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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start today, I would like to welcome back three of our Pages from the last session: Michael; and we have Fatima, who is back with us as well; and we have Morgan, who is also back with us. I want to introduce our new Page for this session, Ms Andrea Tapper. Welcome, Andrea.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: You would have noticed yesterday in the Chamber, and again today, we have our new Sergeant-at-Arms with us as of yesterday, and a little later today there will be a motion introduced in the House to formalize the appointment: Mr. Wayne Harnum.

Welcome, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of St. John's East; the Member for the District of St. John's South; the Member for the District of Burgeo – La Poile; the Member for the District of Lake Melville; the Member for the District of Bellevue; and the Member for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

You would have probably noticed a visitor in our Speaker's gallery today, the recently appointed Chief of the RNC, who will be more formally introduced in a few moments.

The Member for the District of St. John's East.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this House today to honour a woman who, with dignity and humour, became an unlikely leader in the field of HIV/AIDS education and gay rights.

For her leadership in the face of personal tragedy, Sara Rita Sexton was selected for induction into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador this year. Her many admirers - and I include myself in that number, Mr. Speaker - could not have been more pleased.

Sara was the mother of one of the most popular entertainers this Province has ever produced, Tommy Sexton, whose life was cut tragically short at age thirty-six by AIDS in December of 1993.

Since then, Sara and the rest of the Sexton family have worked tirelessly to educate the public about HIV and AIDS, and to help those who are affected, including spearheading the construction of the Tommy Sexton Centre. The support continues – for Sara's ninetieth birthday last year, she requested no gifts for herself, but donations for the centre, raising \$4,000 on that occasion.

Sara Sexton's compassion and common sense continue to inspire us all. I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating her on her induction in the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, last month there was a fire at Maplewood Apartments on Shaw Street, in St. John's South.

There were five residents sent to hospital but later released. All other residents got out safely. There were no fatalities, thank God. I am very thankful that the fire was late afternoon and not in the middle of the night or things may have been very different.

I would like to recognize the people who helped make sure everything went as well as it did that

night: the St. John's Regional Fire Department, the paramedics who responded, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Mayor and City of St. John's, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, the staff from Advanced Education and Skills, and the staff of the building, as well as others.

Everyone worked well together, and they have to be commended for how smoothly everything went. As the Premier will recall, I contacted him early that evening to ensure that people had somewhere to stay that night. He and the minister responsible responded and I thank them for that.

I would like to recognize and thank everyone who was involved.

Thank you, from myself and from all of the residents at Maplewood Manor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I rise today to pay tribute to the late Dr. Richard Ernest Taor.

Dr. Taor stated his medical career in London, and emigrated to Port aux Basques in 1977.

In London, Dr. Taor worked primarily as a surgeon but when he came to Port aux Basques he did whatever was required of him, from delivering babies and emergency C-sections to general checkups.

He had an extremely busy practice and once said he had delivered between 1,000 and 1,500 babies. He was always quick to praise the nurses and staff he worked with. He served his patients of the Southwest Coast with compassion and devotion until his retirement in 2011.

After retirement, Dr. Taor had no desire to leave Port aux Basques, where he was welcomed from his first day on the job. He said: "We go places and visit, but this is home".

Dr. Taor will be deeply missed by his wife, Magda, their two children, Fiona and Christopher, their partners, his siblings, William, Lesley, and Helen, his extended family, as well as a wide circle of friends, associates, and physicians.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join with me in paying tribute to the late Richard Taor, a true credit to his family and community, and to extend condolences to his family on their loss.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the life and spirit of Ms. Loretta Saunders.

I would like to recognize the determination of this young woman. Growing up as a woman of Inuit heritage she saw first-hand the struggles of her people. While most feel the need to ignore and just live their lives, Loretta wanted to help.

She pursued a degree that would give her the ability to help others, which led her to begin writing a thesis on missing and murdered Aboriginal women. When she was finished this degree, she had plans to become a lawyer and do what we could only imagine now to help the people of her community, if not the people of the country.

She, like most Labradorians, looked to help others in their community so they too could be become stronger. Loretta was someone who dreamed big, worked hard, and was a person everyone adored. These things she learned from being raised in a close-knit family of eight siblings.

If any solace can be taken from her tragic passing, it is the fact that she was able to put a

national spotlight on the issues she worked passionately to address.

I ask all hon. members of this House to join me in remembering the life and spirit of Loretta Saunders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Bellevue.

MR. PEACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a student of Crescent Collegiate in Blaketown, on winning a scholarship for academics.

Brandon Thorne of New Harbour is the son of Christine and Brian Throne and has two siblings. He is now attending Memorial University and is the only recipient of the Ronald K. Kennedy Scholarship. This scholarship recognizes the excellence in post-secondary studies and is given to the student who completes two years of a degree or diploma program with scholastic achievement, displays potential, and possesses exceptional qualities of character and economic need. The scholarship was for \$1,200.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Brandon on his accomplishment and wish him all the best in his future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to deliver accolades to some special volunteers from the Town of Harbour Breton. The Citizen of the Year was held recently at the Lions Club and I had the honour of attending. The nominees for 2013 were George Strickland, Margaret Day,

Hilda Strickland, Sean Johnston, Elizabeth Taylor, Lorne Bond Jr., and Sheila Mercer – all very deserving candidates. This high community honour was awarded to Mrs. Sheila Mercer.

This exceptional lady's official role is Treasurer-Secretary of the Connaigre Peninsula Cancer Support Group, but all can attest that she goes far beyond this title and lends her talents to many causes. Nominated by the Local Cancer Group for her dedication as an ACW member for thirty-four years, and St. Bartholomew's Church member for forty-four years, Sheila has delighted audiences in various ACW concerts and fundraisers with her acting skills and infectious sense of humour. Sheila is well known for her care and compassion and, on behalf of residents, I thank her for the many donations of cakes and cookies for the sick or bereaved.

I ask all members of this hon. House to join me in thanking all of the nominees and Mrs. Mercer for their outstanding community service and volunteerism.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding performance of figure skater and Marystown native, Kaetlyn Osmond, who served as an inspiration for thousands of students throughout Newfoundland and Labrador during the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

During the games, the Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, established a Web page,

Follow Kaetlyn's Journey, where all residents were able to learn more about Kaetlyn and her path to the Olympics. The Web page included photos, recent events, as well as various teaching resources to help schools capitalize on the learning opportunities made possible through the Olympic Games.

Our schools did take advantage of those learning opportunities, Mr. Speaker. There were countless photos posted to social media, demonstrating how students were participating in the Olympic experience. One school held their own Olympic opening ceremonies, wore the traditional dress of various countries, and learned about their cultures. Others participated in Olympic-themed arts, crafts, and sporting events.

I had the pleasure of visiting St. Thomas Aquinas in Port au Port in mid-February, and saw first-hand how that school had used an Olympic-themed banner, running through the main hallway, to update Kaetlyn's progress – and the progress of other Canadian athletes. They also integrated the Olympic theme into their mathematics and language arts classes in ways that clearly engaged students in a new and exciting way.

Meanwhile, students and staff throughout the Province were encouraged to use interactive whiteboards, and other advanced technologies, to watch Kaetlyn's performance during the final ladies free skate program on February 20. Mr. Speaker, with more than 4,000 interactive whiteboards placed in K-12 schools in recent years, along with other technological advancements, students could witness local sports history taking place, in real time, right from their classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues in this House to congratulate teachers throughout the Province for the many innovative ways in which they integrated the 2014 Winter Olympics into the curriculum and, of course, to congratulate Kaetlyn Osmond, Canada's national figure skating women's champion and Olympic silver medalist in the team competition in Sochi. She is a remarkable talent; a remarkable young

women, a true class act in every sense, and we wish her every success in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thanks to the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Like many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, my family watched on with excited anticipation as Kaetlyn Osmond competed in Sochi. Since she has burst onto the international figure skating scene, Kaetlyn has made the people of Marystown, and indeed all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, proud. Her example of excellence is one that all Canadians, young and old alike, can look for example from. She has displayed exemplary grace, poise, and professionalism throughout her career so far in that sport.

Whether it is in sports, the arts, business, or other areas, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians continue to stand out on the international stage and it is our teachers who we rely on to educate, prepare, and nurture excellence in the coming generations of Olympians and world-class leaders.

So we congratulate Kaetlyn Osmond on her amazing accomplishments and her achievements, and we also thank our teachers who play such an important role in our lives and inspire our children to reach excellence, just like Kaetlyn does.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I am delighted to join with the minister and my colleague in congratulating Kaetlyn Osmond in her achievements. I have been very lucky, actually, to have seen her skating live three times now, and was there when she first got the bronze medal in the national championships and then her gold. So I have a real personal thing with Kaetlyn. I have to say, from the first minute I saw her I knew this was an exceptional person. I do applaud everything that has happened for her and especially in the Olympics.

It was wonderful at the Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games opening, and the Speaker was there, of course, and the Premier, as well, to see the video of Kaetlyn speaking to all of the young athletes in Clarenville that night and to see the smiles on their faces as her face lit up the whole of the arena. It was wonderful to see her being used as a role model for the other young people.

I do encourage the government, in recognizing that and recognizing how important it is for our students to have healthy lifestyles, our young people to be active, that we put more resources into sports and physical activities, both in the schools and the wider community. We have the proof of what it can do for us. To see the stadium at the Winter Games, in particular, filled with all these healthy looking students, these healthy looking young people, and then having Kaetlyn as their role model, it really does behoove us to look at putting more resources into these activities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, for thirty-eight years, the Newfoundland and Labrador Games Program has encouraged participation in sport

and the pursuit of excellence. As the largest multisport event for youth in the Province, it brings together athletes eleven to eighteen years of age to compete for the Premier's Cup. The event is made possible through a collaborative effort of the provincial government, SportNL, a host committee, and provincial sport organizations.

The 2014 Winter Games were held in Clarenville from March 1 to March 9 and drew 1,400 athletes, coaches, and staff from eight regions of the Province and St. Pierre and Miquelon. The participants competed in eleven sports such as alpine skiing, basketball, cross-country skiing, figure skating, gymnastics, and hockey. Our government invested more than \$500,000 in the 2014 games to offset operating costs and assist with travel expenses.

