Butler in favour of the food fishery? One hundred per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: So I would say, let's allow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – I commend my hon. colleague and I yield my time to my colleague across the floor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House. I thank the hon. Member opposite from Bonavista for yielding time and, as well, to the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels for bringing forward this private Member's resolution, which I fully intend to support wholeheartedly.

I had not expected to speak about this but I was moved by some of the comments that were made here. I briefly mention that as a very young reporter, back in the late 80s, early 90s, working as a television reporter, we started hearing rumblings about the closure, the potential closure of the commercial cod fishery.

If I back things up even further, I can remember being a young man in my family home and my parents, every night, would watch the news and we would constantly hear stories about the fishery. Then, as a reporter, we would cover it extensively. I can tell you that on July 2, 1992, when I was in the room when then Fisheries Minister John Crosbie stood and announced that he was closing the commercial Northern cod fishery, I was standing, literally, on the other side of those doors that the fishermen were pounding on, my heart was racing as a young reporter. I could not believe what I was seeing, not only that scene of hundreds of people who were in the room next door watching the television feed, but watching somebody actually close down one of the main reasons people settled here.

Obviously, there were people long before John Cabot showed up, but we see those famous pictures of John Cabot dipping a basket into the water and the waters were so plentiful they didn't have to do anything other than just dip a basket.

I also think back to a picture that I have of my mother. It is one of my favourite pictures

of her. She's about 14 years old. She's from Catalina and she has a giant codfish. Not like that iconic picture of a child holding one that's taller than he is, but she has a very large codfish. I have that displayed on my mantelpiece of my mom who grew up in Catalina and recounted many, many stories of how she loved to go out in the boat with her father and fish and go out and be part of that. Now, sadly, her father died at a very young age, before she was about 14 years old. But I treasure that picture.

When I was talking to my colleagues here about being in that room when they closed the cod fishery, something most people in this province never thought they would see, my colleague to the right said that at that point in time, he was 12 years old, and my colleague who is wearing the Montreal Canadiens tie behind me had not even been born at that point in time.

But that speaks to the fact that we have him from Burgeo - La Poile endorsing this PMR, this spans across all generations. It's who we are as people from the sea and who have relied on the sea for many things.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: I will briefly say in my own district, of course, I represent Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, which has Portugal Cove and St. Philip's both with harbours, where there are many boats on any given day during the summer heading out for recreational purposes to fish and, of course, on Bell Island. I've worked with groups over there where people want to make sure that there's a safe slipway. They were looking for materials over the last couple of years since I got elected to reinforce the slipway they use to launch their boats so they can bring home fish, not only for their own families, because it's a way of life, but also because it's an inexpensive way to get food. In this cost-of-living crisis that we face, it's a great way for people to be able to do it.

As other Members have mentioned here, on both sides, as part of tourism. Can you imagine being from some place which has all skyscrapers and pavement and no ocean and be able to come down and fish a codfish and then go in and eat it that night, at one of the many B & B's or hotels or a campfire? I mean, it's something that is priceless. It is priceless. You can't pay enough for it.

But the main thing is that the people from this province, from Newfoundland and Labrador, want to go out. I see this on a regular basis. On Thorburn Road, there's a gas station there, people pull up on a Saturday morning. I'm usually on the go pretty early with my dog and I see them filling up their cans as they get ready to go down to St. Philip's to launch their boat, if it's a food fishery day, or if I'm down by the ferry in Portugal Cove. Sometimes there are dozens of boats out there and the ferries are almost doing a slalom to get back and forth to Bell Island. But when the weather is bad, they shouldn't be forced to go out because it might be their last day.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave it at that. I'm delighted to see this private Member's resolution brought forward. Hopefully it will raise the attention of federal fisheries minister. We will certainly do whatever we can to do that, to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians continue with a tradition that is important to us, and I thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I now recognize the hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels to conclude the debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I want to thank all hon. Members who spoke on this debate today, this motion, thank you.

This is an issue that matters to people in every part of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially in our coastal communities. I think the debate has shown something important. The food fishery is not a small thing. It's not just a weekend activity. It's not just something people do for fun. It's a part of who we are. It's culture. It's food. It's a family. It's a community and it is the connection to the ocean that has shaped this province for generations.

