

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The recently leak of information at the Labour Relations Board has sent shockwaves throughout the province. This unprecedented act resulted in certification cards being shared with the actual company that was involved in the certification process. The Federation of Labour has called for an independent investigation, of which the minister has refused to get involved.

How does the minister believe that the Labour Relations Board can investigate itself?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

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

I welcome my hon. colleague to the post of critic for Immigration, Skills and Labour.

Delighted to have this question because it provides an opportunity for me to enlighten the House about the nature of the Labour Relations Board. It is a statutory, it's a judicial guiding body. It sets, makes decisions. Sets and makes decisions which are binding in law. As such, it is a quasi-judicial body. It is the equivalent of a court. Therefore it is very important for political actors such as ourselves, both the critic and myself, not to intervene in the activities of a quasi-judicial body. With that said, however, it is important to point out that some time ago an officer of Parliament, and officer of the legislature, the Privacy Commissioner, did say he was conducting an independent review of this situation. It is occurring.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Labour Relations Division is responsible for promoting a stable and constructive labour relations climate, while fostering productive work relationships. That division falls under the minister's purview and his responsibility.

I ask the minister once again: Why does he feel that he should not be involved in some way in ensuring that this independent investigation gets done and gets done quickly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member does flatter me because he says that I'm responsible for fostering a solid labour relations environment. Mr. Speaker through the assistance and with the support of conciliation officers from the Department of Labour, we were able to resolve in a very important, very testy at times labour dispute between ferry captains in this province.

I just want to take this opportunity to say on behalf of each and every one of us in this House how proud we are and how satisfied we are with the labour professionals within the Department of Immigration, Skills and Labour, for their expertise that they lend to a successful labour relations environment for our province each and every day. With that said, Mr. Speaker, there is an independent Officer of Parliament conducting an independent investigation. What part of yes does he not understand?

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

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents who signed these cards in good faith have had their confidence shattered and the system we're at now, the company knows who signed up. Employees feel intimidated and fearful of backlash from the company, as some individuals who have signed cards have already been laid off.

What is the minister going to do to protect employees?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I would not wish to prejudge the outcome of the independent investigation of the Privacy Commissioner of Newfoundland and Labrador which was appointed by this House as an independent officer. With that said, I also take consideration to the fact that the chair of the Labour Relations Board has provided a public statement as to how they are dealing with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, to put this in a certain perspective, there are situations that occur in our courts that are maybe somewhat similar. I won't cast a direct parallel to anything that has occurred nationally or directly, but it had the appearance of human error. That will be decided by the Privacy Commissioner.

It is incumbent upon political actors such as ourselves not to interfere with a quasi-judicial body such as the Supreme Court of Newfoundland or the –

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The employees' privacy has been illegally breached. People have signed cards, have been laid off and others are living in fear.

Why does the minister continue to wash his hands of this matter and when is he going to stand up and protect the workers' rights against this gross abuse?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I might ask if this is the position of the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador that political actors should indeed become engaged in the matters of quasi-judicial body. That would be an interesting answer, because I think, as an officer of the court himself at one point in time, the Leader of the Opposition would recognize that matters before quasi-judicial bodies, where there are independent oversights, whether it be from the courts themselves, which is a matter under statutory availability, for such matters or matters which are available for adjudication of officers of Parliament, there is a process in place.

I do not take this responsibility lightly, but I also do not take lightly an intrusion on a quasi-judicial body by a political actor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, this party gets involved when there's an injustice. That's our stance.

Yesterday in the House of Assembly, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure stated 95 per cent of workers on projects in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are being worked on by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Unfortunately, we continue to hear reports of workers in Corner Brook hospital, Central Newfoundland long-term care facility and the Core Science building at MUN.

Can the minister table proof to this claim?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, what I have before me is not coffee-shop news, it's not rumour, it's not gossip. It's a document that was produced in August in 2020. Botwood protective care, 20 out of 20 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Gander Academy, 48 out of 50 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Paradise Intermediate, 45 out of 45. Do I need to say where they're from? Coley's Point. Where's Coley's Point? Fifty-four out of the 54. Gander long-term care facility, 67 out of 71 employees. Grand Falls long-term facility, 83 out of 86, Mr. Speaker. Bay d'Espoir, Mr. Speaker – wait, hold it. You asked the question; I'll give you the answer – 27 out of 27. One hundred per cent. Wait for the final one, the West Coast medical facility, the West Coast hospital 30,265 hours, 27,901 hours, 92 per cent Newfoundland and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

MR. PARROTT: I assume the minister wasn't at the airport to greet the Quebec workers this morning that went to Corner Brook.

Despite cries from workers the Liberal government still is not committed to putting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first, requiring all public infrastructure, construction projects to require a community benefits agreement.

I ask the minister: When will you implement such a policy?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, great question. I look forward to answering this question. The Member for Grand Falls - Windsor earlier today admitted for 17 years of finding employment outside of this province as a rotational worker. We are showing 95 per cent and might I add, Mr. Speaker, that is only the mega-projects or the major projects, let's look at the road projects in this province. Let's look at J-1 in Clarenville, 100 per cent Newfoundland employment, Newfoundland and Labrador employment. Let's look at the water and sewer in every one of our districts, 100 per cent owned and operated by Newfoundland and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, workers in our province need jobs and they need them now and the pandemic is more than enough reason to make that happen.

They're ready and they're able to go to work. Why does the Liberal government continue to sit down when they should be standing up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through a community benefits agreement?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, this year as we all know COVID changed the world but I had the opportunity every Friday to have a meeting with the Construction Association of Newfoundland and Labrador who applauded us on a number of projects that we were getting out in April, May and June of this year, that we were getting Newfoundland and Labradorians out to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just over two weeks ago the minister said the future of the offshore in this province was bright despite the exploration rigs leaving the province. Does he still agree?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think what I actually said was that I was optimistic about the future of this industry and certainly I still remain optimistic about this. I'm not going to go around living with pessimism because I don't think that's what people want. People want us to look forward and to be optimistic and to do our best but what I will say is we continue to work to try to help workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, to try to help make these projects work.

Again, we spoke about it today. I was glad to see all my colleagues out there in front of this building today in force to support the workers that were gathered there today, and will continue to work for them and on their behalf going forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the executive directors of Trades NL said this morning that Husky is a symptom today but not the problem. The reduction in exploration is also a symptom of the stress in the oil industry.

I ask the minister: Have you gotten a commitment for exploration incentives yet?

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're continuing to do what we can as a province as it relates to the success of the offshore industry. In fact, I have a letter here that my predecessor in the department wrote to the minister and to the federal government, I believe about six months ago talking about the different things that we need in this province. We pressed for exploration incentives and as we all know, we continue to wait to see what is coming.

We continue to try to work with the companies which also have a role to play here, because at the end of the day we all want what's best for these workers; we want this industry to thrive. Again, I'm proud of the support here and I was proud to see I think every Member of this House out there today, because at the end it's not about the politics that gets played, it's about finding some solutions to the issues that we're faced with.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.