The games ended with Labrador leading the medal count at twenty-two, while the Western Region had the highest number of gold medals at thirteen. The Premier's Cup, awarded to the region accumulating the highest number of points, was presented to the Western team. Both the SportNL Trophy for the team showing the most improvement from one games to the next, and the Lieutenant Governor's Award celebrating sportsmanship and spirit, were presented to the host team of Clarenville, which was done by His Honour, the Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, these games promote the achievements of some of our Province's top young athletes, and play a significant role in our efforts to achieve an active and healthy population. They also contribute to the development of sport and create opportunities for our aspiring athletes. These objectives would not be realized without the many coaches, managers, volunteers, and parents committed to ensure the Newfoundland and Labrador Games are always a success for everyone involved. Their time, knowledge, and skills are an essential part of these young athletes' achievements.

I would like to congratulate the Town of Clarenville and the host committee who truly demonstrated their ability to host large-scale

sporting events. Some of their most notable accomplishments were the provision of nutritionist-approved food options for the athletes, and the creation of a world-class giant slalom course that could rival Olympic venues.

Mr. Speaker, participants in the Newfoundland and Labrador Games attain a level of excellence because of their passion for sport, tireless hours of hard work, and a determination to be the best at their respective sport. I encourage all athletes to take their perseverance a step further, as they prepare for the next Summer Games which will be held in Conception Bay South in 2016.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement. I want to congratulate all members, the Premier, the minister, yourself, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Mount Pearl South who was out there, and I am sure other members here also who support the athletes out in Clarenville.

Mr. Speaker, if I could just sidetrack for a second, they said it was on for thirty-eight years. One of the first events I went to as a boxer was the Canada-Newfoundland Winter Games out in Gander, back a number of years. Mr. Speaker, that was an experience that I had for many years later.

Congratulations to the government for supporting these games, for supporting the athletes; Labrador, for getting their awards; Clarenville, for the most spirit award, Mr. Speaker. Also, I have to congratulate the athletes from the West Coast for getting their award.

To them, the awards are just something different – meeting friends, meeting families, and making new friends is what it is all about. People who

have been in the sports, they know what it is like to win but they know what it is like to strive. They have to work hard, they have to work together, they have to have a healthy lifestyle, and this is what the Winter Games is all about.

A lot of these athletes will never move on like Kaetlyn Osmond, but a lot of these athletes here will make new friends, will learn how to achieve things at life because of hard work and dedication. To everybody who supported the Town of Clarenville, Mr. Speaker, I understand you were there a lot helping out in the beginning, so congratulations to everybody who participated in this to make this a success. They are definitely our future. As the Premier mentioned yesterday in the Throne Speech, the future is bright with these athletes that went to Clarenville in the Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Congratulations to the participants and organizers for a very successful Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games in Clarenville.

The Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi had the pleasure of attending the opening ceremonies and she said the extent of the expertise and professionalism of the local people was so evident in the incredible, fantastic opening.

The games play a very important role in achieving an active and healthy youth population, and these activities carry on into their adult lives. Government's investment is important, crucial, and vital. We need greater investment in physical education in schools, more physical education classes, beginning in their early grades and on up through high school. It is both a way to increase our numbers of

excellent athletes and healthy lifestyles. Early experience with team sports also helps youth to become team players as adults and more involved in their communities.

Bravo and congratulations to Clarenville; bravo to volunteers and the athletes.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the outstanding achievements of retired Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Chief of Police, Robert P. Johnston, and to also welcome our new Chief, William Janes, to the job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, as most of us would know, there is no higher rank that one can achieve at the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary than the Chief of Police, and Chief Johnston served admirably in this capacity after taking on the role in May, 2010.

Upon his retirement, he was a thirty-four year veteran of the RNC with the majority of his career being spent in the Criminal Investigation Division, Criminal Intelligence, Major Crime, and Sexual Offence Units. Chief Johnston is a recipient of the thirty-year Police Exemplary Service Medal and the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilee Medals. In 2012 he was appointed to the Order of Merit in the Officers' Category. Shortly after the official opening of the RNC headquarters at Fort Townshend last month, Chief Johnston announced his well-earned retirement from the police service.

Chief Robert Johnston has been an exemplary police officer and an outstanding role model for

all those who worked with him. Under his guidance, we saw many positive developments in the structure of the RNC including new specialized units in the Criminal Investigation Division, the prioritizing of training for officers, and a focus on best practices in terms of scientific and investigative techniques. We also saw, Mr. Speaker, more women encouraged and supported in becoming police officers at the RNC.

On behalf of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, I would like to thank Chief Johnston for his valuable contribution to policing in the Province. He has made the RNC a better police service and has made our communities safer places in which to live.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the twenty-first RNC chief of police who was officially appointed by the Premier on February 28. I would like to take this opportunity to officially introduce Chief Bill Janes to this hon. House. Bill joins us here in the gallery today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Chief Janes, Mr. Speaker, has been a member of the RNC for almost thirty years and most recently served as the deputy chief in charge of criminal operations. He has played a significant leadership role in helping the RNC become one of Canada's leading law enforcement agencies, and as we have already seen in the last week or so since his inauguration, he will persist in the pursuit of policing excellence. The provincial government is committed to ensuring safe and secure communities in which to raise our families, and looks forward to collaborating with Chief Janes on future policing initiatives.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I, too, join with him in congratulating Chief Johnston on an outstanding career and welcoming Chief Janes on the continuation of what is very obviously an outstanding career. We have many fine officers in the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. We have extended the reach and the scope of the RNC over the last generation so it is pretty much Province-wide.

Mr. Speaker, however, the RNC needs more than platitudes and more than words. The police can arrest offenders but they have no ability to incarcerate or to try and convict and to punish. This government has fallen down on the job.

The biggest backtracks that this government did is to do away with the domestic violence court. This domestic violence court increased the number of people requiring it by 300 per cent in four years and then they did away with it. Mr. Speaker, I would hope that since the domestic violence court was the brainchild of the current Premier when he was the Minister of Finance, I hope he would add to the litany of backtracks in the Throne Speech, add this one, reverse the position, and give us back the domestic violence court so people do not have to protest at the Confederation Building for their right to justice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I, too, would like to thank Chief Johnston for his many years of service to the people of the Province. He oversaw many positive and crucial changes to the RNC during his time as chief, especially an increase in the recruitment of women. He fostered a better understanding of the dynamics and complexities of family violence. He saw the importance of and encouraged officers to refer cases to the Family Violence Intervention Court to keep

women and children safer. He worked closely with women's groups in the community, respecting and really listening to their expertise and experience. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are grateful for his dedicated service.

Bravo, Robert Johnston. Enjoy civilian life. You have earned it.

Welcome, new Chief Bill Janes. I look forward to working with you. You have already been a crucial part of the wonderful changes to the RNC. We hope you enjoy your service.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Virginia Waters have been without representation in this House since the former Premier resigned. The by-election can be called at the wish of the Premier, but he has not done so yet.

I ask the Premier: Why have you delayed calling this by-election?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, there are a lot of things that go on the desk of the new Premier and it takes time to get through them all, but I can assure the hon. member and the people of Virginia Waters that they will have a by-election to elect a member to sit in this House very soon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have heard very soon many times from this government.

This government has had an awakening of sorts and now they say they will review Bill 29. This is the same bill they claimed was the proper balance and preserves the right to know while protecting privacy and personal information. This government previously defended Bill 29 and now they are committing to a review.

I ask the Premier: Are we to believe that the Cabinet was powerless to take a stand on Bill 29 while the former Premier held office?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, this government proclaimed the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy legislation, which had been legislated by our friends opposite, but they did not proclaim it and did not have to live under it. We did. We brought the Auditor General back into this House of Assembly. We passed the Transparency and Accountability legislation as well.

With Bill 29, obviously the leading commentators in the country, the Centre for Law and Democracy, have commented on the fact that they consider we have the third-best legislation in the country, but the people of the Province have expressed some concerns, some real concerns, so let us find out.

It is not about Bill 29. It is about our Freedom of Information legislation, our Access to Information legislation, and privacy legislation, not just the amendments but all of the legislation. That all needs to be looked at. An independent, impartial committee will look at it

and tell us whether our law is good enough or not.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, none of the comments we heard from the groups that were mentioned by the Premier – that was nothing new. These comments were all in place and they were discussed publicly when the former Premier was here. My question: Why did the Cabinet not respond then?

Mr. Speaker, the new Premier announced the review of Bill 29. When he did this he said government would establish an independent review committee in the coming days, and more details on the consultation process would be available in the coming weeks. Now, that was six weeks ago.

So I ask the Premier: When will you make the details of this review public?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This review of our Access to Information and Protection of Privacy legislation is very important to this government and it is very important to the people of the Province. We want to ensure in appointing the independent committee to lead this process that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have full confidence in those we appoint.

We need people with, for instance, a journalism background, with a legal background, and with expertise or experience working with our ATIPP

legislation. We are making sure we get the right mix of people. We are going to give them all the time and resources they need to do the work, and I will be making an announcement regarding that committee in the days ahead.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: We will have a by-election very soon; we will have a review in the days ahead.

Mr. Speaker, it is not just me who wants Bill 29 repealed. In a recent poll conducted by CRA, 70 per cent of the population of Newfoundland and Labrador believe that Bill 29 should be repealed.

So I ask the Premier: Why are you not listening to the people of our Province and repealing Bill 29?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, from the day he was sworn in to yesterday's Throne Speech, each and every day, this Premier demonstrates that we are listening to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: We have heard from countless people that it is not as simple as repealing Bill 29. Our own Information and Privacy Commissioner has said that would be an unnecessary step. I have seen blog posts that have suggested similarly. It is our view that it is not just about looking at the amendments that were made in 2012; it is about looking at the whole legislation.