Speaker, I brought this motion forward because people are asking for something very reasonable. They are not asking for unlimited fishery. They are not asking for rules to be thrown out. They're not asking for conservation to be ignored. They are asking for seven days access during the established season, with limits, with enforcements, with monitoring, with respect for the resource. This is all. I believe that is a fair request.

Right now, the system is too rigid for many people. It does not always work for shift workers. It does not always work for people who work weekends. It does not always work for people with family responsibilities. It does not always work for seniors who need someone else to take them out and it certainly does not always work with the weather.

This is the big one. You can mark days on a calendar all you want, but the ocean does not follow the calendar. The wind does not follow the calendar. The fog does not follow the calendar. When the day is open, but the water is not fit, responsible people stay ashore. Then a good day comes and the fishery is closed. That is the problem. This motion is about fixing that in a practical way.

Speaker, seven days of access does not mean more fish per person. It means better access to the fish people are already allowed to catch. That point is important. This is about flexibility. It is about safety. It is about giving residents a chance to choose a day that works, a day when the

weather is fit, when the boat is available, when family can go and when people are not forced to rush. This is common sense.

We also heard today about food security, and I want to underline that again. In a province where the cost of living is high, local food matters; a few fish in the freezer matters; a meal shared with family matters; being able to harvest food from the waters around us matters. That has always been a part of life here and it still matters today.

For many people, especially in rural communities, the food fishery is not just about recreation. It's about putting good, local food on the table. That deserves respect. Speaker, conservation has been raised and it should be. Cod matters and groundfish stocks matter. The future of the resource matters. Nobody should pretend otherwise.

But this motion is clear. It says such advocacy to the federal government must emphasize conservation-based management. It says there should be appropriate catch limits. It says sustainability must be protected. This is not access versus conservation. This is access with conservation. That is the balance we are asking for, and I believe Newfoundlanders and Labradorians understand that balance better than anyone.

The people of this province know what the fishery means. They know what was lost in the past. They know why we have to be careful. But they also know when a rule does not make practical sense. They know when the system is not working as well as it should be, and they know that being allowed to fish on a safe Wednesday instead of being forced to try on a rough Saturday is not a threat to conservation. It's just common sense.

Speaker, as the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, I see this issue through the eyes of the communities I represent. In my district, the fishery is everywhere. It is in the

history. It is in the economy. It is in tourism. It is in the way people talk about home. It is in with families' gatherings. It is in the way the people help one another. When someone gets out and brings home a few fish, very often they are not just feeding themselves. They are sharing with a neighbour. They are dropping some off to an older relative. They are keeping the tradition alive that matters and is worth standing up for.

This motion also sends a respectful message to Ottawa that says Newfoundland and Labrador wants to work with the federal government. It says we understand conservation. It says we understand responsible management but also it says the people of this province deserve reasonable access to their food fishery.

The rules should reflect the lives people actually live. They should reflect our weather. They should reflect rural communities. They should reflect work schedules. They should reflect safety on the water and they should reflect the importance of this tradition to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I believe this House can speak with one voice on this. This is not partisan about wanting families to have their access. This is not partisan about supporting food security. This is not partisan about respecting coastal communities. This is not partisan about conservation. This is not partisan about standing up for Newfoundland and Labrador. This motion is reasonable, it's balanced and is rooted in the lives of the people we represent.

Therefore, I ask all Members to support it. Support it for the families who want to take their children out and teach them something their parents taught them. Support it for the seniors who still want a feed of fish. Support it for the shift workers who cannot always make the designated days work. Support it for the communities where the fishery is still part of everyday life. Support it for safety.

Support it for food security. Support it for culture and support it for responsible conservation.

Speaker, the food fishery is more than a date on a calendar. It's a part of Newfoundland and Labrador; it's a part of identity. It deserves the rules that practical, fair and respectful. Seven days of access during the established season is a reasonable ask. It can be responsible. It can be done with limits. It can be done with enforcement and it can be done with conservation at the centre. This is the message this House should send today.

I ask all hon. Members to support the motion.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are the Members ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before we conclude for the day, Members are reminded that the Resource Committee will meet in the Chamber at 5:30 this evening to consider the Estimates of the Department of Jobs and Growth, and Rural Development.

Given the hour of the day, this House is now adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, May 7, at 1:30 p.m.