We are so committed to getting it right that we are advancing this review. We are doing it a year earlier than what is required under legislation, and we are going to look at the whole thing, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, teachers in our Province have been without a contract for almost two years, and we have been told that this government is not taking this new contract seriously. Almost two years at the table and this government has not allowed a conversation about monetary issues to enter into the negotiations. Now, that is called bad faith negotiations.

So I ask the Premier: When you finally get back to the table with our teachers, will you commit to serious negotiations so teachers can focus on their primary responsibility: educating our students?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government is certainly committed to the bargaining process. Tentative dates were set for the week of March 31. I did have a meeting with Mr. Dinn in the last few days. I was pleased to see that they too are committed to continuing negotiations, Mr. Speaker.

We certainly value our teachers. We are optimistic that we will reach an agreement, as we have reached an agreement with 23,000 other union members. We have reached agreements with NAPE, CUPE, AAHP, and, in the last few days only, we reached agreements with the correctional officers and the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission. So, we are committed to collective agreements.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, the commitment has been two years. So, letting our teachers go almost two years without a contract is really insulting to the professionals, and they were working tirelessly every day to educate our children. Government's negotiating team has not been given the mandate to make these decisions.

I ask the Premier: If you are truly listening to people, why did our teachers have to resort to a public relations campaign to get the negotiations back on track?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, tentative dates were set for the week of March 31. I did meet with Mr. Dinn and I was pleased to hear that he is committed to continuing with those dates. Dates were never off for us; there is a clear mandate to negotiate, we do value our teachers, and we hope that everybody gets back to the bargaining table so we can have a deal with teachers because we certainly value what they do for our children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the eve of the 2007 election this government promised whistle-blower legislation, but they never acted. Last year during Estimates, the Minister of Justice stated that no government resources or funding had been allocated to whistle-blower legislation during this fiscal year.

I ask the Premier: If it is true that no resources were allocated, how are you able to make this commitment now? Wouldn't you need to allocate resources to prepare this legislation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government made a commitment to the people of the Province that it would bring in whistle-blower legislation, so we are now going to do exactly what we said we were going to do. We made a commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are going to honour that commitment by bringing it forward into this House and hopefully, with the co-operation of members opposite, pass whistle-blower legislation to protect employees in the public service in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we send birthday cards to celebrate events; we will give that piece of legislation a seventh birthday card.

Government announced whistle-blower legislation, Bill 1, and yesterday would not provide the text on the proposed bill. We have seen this from the government before. They introduced procurement of the public bodies as Bill 1 in 2012, but they never provided the text and they let it die on the Order Paper.

I ask the Premier: When we will get the text of the whistle-blower legislation? By the way, whatever happened to that old Bill 1?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, from a procedural perspective there is nothing unusual about giving notice of motion on a particular piece of legislation in this House; we do it all the time. The members opposite would know, of course, that we provide text to the House and we provide text to members opposite when we do first reading. We provide briefings and there is a whole procedure that we follow for every single bill we bring before this House. I remind the member that they would know because they participate in that process.

I can confirm for the member that bill will be coming forward in the very near future in this session of the House. We will lay it before the people and we will hear what the members opposite have to say and whether or not they support a real good piece of legislation that this Premier is going to bring forward for the people of the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let's go back to Bill 1 in 2012, the procurement by public bodies. Whatever happened to that piece of legislation that we never did see the text for?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, we are getting very close now to bringing it to the floor of the House. We just went through a special strategic procurement project. We had some great learning in that project. We invested \$4 million; it resulted in \$20 million in savings. We used RFPs in that process to maximize savings for the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, what we will be doing in the next little while, we will be incorporating some of these learnings into the new legislation. That

will take a little bit more time, but I will be happy to bring it to the floor of the House when it is ready.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the Speech from the Throne there was a commitment to an open government initiative which was supposed to share information and data freely.

If government is so interested in being open and accountable then I ask the minister: Will you now reveal how much was spent on marketing and advertising in the last two years, instead of charging \$1,600 and taking almost four weeks to get the answers?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In recent media reports, I was quite clear that this is a request that we looked at in some detail. It was not as simple as pulling a number and providing it to the members opposite. There was considerable work involved in considering the thirteen requests that were made.

It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that in most cases over the last year when there has been an access request filed, fees have not been warranted and fees have not been collected. It is in rare cases where there is extensive work required that fees are required to be paid. That is the case in this particular instance, and we have provided a full explanation to the member opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I guess the open government initiative is something else that will be coming soon because it is certainly not here yet.

A truly open and transparent government will be proactive in disclosing the information; instead, government is charging hundreds and thousands of dollars for basic budgetary line items. The marketing and advertising is not the only outrageous request. We have asked through ATIPPA for copies of aquaculture monitoring reports and we were told it would cost over \$19,000.

I ask the minister: Is this an indication of open and transparent?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we take all access requests very seriously and many of them do come from the members opposite. We recognize that access to information is important to members opposite in order to be able to do the important work that they do.

In the fiscal year 2012-2013, of the 285 general requests we received for information, twenty-three involved fee estimates, and there were only in ten instances, I believe, where fees were actually charged. It is very rare that fees are required; but when the requests are extensive and when they are exceptional, there is a process in place for that.

Mr. Speaker, we try to provide whatever information we can, in whatever form we can, and our open government initiative which we will also launch in the days ahead, I say to the Leader of the Opposition, it will mean that even

more information than ever before is available to the public.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Both the Auditor General and a bridge inspection report, obtained through ATIPP, which is already two years old, confirms that 93 per cent more bridges are considered to be in poor condition today than there were a decade ago.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Works: Why has your government comprised the safety of our travelling public by allowing bridges to fall in such disrepair? A government navigating such troubled waters should not be ignoring bridges, I say.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I would like to tell the member opposite that this government certainly does not ignore the bridges in the Province. What he is failing to state is that although there are 152 bridges that are still in that repair or disrepair right now, there have also been bridges added to the inventory. This government, over the past ten years, has put millions of dollars into the restructure and new development of bridges. We will continue to do that, as we see, as part of our road and bridge program. We do them in moderation.

What I think is very important, Mr. Speaker, when a bridge is rated as in poor condition, it is still very useful. When it says that it cannot be used, then we will close the bridge.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, here is one bridge that was ignored by government: Southwest Bridge, near Port Blandford. In fact, this particular bridge was listed as in fair condition two years ago, but today it requires major repairs.

How many more of our bridges that were considered to be in fair condition, two years ago, have fallen in to that type of disrepair today?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the bridge that the member opposite just mentioned, Southwest Bridge, has certainly not been ignored. The day of the accident on the Southwest Bridge, I happened to be on the Trans-Canada Highway and I drove that particular bridge near Port Blandford. I drove over the bridge and I actually stopped to make sure that the proper signage was up.

This has been an incredibly cold, harsh winter, as many have referred to it as an old-fashioned winter. Not long ago in the media, I did a story on potholes. What you have on the surface of the Southwest branch bridge is that a lot of the top surface, the asphalt on the top, has lifted and caused a lot of potholes on the bridge. We are monitoring it very closely, and we will repair it when weather permits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the Mayor of Port Blandford has stated publicly that the bridge is in the worst condition he has ever seen. It is a narrow bridge to begin with. With the lack of snow clearing on that bridge, it is even more narrow. With the potholes on that bridge,

there has been a number of near accidents on that particular bridge, Mr. Speaker.

There is signage put up by the Department of Transportation warning people to slow down. The bridge has been ignored. I ask the minister why.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, once again I will tell the member opposite that the bridge has not been ignored; we are very aware of the condition of the bridge. It is a narrow bridge. As I stated, this has been a very different winter that we have had this year.

I counted the signs on each side of that bridge. There are seven signs on each side as you approach the bridge. So, sufficient signage is more than up. We have decreased the speed limit approaching the bridge to fifty kilometres an hour. We have the proper signage up and, as soon as weather permits, we will be out to do repairs on it. I am not sure – unless the member opposite has a magic way of putting down asphalt in the middle of the winter, then I would appreciate it if he would let me know it and perhaps I could do it now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Health has failed to establish midwifery as a self-regulated profession as required by the Health Professions Act of 2010. Three nurses with midwifery qualifications had continued to deliver babies independently at St. Anthony hospital but now will require a physician present.

I ask the minister: Why are you adding to the ballooning health care budget by diminishing the role of nurse midwives in a publicly funded system?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we certainly value and appreciate the work done by midwives. In fact, that is why we started out to do the study and hired two professionals to report to us. I am happy to say that report came to us in December. We are moving forward with the regulations and will implement in a schedule that actually was provided to us by them. In actual fact, we hope to be able to move that schedule a little faster.

With regard to the St. Anthony area, Mr. Speaker, that issue came about as a result of an insurer who came forward and said that the company itself was not willing to insure because this particular service is not regulated at this point in time. As a result, we had to be concerned for the safety of our patients.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It goes back to show government's failure to implement regulations is causing this problem. The minister in her midwifery announcement has focused on privatization in health care. This government's approach will only serve those who can afford midwives in a private setting giving access within a year.

I ask the minister: Why are you working to remove nurse midwives from a public system with hopes to bring them back in five to seven years?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, government is working to ensure that midwives, in fact, can practice within Newfoundland and Labrador. That has been our intention from the very beginning. When insurance companies come forward and say that they can no longer cover the particular people who are operating in that particular business then we have no choice, for the safety of the clients and the safety of the employees.

Mr. Speaker, the time frame that the member opposite has put out is not quite right. We are saying that within one year we hope that the regulations will be in place and that our private midwives will be able to continue to practice. We are moving forward to ensure that others can practice as quickly as possible as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, five years ago the former Minister of Justice, now Premier, committed to establishing a Family Violence Intervention Court. An evaluation after twelve months noted positive outcomes and recommended expanding the court's mandate to include all-risk levels.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Why would he eliminate a program deemed by his own consultant as positive and needing expansion?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We take the whole issue of violence in the Province very seriously. That is why if you take

some time to look back at our investments in justice over the last number of years, the budget has increased dramatically.

I say to the member opposite, we recognize the issue of the family violence court and we recognize the words that we are hearing from the public; but I will remind the member opposite, when it was brought in, it was brought in as a pilot initiative. By the very definition of pilot, it is something that you bring in to try. At some point in time, you make a determination whether you leave it in the budget on a permanent, ongoing basis or whether you remove it from the budget and simply move on to something else.

The fact that we have chosen not to renew the pilot of the Family Violence Intervention Court does not lessen our support for family violence and our willingness to do other things to make sure that we combat that issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the one-year pilot clearly worked because the government kept it going for four more years and had a 300 per cent increase in the number of people agreeing to participate.

Having abandoned the family violence court, yesterday's Throne Speech mentioned Phase 2 of the Violence Prevention Initiative. I guess if you quit Phase 1, you can go on to Phase 2.

Domestic violence is cyclical; most abusers recall their first violent memory as intervening to protect their mother from her abusive partner.

I ask the minister: Aside from the moral imperative, can't he recognize that mandating offender programs to prevent children from witnessing more violence will save the system millions of dollars down the road? Doesn't he understand the impacts on these children are lifelong?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, any time a government brings in initiatives, there are often times where you bring a whole host of activities and events that you put into the budget on a pilot basis or a one-time basis. The Violence Prevention Initiative is no different than that. It is an initiative that we brought in, a number of things have run their course, and they have achieved their objectives. We will move forward into Phase 2. Some things we will renew; some things we will do differently.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite, this government recognizes very clearly the seriousness of the issues facing children in this Province. That is why this government brought in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, I say to the member opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In January, thousands of people were left in the dark and the recent threat of more blackouts has shown that we have a serious electricity supply program. Residential energy conservation programs would help cut electricity demands.

So I ask the Premier: Is his government prepared to commit to establishing such programs instead of forcing the people of the Province to endure rolling blackouts in a crisis?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: I thank the Leader of the Third Party for her question, and you are right. The whole issue of supply is the reason why we have to ensure that we complete the Muskrat Falls Project, to ensure certainty of

supply for the people of the Province in the future.

We know coming out of the blackout that the PUB has announced it was going to do a short-term reliability review, and then they subsequently announced they are going to extend that review to look at the Muskrat Falls interconnection and beyond. We support that. That is a very good thing. Nalcor and the government would certainly support the PUB and provide any assistance it can.

Given the fact that we are going to interconnect to the North American continent for the first time in history, that is a major game changer. So our government will also be conducting a review. We are going to look at the management, the operation, and the regulation of the whole industry that will inform future regulation and legislation as we go forward after total interconnection.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: We are living in the present, not in the future, so why won't government demand that Nalcor focus on energy conservation and put real programs in place?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A full part of our extensive utility review, looking forward to the future and what Muskrat Falls will bring to this Province, Mr. Speaker, built within that, obviously, and a lot of discussions around the Province, is around conservation as well. We always echo the message, the importance of conservation, particularly around the events of January 2 to January 8, and recent calls again for

conservation. I think it highlights the importance of conservation with the people of the Province.

There are a number of programs, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to talk about and work on within government, but as well from the federal government, as well as my department, the Climate Change Office, issues around investments in efficiencies, home repair programs, and so on all support opportunities for conservation. We will continue to support that effort throughout government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I point out to the minister that they cut their Residential Energy Efficiency Program in half from 1,000 to 500 homes.

I ask the Premier, in his Throne Speech yesterday, vague references were made to implementing long overdue corporate oversight on the Muskrat Falls Project.

So I ask the Premier: Doesn't the report of the independent engineer already perform this function?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the report of the independent engineer, which was asked for originally by the federal government and their lenders, will also be made available to Nalcor and to the provincial government to help us in the oversight process. It will be certainly an added benefit.

In addition, Nalcor has their own audit committee, they have their internal auditors, and they have their external auditors who provide independent audit and independent financial statements. They have annual reports and an

annual general meeting. They filed an annual transparency and accountability report. The CEO updates the Cabinet. They have their internal lawyers and their external lawyers. They have their financial advisors. The Auditor General can go in there any time he wants. It is a big project, it is owned by the people, (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the Family Violence Intervention Court was working at full capacity treating forty-four families. The Department of Health promotes prevention programs but when someone is sick they still get treatment. The Minister of Justice said he is focusing on prevention of family violence yet he has cut one of the most effective treatment programs that protect victims of family violence.

I ask the minister: How does this make sense?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I have acknowledged any number of occasions in this House today, and previous days, the family violence court was a pilot initiative brought in by our government. From time to time government has had to make decisions about whether you continue with pilot initiatives or whether in fact you move on and you focus on other priorities.

The fact of the matter is I have never, ever said that I did not see or acknowledge the merit expressed by people who have gone through that family violence court. The fact is that twenty-one people only availed of that court service the last year it fully operated, and only in St. John's. It was not available to people in the Labrador

part of the Province; it was not available to Central or the West Coast people, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to offer services through Adult Corrections and through Victims Services, and we continue to invest in positions like the family violence coordinator with the RNC and positions (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, neither the former nor the current Minister Responsible for the Status of Women said a peep in defence of the Family Violence Intervention Court, even though women's groups and anti-violence groups have begged government to reinstate the court.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Will she stand up for the women and children, victims of family violence, and ask the Minister of Justice to reinstate this court? Put it back in this Budget.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one initiative that this government has had as a hallmark for many years is our Violence Prevention Initiative. We are committed to our Violence Prevention Initiative and we understand that we need to work with our community stakeholders in order to truly prevent violence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we provide funding to our eight regional coordinating committees. They work with the people in their local communities and they look at initiatives to help reduce violence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, this government understands that no one initiative will do what it takes to reduce violence to the levels that it should be at in this Province. One thing this government has done is it has recognized that we need to partner with our communities to ensure that all people in this Province live in a respectful environment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, during Question Period in response to my second question the Minister of Municipal Affairs clearly referred to a document in answering that question, so I would ask that he table those documents, please.

MR. SPEAKER: I would like to address the issue of tabling of documents for a moment. I think your operative word was refer. The minister is obligated to table a document that he reads from, but a minister is not obligated to table a document that is just referenced and he may have made some notes of. As I was witnessing the minister as he was speaking, he did have a piece of paper with him but he was actually using the notes as a point of reference. He was not actually referring to the document.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Striking Committee of the House of Assembly and in accordance with Standing Order 65 (1), I give

notice that I will move that this hon. House approve changes to the membership of the Public Accounts Committee as follows: that the Member for Conception Bay East be replaced by the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune; and that the Member for The Straits – White Bay North be replaced by the Member for St. John's East.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

MR. KING: Thank you, once again.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce the following resolution to the House:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Assembly as follows:

WHEREAS section 7 of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act provides that the Sergeant-At-Arms of the House of Assembly is to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on a nomination of the House of Assembly;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Mr. Wayne L. Harnum be nominated for appointment as the Sergeant-At-Arms of the House of Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS provincial funding and support for an arm's-length advocacy group is needed in order to promote, protect, and ensure full citizenship rights for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with disabilities; and

WHEREAS the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities has advocated for persons with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador for nearly thirty-five years; and

WHEREAS people with disabilities across the Province rely on COD-NL to navigate and access support services, educate the public, and provide outreach; and

WHEREAS long-term sustainable funding for COD-NL should be a key building block in the Province's strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities; and

WHEREAS federal and provincial funding cuts continue to threaten COD-NL's capacity to provide important advocacy, public education, and outreach activities;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the funding cut from the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities-Newfoundland and Labrador in 2013 and provide a long-term sustainable funding arrangement for COD-NL.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these petitions have been signed by people across the Province. I remember shortly after I was elected in 2011, I attended an annual general meeting of the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities. I still have the program for that meeting which contained a full-page greeting from the then Premier at the time. There was a full-page greeting from the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities at the time. There was a full-page advertisement and greetings from the Member of the House of Assembly for the District of St. John's West basically lauding COD-NL, recognizing their important contribution to the Province and the

important role that they play in Newfoundland and Labrador.

A short time later it was decided by this government to cut funding for COD-NL which more or less threw them into a crisis situation. A number of Members of the House of Assembly and community leaders in the city and from outside the City of St. John's attended a meeting that was held to try to figure out how they would move forward. Thankfully, due to the hard work of individuals such as the Deputy Mayor of St. John's Mr. Ron Ellsworth and others, they managed to find alternate space. They were effectively kicked out of their space. They could not afford to continue to be in that space.

We make mistakes and governments make mistakes, Mr. Speaker. In the Throne Speech yesterday there were a lot of admissions of mistakes made so this was a mistake.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

I remind the member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

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

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS following the 2009 inquiry into helicopter safety, Commissioner Robert Wells recommended no night flights take place in the Province's offshore; and

WHEREAS flying at night increases the risk offshore workers are exposed to; and

WHEREAS the Tory government has refused to take a strong stance on the issue of night flights; and

WHEREAS workers' safety should be a higher priority than corporate profits;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to formally notify the C-NLOPB of its position regarding a ban on night flights, urging them to reject requests from offshore operators for a return to night flights in the Province's offshore, while encouraging them to develop a safer alternative for workers.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I am pleased to be able to stand and speak to this petition today, Mr. Speaker – yesterday, of course, being the fifth anniversary of the tragic loss of lives on the Cougar helicopter in our offshore. Expert testimony at the 2010 Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry stated that the survival rate for a nighttime helicopter crash offshore is 30 per cent, as opposed to 70 per cent in daylight. We know that the crash that happened five years ago did happen in daylight.

The concern of workers is what would have happened if that crash had happened at night. Obviously, Commissioner Wells listened to that testimony very carefully. We know from the testimony that the chances of anyone having survived – we were lucky enough that we had one survivor. The chances of even having that one survivor would have been wiped out most likely if the flight had been at night.

Commissioner Wells listened to this testimony. He also investigated. He just did not listen to one piece of testimony. A lot of investigation was done into the whole issue of night flights. He recommended that night flights end.

We know that right now they are not happening. We do know that some people within the industry are still looking at it as a possibility. We also know that some major unions such as

Unifor are saying that they do not support night flights. Especially as we go further into the deep with regard to exploration, we have to be more and more concerned about the lives of our workers.

As petitions of this nature come to me, I will continue to stand in this House and raise the concern of workers, of their families, people like the families of the dead workers from the Cougar helicopter five years ago –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member her speaking time has expired.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I have a petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS residents of the Southwest Coast must travel the Trans-Canada Highway between Channel-Port aux Basques and Corner Brook for work, medical, educational, and social reasons; and

WHEREAS Marine Atlantic ferries dock in Channel-Port aux Basques at various hours on a daily basis resulting in extremely high volumes of commercial and residential travellers using this section of the TCH; and

WHEREAS the world-renowned Wreckhouse area is situate along this section of the TCH; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador initiated a twenty-four hour snow clearing pilot project in 2008 that excluded the section of the TCH from Channel-Port aux Basques to Stephenville;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, you petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to include the section of the TCH from Channel-Port aux Basques to Stephenville in the twenty-four hour snow clearing project.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is obviously not the first time I have entered this petition. I have entered it, and entered it, and entered it again. Unfortunately the Department of Transportation and Works does not seem to agree with what I am saying. That is fair ball; they have a position they want to put forward.

The problem I have is that I have put forward questions, questioning the methodology used by the department in coming up with this decision, and I am not getting the answers back that I need. That is the problem I hear: The methodology, the ways that they are making these decisions, are flawed.

I have people from La Poile to Rose Blanche, right on up to Stephenville, who are signing these petitions and they want to hear government come out and give them a reasonable answer on this, but they are not. Again, to quote the minister, this was an old-fashioned winter. It was one of the worst winters we have had. More than ever we had the need for twenty-four hour snow clearing that we should have had.

Again, I am asking for information. We know this open government thing is going to take a little while. Now the latest information I have is that I will get the facts on March 31 – again, towards the end of the winter; a good way to push this off in to the next session. It is a good way to delay giving us the service that we need and we should have. Like most things, this government waits until something happens before they react; reaction rather than proactive.

I will keep entering these – I have a suitcase full here that I will bring in every day. I will keep

putting them forward until the government comes to their senses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court provided a comprehensive approach to domestic violence in a court setting that fully understood and dealt with the complex issues of domestic violence; and

WHEREAS domestic violence continues to be one of the most serious issues facing our Province today and the cost of the impact of domestic violence is great both economically and in human suffering; and

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court was welcomed and endorsed by all aspects of the justice system including the police, the courts, prosecutors, defence counsel, Child, Youth and Family Services, as well as victims, offenders, community agencies, and women's groups; and

WHEREAS the recidivism rate for offenders going through the court was 10 per cent compared to 40 per cent for those who did not; and

WHEREAS the budget for the court was only 0.2 per cent of the entire budget of the Department of Justice;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to

reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of signatures here today. I still have hundreds of signatures up in my office. There are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of postcards that people across the Province have sent to both the Premier and the Minister of Justice asking for the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, we have not heard one credible reason for cutting the court. The irony that we hear is that the Minister of Justice has stood up and talked about how effective the court was, that it was a good program. He said it fulfilled its mandate, but now he is saying we are going to take it away from St. John's because nobody else in the Province has it.

Mr. Speaker, that makes no sense whatsoever. As a matter of fact, what people in the anti-violence community are saying is expand it to the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Expand it and serve all of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This was a concrete program. This government spent a lot of money and did a lot of research to make sure this court was the best it could possibly be. As matter of fact, Nova Scotia modelled their court on this court. So perhaps we can ask the government to go to Nova Scotia and model their court, to model a new court here in the Province on the one that Nova Scotia has, because Nova Scotia modelled it on our court. There is no reason for this explanation at all.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member her time for speaking has expired.

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse at Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS seniors have to travel outside of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair to attend appointments with specialists; and

WHEREAS seniors are waiting long periods of time to get reimbursed for their expenses through the medical transportation program; and

WHEREAS the medical transportation program does not cover all incurred expenses, for example, ground transportation less than 2,500 kilometres per year;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to improve the medical transportation program so that all expenses are covered and reimbursed in a more timely manner.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I stood a number of times last fall to talk about the importance of changes with the medical transportation program, and what makes no sense to me and many people, especially in the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair that I represent, is we are asking the minister to look at a program not to give us more money, but to start spending it smarter.

They will prepay 50 per cent of an air ticket, yet will not give you anything for driving for the first 2,500 kilometres. So what this program is actually doing is asking people to incur more expense by flying. The other thing is, if you stay in a registered accommodation you will be

reimbursed, but if you stay in private you get nothing. People who come in here for treatments of various forms that need the support of being with family are choosing not to because they cannot get anything to give that family member.

The Minister of Transportation said this was an old-fashioned year, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that our people who are travelling for medical reasons are certainly incurring an unprecedented amount of money this year. We have the *Bond*, as I stand here, once again forty-eight kilometres outside of Corner Brook, and in case you do not know she is stuck in the ice again and has lost the support. We have people going out for medical appointments who are spending eight, ten, and twelve days waiting on the ferry, along with a host of other problems. So I ask the minister to sit down and look at this program.

Also, every time I am in the district people are telling me: I am submitting claims in January and I am not getting reimbursed until June. Many of the people using the program cannot afford to wait six months, especially if they are travelling monthly. All of the people in rural communities, as you know, are travelling outside the region for those specialized programs.

I say if we have the program here, let us make it effective. It is not good enough just to say we have a medical transportation program that was brought in by a Liberal government in 1998; we have to make the enhancements, and many of the improvements can be made without incurring extra costs. So I would love to see you sit down and take a look, and I would be happy to have discussion.

Thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. KING: This time I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, for the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to

move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider certain resolutions for the granting of Interim Supply to Her Majesty. (Bill 2)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to rise today to begin debate in Interim Supply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS JOHNSON: The message first?

Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

MR. SPEAKER: All rise.

The letter states:

As Administrator of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit a request to appropriate sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending 31 March 2015, by way of Interim Supply, and in accordance with the provisions of section 54 and 90 of the Constitution Act, 1867, I recommend this request to the House of Assembly.

Sgd.: _____
Administrator Justice J. Derek Green

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

MS JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that the message together with a bill be referred to the Committee of Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the message together with a bill be referred to the Committee of Supply 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.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Littlejohn): Order, please!

We are considering Bill 2, an act for granting to Her Majesty Interim Supply.

Resolution

"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to Her Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2015, the sum of \$2,829,892,500."

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

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

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I am pleased now to rise in this House today to begin debate in Interim Supply. I will begin by providing a few introductory comments about Interim Supply and then I would like to go into just giving a highlight to our listeners about the economy, about how our taxpayers' dollars are spent, and where the revenues come from.

Mr. Chair, as we all know the Interim Supply bill is required to be passed by the House of Assembly during the spring sitting in order to allow for ongoing and routine operations during the period while Budget 2014 is being introduced, being debated, and then eventually approved by the Legislature. When we bring in the Budget we will be seeking approval for funding to spend for the entire fiscal year, but it takes time to allow for debate and approval of the Budget.

During the interim period it is necessary to provide funding to the government to pay its bills which is the purpose of Interim Supply. Mr. Chair, we are seeking approval in Interim Supply for a sum of approximately \$2.8 billion. This will provide departments and public bodies with sufficient cash flow dollars to manage expenditures from the period of April 1, 2014 to June 30, 2014, which is the first quarter of the fiscal year.

Interim Supply is basically intended to provide for the continuation of ongoing government programs and projects. Included in the 2014 Interim Supply bill are ongoing housekeeping expenditures including funding for seven pay periods, and ongoing project and funding requirements applicable to the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

The legislation will need to be passed and receive Royal Assent by March 25, 2014 in order to allow for sufficient time to meet payroll expenses like Income Support, spending on roads, those types of things, and other expenditures effective April 1, 2014.

That is a little bit about what Interim Supply is and why we need it by that particular date, March 25. I would now like to talk a little bit about our economy and how well the economy is doing and I would like to begin by talking about pre-Budget consultations, Mr. Chair. Today, I would like to talk about the priorities our government has set and how these priorities are what we believe are priorities for the people of our Province – of course, priorities such as health care, education, new infrastructure,

supporting the things that people feel are important.

I would like to start by talking about the pre-Budget consultations themselves. As most of you are aware, the Department of Finance engages in pre-Budget consultations throughout the Province. This year we had twelve sessions in eleven locations across the Province and there was an excellent turnout, I have to say. We made it a little different this year and made it a little more interactive in that we utilized our polling technology and asked people around the Province what they thought, how they would do a Budget, and the feedback was very helpful and feedback that we will use when we are making our Budget 2014 deliberations.

In addition to the sessions that I attended personally, some of my colleagues also had the opportunity to hear first-hand from people in their communities about the priorities that are important to them. As I said it was really good to hear first-hand about the good work that organizations are doing.

To participate in a process like pre-Budget consultations is very important because as our Premier said on the day that he was sworn in, we want to hear from people. We want them to tell us when are doing something good and also when we are not, and we want to hear their ideas on how we can improve things. Because no matter how good you do something, it can always be done better.

I would like to say a thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in pre-Budget consultations this year, including some of my colleagues on the other side of the House. We appreciate the input and we have considered it in putting together the Budget for this year and we are finalizing that process now.

Some of the messages I delivered at the pre-Budget consultations I would also like to deliver here today, because I think it is important to provide these facts as we get closer to Budget 2014. As we outlined in last year's Budget and again in the fall financial update, our Province is facing a deficit for 2014. This means that

difficult decisions will have to be made in order to effectively manage our spending while maintaining the programs and services that are most important to people.

As you may recall last year during Budget 2013, we outlined Year 1 of our 10-Year Sustainability Plan. The plan sets out specific goals to ensure continued sound fiscal management over the long-term, including the elimination of deficits and a return to a surplus budget in three years. These are the goals that we are working hard to achieve and include a return to surplus in the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

There are twelve key focus areas of our 10-Year Sustainability Plan and I would just like to go down through them to show where government is focusing its efforts.

First, is to eliminate deficits and return to a surplus budget in 2015-2016 and to maintain a strong fiscal position as we go forward. We have committed to a health care operational review; a post-secondary education review; pension and post-retirement liabilities reform; debt reduction; public service salaries and benefits; spend analysis-procurement reform which, of course, is ongoing; priority setting-strategic infrastructure practices; equity investments, economic diversification and innovation; a competitive tax environment; sustainable expenditures; and we committed to consult with municipalities and local government.

Mr. Chair, one of the most important issues facing our government and facing the people of the Province is pension and post-retirement liabilities reform, which I will discuss a little later, either in my seven minutes that remain or later on in the next couple of days as we debate Interim Supply.

I now would like to provide an update on our fiscal position and the economy. Our story of economic growth over the last decade, as was said in the Throne Speech, is one of which only others can dream. The growth in our economy has helped the Province build a strong financial foundation which has contributed to surpluses in

the six of the past ten years and has resulted in our government not having to borrow money for operational or capital purposes since 2004. Since 2005-2006, we have generated surpluses of approximately \$5.6 billion, Mr. Chair.

Our goal is to ensure the long-term sustainability of our programs and services. In order to achieve this we have built new schools, we are investing in new health care and acute care centres, we are improving the Province's roads, we have lowered tax rates, we have repaid debt, and we continue to invest to encourage job creation.

Our priority is to grow the economy further, to continue to invest in areas that matter most to the people of the Province, and to make prudent financial decisions to protect the gains that we have made.

During the fall financial update we advised the public that the 2013-2014 deficit is expected to be \$113 million less than forecast on Budget Day 2013 and was expected to be \$450.6 million. This is due to lower-than-anticipated expenses from Budget Day to what was projected at mid-year. We had a \$207 million decline in spending and that was offset by a projected \$94.4 million decline in revenue, giving us the \$113 million difference.

The decline in total revenue between what was forecasted on Budget Day and up to mid-year is primarily due to three areas, one being lower offshore royalties. As you know, Terra Nova was shut down this past year and we projected this shutdown to be for about twenty-four days. However, the actual shutdown ended up being seventy-five days, which had an impact on our royalties. Corporate income tax was down as a result of decreased oil royalties and there were decreases in mining tax.

Offsetting these declines are increases in Canada Social Transfer and Canada Health Transfer as a result of federal government re-estimates of our population. As well, higher personal income for prior years is reflected in higher personal income tax revenue. Of course, these numbers will be updated as part of Budget 2014.

That was the revenue side of where the money comes from. Now I would like to briefly speak about expenses and how we wisely spend that money.

Spending in the social sector accounts for approximately 55 per cent of total expenses, with almost 36 per cent allocated to Health and Community Services and 10 per cent to Education. Here is some really interesting information, Mr. Chair, and it really outlines our approach to how we value education, health care, and other sectors in the social side.

In 2003-2004, in K-12 education alone the provincial government spent \$7,183 per student in the Province. That amount increased each year and as of last year, 2013-2014, that spending went from \$7,183 to \$12,571 per student in the K-12 system.

Mr. Chair, in 2003-2004, approximately \$150 million was invested in infrastructure. We hear the members opposite today asking about infrastructure and where we have been putting our money. Well, let me tell them how we have been spending that money. The investment of \$154 million has increased to \$687 million in 2012-2013. That is an increase – very important – of 346 per cent in infrastructure since we have come into power. The Auditor General noted that government has made significant progress in replacing the Province's aging infrastructure by investing approximately \$3.6 billion since coming in to power in 2003-2004.

Mr. Chair, in terms of where our revenues come from, over 28 per cent of revenues comes from offshore royalties. As we all know that is very volatile and it is also a non-renewable resource. In addition, a significant portion of corporate income and personal income tax revenue can also be attributed to the activity in the offshore. When we were preparing Budget 2013, we estimated the impact on revenues for a change in the price of oil and the exchange rate. While the average price of oil for 2013-2014 is estimated to be about \$108 US per barrel, where we should end up for the average for the year, that is higher than the average budgeted price of \$105 US per

barrel, but this has been offset by lower oil production as mentioned earlier.

Just to give you some information around the sensitivity of the price of oil and the exchange rate, every \$1 change in the price of a barrel of oil has a \$26 million impact on revenue. Similarly a one-cent change in the exchange rate impacts revenue by \$27 million. You can see how volatile this is.

The Leader of the Opposition yesterday in his response to the Speech from the Throne suggested that because these numbers are volatile we should take them out of the equation when doing budgeting. Well, Mr. Chair, I went back and had a look last night and if that is their approach to budgeting then we are in for some serious areas of concern. With so much spending in our health care, 55 per cent in our social sector, I would certainly like to know how the Leader of the Opposition would budget and what he would ultimately have to cut. There is no way you can take 28 per cent of our revenues and then budget on the remaining.

Mr. Chair, net debt has declined from a high of \$11.9 billion in 2004-2005 –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS JOHNSON: If you are questioning those words, I have Hansard here. We can certainly highlight what he had said in terms of how he would budget.

Net debt has declined from a high of \$11.9 billion in 2004-2005 to \$7.8 billion in 2011-2012, a decline of 35 per cent. Net debt as of March 31, 2014 is projected to be \$9.1 billion and this is \$396 million lower than the 2013 estimates. The Auditor General has noted that this is a significant issue.

With twenty-two seconds left, Mr. Chair, I will leave it there, just to say that government is committed to reducing our net debt per capita to the all-province average within ten years. Our 10-Year Sustainability Plan is something that we announced last year. We are committed to

getting back to surpluses. I will leave it to other members to have their say on Interim Supply.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to stand here in this hon. House and say a few words. I can assure everybody that I have a lot to say. I will take every opportunity I can to speak on behalf of the people of my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: First of all, Mr. Chair, I want to take the opportunity just to welcome everybody back on all sides of the House. I am sure we are going to have a lot of opportunity as I said to debate the issues. I certainly look forward to it.

Mr. Chair, before I get into some of the comments I did want to make around Interim Supply, I did want to just raise the issue – it was raised yesterday. Of course, yesterday was the anniversary of the Cougar 491 crash. There was a memorial service yesterday evening. There were a number of members from this side of the House, from the Third Party, and there were a number of government members present as well. It was a very touching service to say the least.

Mr. Chair, when you think about what happened there, when you look at the families who were there still in mourning at that event yesterday evening, I think it says to all of us that offshore safety is something we all need to strive for. It certainly needs to transcend any partisan politics. I believe that as members of this hon. House we all have to work together to ensure that we can improve the offshore safety for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We know there are a number of issues surrounding offshore safety. We know there were four recommendations made by the Transportation Safety Board, of which only two were implemented. We know we have a need. I think all parties have agreed there is a need for an independent safety regulator. We all, I think, also agree that we need to see improvements to search and rescue.

It is incumbent upon all of us. If there was ever an issue where all parties should come together in this hon. House to lobby the federal government, to utilize our MPs, to utilize our Senators, and to utilize everybody involved in the offshore, it is certainly this issue. I encourage all members to do that.

Mr. Chair, as we know, since the last sitting of the House of Assembly some things have changed and I have moved over into a new role. My role, which I will be pursuing in this sitting of the House, will be as the Critic for Service Newfoundland and Labrador. I certainly plan on conducting myself in a professional manner; that being said, there will be questions that have to be asked. There will be petitions presented, there will be commentary made, and I will be holding the Minister of Service NL's feet to the fire when it comes to issues as it relates to that particular department. I certainly look forward to doing just that.

Mr. Chair, the other point I want to make is that certainly in my role in the Official Opposition I have a responsibility and a job to do over here, the same as I had a job to do on the other side and other members do. They are bringing forward government's position; we have to bring forward the opposing side. We have to question things that government is doing.

That being said, as I have heard my colleague the Member for Burgeo – La Poile say on a number of occasions, and the Member for Bay of Islands, when government does good things it is also important we acknowledge that. I certainly intend to acknowledge when government does good things, not simply criticizing for the sake of criticizing.

Mr. Chair, the first thing I just want to acknowledge the government for is to say that, at least as a first step, they are talking about doing a review of Bill 29. I am glad they are doing that. It is certainly an issue I raised when I was on the other side. Unfortunately, there was no action taken at that particular time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Anyway, Mr. Chair, that is something I did and I actually have the e-mails to prove it. I will table that at another time. As I said, I am very glad to see that is going to happen and it is certainly one of the key reasons I am over on this side of the House now, but I am glad they are doing it.

Now, I think a lot of people would say, Mr. Chair, that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. LANE: Yes, we are hearing all the heckling over here now.

Let me say this, Mr. Chair, before I go any further. My intention here, as I said, is to operate in a respectful manner, but I am also going to say that I am not going to be bullied. We talk about our children standing up to bullies and I am not going to be bullied by anybody across this side of the House, not a soul. It is not going to happen. If there are going to be attempts to bully me, then I will be calling out the members who are doing the bullying and I will let the people know.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, as I said, I think that Bill 29, as has been said on this side, perhaps should be simply repealed and then start from scratch, but if the route they are going to take is to do a review it is better than nothing. I am glad to see they are going to and I applaud them for it. I applaud them for doing it.

Mr. Chair, another thing I want to acknowledge is the whistle-blower legislation. Again, I think this is a good move. Now, it may have taken a

number of years for it to happen, but at least they are doing it now. I will certainly support that as well and I am glad to see they are doing that.

Mr. Chair, in terms of Mount Pearl – and I would say to the Member for Cape St. Francis who is over there now and he is going to start his little rant and his little bit of bullying, well, he will have an opportunity to speak and I encourage him to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I said, Mr. Chair, when investments are made certainly in my district in Mount Pearl I will recognize that as well. When I see investments in roads and infrastructure, when I see investments in recreation, when our seniors' group receive some grants, and our sports groups, I will acknowledge that and I think it is all a good thing. I certainly support that and Mount Pearl certainly deserves its fair share for sure.

Mr. Chair, that all being said in terms of acknowledging the good things, I think it is also important to note that as an Opposition we have issues we have to bring forward. Everything is not rosy. Everything is not perfect. That is certainly true. There will be a number of issues that I intend on raising in this sitting of the House of Assembly.

We have issues around, for example, the school reorganization in the City of Mount Pearl, which was very necessary. There is no doubt about it. It is necessary and it has been a number of years where it was supposed to happen and did not happen, and it was two or three years of delays

for whatever reason. It is finally happening and that is a good thing.

That being said there are a lot of parents in the City of Mount Pearl, particularly parents in St. Peter's Elementary and Newtown Elementary, who have serious concerns about what is being proposed. There are certainly parents, teachers, and so on in Mount Pearl Senior High and Mount Pearl Intermediate who have serious concerns about the position that is being brought forth by the board. That is something I am going to be watching. It is something I am going to be speaking to and participating in. I have been and I will continue to do so.

Mr. Chair, supportive employment is another issue. I was very pleased to see, by the way – I have been working on an issue with Visions Employment in Mount Pearl for the last two or two-and-a-half years. We have had meetings. We have brought proposals forward to the minister. I have talked to the minister about it where they have a number of people, a number of clients, who want to work. These are people who have disabilities. They have employers who are willing to take them, but there was no government funding.

I am very pleased, and I am going to acknowledge again that it was interesting. There was a meeting this week between Visions. They wanted to meet with the minister and the MHAs for the area, which I was one, to try to bring this to a head because they have so many people waiting and no funding. I was very pleased to find out that in advance of the Budget, they were promised an additional \$150,000. I think it is just a great example of when you have MHAs such as myself and such as the Member for Mount Pearl North, credit to him. We worked together and we got some funding. I am glad that I was able to be a part of that and that \$150,000, for sure.

That being said, though, that will cover twelve clients. They have a waiting list of thirty-five clients. So that means there are still twenty-three people who want to go to work who cannot go to work. That is with Visions. I am not sure what the story is with Avalon. I know that Vera

Perlin had similar concerns and issues with their supportive employment program. I hope there is money there for them as well.

Mr. Chair, as I said, there is a whole host of issues. Certainly, the proposed waste transfer site in the Whitbourne area is an issue, and there are a number of people in the Peak Pond area who never received the proper consultation, certainly in their view, and were not even notified of the environmental assessment that was taking place, who are very concerned. A number of those people are actually constituents of mine in the District of Mount Pearl South. I have been working on their behalf and certainly hoping that they are going to have that public consultation, have their input, so they can get their concerns brought forward.

Mr. Chair, there are a number of occupational health and safety issues. Certainly, as part of my role, Service NL, there are a number of issues around occupational health and safety. There are a number of issues which will be coming forth as a result of the workers' compensation review, and we all know if you ask the recipients of that program and if you ask the employers and so on, I think there are concerns on all sides around workers' compensation. I am going to have a lot of questions around that review and what they plan on implementing when changes will be made.

Certainly, another one, Mr. Chair, that I would have concerns about, I would want to raise issues about would be the lack of enforcement in blue zones. That was certainly a piece of legislation which was passed two years ago now, and two years later, as you drive around the city, you will see that there are all kinds of non-compliance issues. Not only around the city in terms of commercial establishments, but around other areas of the Province. I noted it when I was in Clarendville and I noted it in Whitbourne, in CBS and so on, and even government-owned facilities are not even in compliance with its own blue zone legislation. I certainly will be having a lot of say about that.

I also have concerns and questions, Mr. Chair, as it relates to the reliability of our current

electrical system. We all know about DarkNL and I believe I heard in the Throne Speech what was called disruptions which were particularly significant. Some people might call it a crisis or not a crisis. Anyway, Mr. Chair, I think we all have concerns about what went on there, about the reliability, and we are certainly going to be waiting to see what comes back when that report is done on that. We are all looking forward to that one for sure. I know I had a number of people who I spoke to, people in my district, friends and family members from around the Province who, for them, it was definitely a significant event; it was definitely a crisis for a lot of them.

We have issues around moose-vehicle collisions, Mr. Chair, that we need to talk about here in this House of Assembly. We have the need for bicycle helmet legislation; that is another issue that we want to bring forward.

Another one that comes to mind, Mr. Chair, we have significant concerns around the administration of the Public Tender Act. That is something that falls again under my critic area; it falls under the Department of Service NL. There are a number of issues around that Public Tender Act and around all of the exemptions that are being given to people to avoid following that act. We have concerns about that.

There are issues around automobile insurance, and there are issues around the availability of affordable housing. I see I am starting to run down here, Mr. Chair. There are a whole host of issues which need to be brought forward, and I certainly intend on doing it. Let me just finish off by saying although I am sitting over here now instead of over there, it is really not where you sit; it is where you stand.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The member ended off by talking about it is not where you sit; it is where you stand. It has been interesting. It is good to get back into the House of Assembly again. I have to say it always surprises me when you leave here at the end of a session, you do not know how things are going to change when you come back into the House. This time the House, the structure of the House and where people are sitting has changed drastically.

Mr. Chair, that is democracy. It is a great thing that we do have democracy, that people can make their decisions. When the election rolls around then it is the voter who will speak. Then we will see if people have made the right decisions or not.

It is an honour for me to get up and speak here today as Minister of Education. I was listening to the Minister of Finance who talked to our allocation that we have given per student and how that has increased over the past number of years. I was interested yesterday in hearing the speeches from the Members for Port de Grave and for Port au Port. In both of their addresses they spoke to students, they spoke about students and how important the future of the Province is. Students are the ones who are going to lead the Province. They are the ones who are going to establish the direction of the Province in the future. Our investment in education is very, very important.

I would just like to take us through where we are. I am the minister for kindergarten to Grade 12 and also the minister responsible for the education component from zero up to the time that students enter kindergarten. A few years back we launched a program that is called Learning from the Start. The reason we did this and if people listen to some of my answers to some of the questions in Question Period last year and through addresses such as this, they heard me speak about the importance of investing early.

Anybody in the research field in developmental research, in early brain development research, will tell you that intervention at these very early years is critical. Anyone who has been around a

young child, all they have to do is take a look at how much a child advances from the time they are born until they are about three years old. They pick up language. Children will learn more words in their first three to four to five years of life than they will at any other period in their entire life.

Our investment and support for young children in that early age is critical. As such, we rolled out a campaign. We had the Power of Play campaign that emphasized the importance of play. I think at earlier years, I am talking twenty years ago, people just saw play as something that children did. They just went outdoors, they played around, that was it, and nothing more than that to it, without the true understanding of the learning that was actually taking place in those encounters.

It is probably more important now than ever because now, with the advance of technology, we have children who are not engaging in play in the way that they used to and the lessons are not being learned there that would have; therefore, we have to go and we have to encourage parents to put their children in situations where they can play.

We had Play and Learn Week (inaudible) resources and one of the things that we developed, that we have gotten good responses on, is around the early learning kits. We developed these kits with suggested activities for parents around reading and engaging their children and we have put them out there for children who are of two, four, and six months of age. As they go into the clinic for their health checks, these kits are passed out to them. The twelve- and eighteen-month-old kits are now being piloted and the kits for months twenty-six and thirty-six are being developed. This early learning intervention, at the end of the third year, will amount – we put in I think it is \$4.3 million or \$4.5 million over the course. We look to see now if we can continue that. It is being received rather positively.

Mr. Chair, I am looking at the clock. I get ten minutes to speak and I am down to four minutes and thirty-six seconds so I better skitter. I can

stand up here for an hour and speak to all of the initiatives that we have done and the investments that we put in education.

I just want to highlight some of the investments, in particular in infrastructure. I will challenge anyone to go and look to see what government has invested more in educational infrastructure in terms of schools and upgrades to schools than this government has. If people could go back into Hansard, I was speaking last year about the forty-some-odd projects that we have underway.

Well, Mr. Chair, in preparation for this I can now add to that. We have fifty-six major infrastructure projects happening in our schools. We have thirteen new schools that have been built. We have eight more new schools under construction. We have twenty-six major extensions and renovation projects underway. We have nine additional extension, renovation, and rebuild projects that are underway or in planning. There are fifty-six major school infrastructure pieces happening in the Province.

Mr. Chair, I have to say this; I have been in this portfolio now for over two years. One of the things I am committed to doing, and I have done, is to travel to the schools. Go to the schools and see the infrastructure that we have in place. I am willing to bet we can put it up against anywhere in the world. That infrastructure is housing students and teachers who are committed to the education of this Province.

I have said this before; the student of today is far more advanced than the student I believe I was. The reason is they are more global, they are more knowledgeable, they understand the world more, and they understand compassion for their fellow student. Go and speak to them. I have gone across this Province from Labrador to the schools in St. John's and across the Island and I have spoken to many student councils just to get their input into it.

I think oftentimes we, as politicians and the adult community, will make decisions and we sometimes include the students, but not to the extent that they should be. Go and sit down with

these student leaders and listen to their perspective. I have to tell you it has been an enlightening experience, but more importantly, as Minister of Education, it has been a rewarding experience. As I have said from the outset, the future of our Province is in our students, and I feel assured that our Province is in good hands.

It takes that commitment and it does take dollars, there is no doubt about it. You will hear over the next number of weeks in this sitting members across the way will get up and challenge us on what investments have been made and what others should be made in education. There will be things we will continue to invest in, but I would ask anybody in this House and I would ask anybody in this Province to take a look at our track record and our investment in education. I will say that it is second to none that we have ever had in this Province. I say that with all genuineness and I put aside all the politics of it. Our investment in education has been second to none.

Mr. Chair, I know my time has ended but I certainly hope that I have the opportunity to get up and speak on education initiatives again.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a privilege for me to be back in my seat again in the House of Assembly to speak on behalf of my constituents in St. John's North. It was great to have a break to be able to spend more time with the families. I know people who are in from out of town from rural districts and districts from around Newfoundland and Labrador who make great sacrifices to come and sit in the House of Assembly and be away from their families for extended periods of time to do your jobs here. I guess "you pays your money and you takes your chances", as the saying goes.

Yesterday as I was listening to the Throne Speech, I was reminded of when I was growing up. My parents were small-business people and they had a convenience store. They had a number of other enterprises, but they had a convenience store. There were always a lot of deliveries at the convenience store. There were always a lot of wholesalers showing up. I always remember when I was a child, that sound of the trucks backing up, beep, beep, beep.

Yesterday when I was listening to the Throne Speech I was taken back to my childhood days working at my parent's store. As the Throne Speech was being read all I could hear was beep, beep, beep, the sound of government backing up, whether backing up on Bill 29, backing up on oversight on Muskrat Falls, backing up on whistle-blower legislation, or backing up on the adult literacy strategy, and on and on and on. Beep, beep, beep, the sound of government backing up. That was one of the things that I wanted to mention.

In all seriousness, however, Mr. Chair, yesterday the Throne Speech said, "By sharing more fairly the benefits of our newfound prosperity, we can continue to achieve a more equitable balance of opportunities for our people, whatever their particular needs." It also went on to say, "We will continue advancing the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities."

As I mentioned during petitions today, it was not very long ago that this government yanked funding, cut funding, for the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities in this Province and basically pushed that organization really to the edge. We are really lucky that they are still around and able to do the job they are doing for persons with disabilities in this Province, despite what this government decided to do last year when it cut a lot of funding including funding for the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities.

The hon. Minister of Education just spoke for a while about investments in education. Again in the Throne Speech yesterday it talked about – it was sort of lip service really, Mr. Chair – the "government will continue to make investments in the province's K-12 schools...". That is a

relatively meaningless statement. There is no detail, no meat on the bones there. Maybe we will hear a little bit more about that.

I know when the Minister of Finance was up, she was talking about how per capita or per-student expenditures have increased in education. Of course, that is not very difficult when enrolment has declined by something like 17,000 students or so since 2004. Of course, the amount per student is increasing because that is increasing, if by nothing else, by attrition. You cannot just throw infrastructure investments in on top of all of that.

Now speaking of infrastructure, the minister is talking about building new schools. Well, one thing that this government has really capitalized on, has cornered the market on to in some extent, is building schools too small. Ask my colleague, the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace, where they built a new school and the next day they had to roll in with the modularity, with the portables, and put them in the parking lot so they would have enough room for all the students.

Go out to Torbay, I say to the Member for Cape St. Francis, the same thing there. Out in Paradise they are wondering when they are going to start building the new school. Portugal Cove – St. Phillips, the same thing: when is this government going to come to life and get to work on all of that?

Yes, there have been investments in education because that is one of the primary roles of government: to ensure that educational programs and services are provided; to ensure that our children have the same, if not better opportunities, than we had when we went to school. I think that is really important.

The minister is talking about investments in education. Well, more or less year after year, to some degree, we have seen teacher cuts, last year we saw teacher cuts, resource cuts, and kindergarten to Grade 12 system cuts. That is what we have seen. Government assumes that it can maintain the status quo and that children

will not suffer the consequences of that. That is not the case.

Government introduced an inclusion strategy a number of years ago, an unfunded inclusion strategy, expects teachers and administrators and other school staff to do more with less and that cannot be done; that is unreasonable.

Also last year, government decided to consolidate the four English language school boards into one and increase the administrative burden on principals, on assistant principals, on teachers, on administrators, on all staff at our schools; and, of course, that increases the burden and the pressure on parents and their kids – unacceptable.

It was interesting to hear yesterday this newfound attachment to openness. As I was listening to the sound of the government backing up, beep, beep, beep, and listening to this newfound attachment to openness, I could not help but think about the way those decisions were made last year to amalgamate those four schools boards into one or, in other words, to cut three school boards altogether.

I was reminded of an article that I read in *The Gander Beacon* last summer, and the Minister of Education, and his colleague, the Member for Gander district, made a trip out there and met with a number of groups. They had a meeting with the local Chamber of commerce, I understand. This article called that lip service. The past President of the Chamber of Commerce called it a meeting with not a lot of substance; that is what was said.

I will read the quote; this is very interesting. This is what the past President of the Chamber of Commerce said about the member for the area and the minister when they went out: They never gave us any details of a plan on how this would develop. In other words, how the Nova Central School District would more or less be demolished and amalgamated into the English School District. He said: That is the biggest issue everybody has with the process. They never gave them any details. They could not show any type of document. In fact, they could

not even answer if there was a document. They could not prove there was a document. There was no documentation provided to provide a rationale for the collapse of all these school districts into one.

A lot has been said about that and other things that were done by this government last year in terms of education funding. There was one person who was a parent of a child at Swift Current Academy and said that she basically was worried about the future of small schools, of rural schools, across Newfoundland and Labrador with one large board headquartered here in the City of St. John's.

As I have said time and time again, the issues in downtown St. John's, or in my district in St. John's North, the issues in St. Andrew's Elementary, in Larkhall Academy, at Leary's Brook Junior High, at Prince of Wales Collegiate, at Beachy Cove Elementary, are very different than the issues outside the overpass, across the vast expanse of Newfoundland and Labrador.

There is a lot that we could talk about in terms of the cuts that were made to teachers, cuts to specialist teachers in intermediate schools, cuts to needs-based teaching units, cuts to school administrators. School administrators came out very clearly and said with all of the mergers, all the amalgamations, all that extra work that is just heaped on and heaped on and heaped on the backs of administrators when you put administrators in and then you take them out, the whole system suffers.

The President of the NLTA said: Regressive education cuts will only have negative effects on students. That is some of what has gone on in the last year and I will have plenty more to say, but I really appreciate this opportunity to speak.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do not usually get up two times in a row, but I could not avoid it after this one. Mr. Chair, I have said I have never gotten nasty at this, I do not believe in it, but I am going to make a little lighthearted one. I came into the House yesterday, and we talk about people backing up – I was almost tempted to say to a couple of the new Liberals: I wonder what happened to their bright orange ties. I saw their bright blue ties around Christmas at one of our events and now they are bright red. Somebody said to me: Do you remember when these mood rings were on the go? I wonder if they have mood ties; that is what I think they must have – mood ties; that is what it is.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, I want to refute some of what the Member for St. John's North had to say. First, he needs to get some of his facts right. He said there has been a decrease of 17,000 students. Actually, it is not; it is 14,200. I just do not get his logic; he says by attrition the dollars go down. Mr. Chair, you think that if it was by attrition, you would lower your dollar as the population goes down. The reality is that despite a 17.5 per cent decline, we have increased the budget by 42 per cent. That is phenomenal.

Mr. Chair, our per pupil investment – I will just get the Member for St. John's North to listen carefully – has gone from \$7,400 to \$12,500. We are getting up close on doubling it.

Mr. Chair, he spoke about some of the schools that he referenced. I do not know if he has been outside the St. John's area. He goes down to the Burin Peninsula every now and then, I know that. I do not think he has actually been in many of the schools in the rural parts of our Province; I really, really do not. I follow him on Twitter. It seems like he tweets a fair bit from some of the schools that are in his immediate area.

Mr. Chair, as minister, I pride myself on going from schools in Labrador, up to the Northern parts of our Province, and right to the Southern parts of our Province. I can tell you that the investments we are making in education are

making a huge difference in the education of our students and the day-to-day lives of students and teachers. I can tell you that.

I have to go and find a few notes to relay to him about the board consolidation. I have to tell you one thing, Mr. Chair, I do not know if his phone is any different from mine, but I am not getting a host of calls that says our decision in reorganizing the school board was a wrong decision. We are saying that at the end of the day we are looking at saving about \$12 million. If it comes in at that number, a bit higher or a bit lower, I think it was the right way to go.

Our population, as I have said, since the last reorganization has dropped by 14,200 students, 17.5 per cent. You are looking towards getting up on a 20 per cent reduction in students, and you never assess whether it is the right way to go to reorganize? Well, we took a look at it, Mr. Chair, and we decided that it was indeed time to take a look at it.

Five million dollars of that savings, Mr. Chair, is from the reduction of what I will call the upper executive, the senior executive positions and the finance positions from the collapse of the previous boards to one English board. That is what that dollar figure is realized at.

We have to ask ourselves; with some 67,000 students we had sixty trustees. If you look at other jurisdictions, the representation that we had in this Province was offside with what a lot of others had. It was time for us to take a look at it. We said that we would not change the impact on front-line services.

I said this so many times in the House last session; we did not change the class cap sizes. We still have the best student-teacher ratio of all the provinces in Canada. Our average class size now is eighteen students to one teacher, the best student-teacher ratio in all of the provinces in Canada. We made no changes to the special education model. We had no changes to the way that we provide direct services to students with special needs. As much as the member and as often as the member gets up and says that, and I repeat that it is not, he continues to do so. As I

have said, we have not changed the class caps for Kindergarten to Grade 9.

Mr. Chair, if you look at our investment in education, I will say as I get up and I said it before, there is no government who has given the commitment to education that this government has. I am going to speak a little more about our investment in infrastructure because I want to let the Member for St. John's North know that our investment in infrastructure is not only in the St. John's area. This is one I have to speak to; he mentioned that our schools are not being built big enough. He obviously has not done much research into what is important in education.

I would ask the Member for St. John's North to listen attentively just for one minute so that I can point this fact out to him. One of the most important things in education is that the teacher and the entire school be able to connect with the students. Once you get over a certain number, then you can lose that personal connection.

Mr. Chair, we have decided that the school for K-6 should be in that 600 student range. We could have built a school that could have taken students in Paradise. Let me ask him: Does he want us to build an elementary school that houses 1,500 students? You can do it. It would be cheaper than building two separate buildings, but educational research will tell you that is not the way to go. That contact in those early ages with that 500 to 600 student population is what is important.

Mr. Chair, he obviously may know about the university system because he taught there, but I can tell you that a lot of his comments indicate to me that he does not know quite as much about what happens in the K-12 system, what happens —

MR. KIRBY: A point of order.

CHAIR: A point of order.

The hon. the Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: I just want to point out to the minister, children are going to schools in the parking lots in modulars because the school is not big enough.

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Chair, no point of order, but a good point. I would ask him — he apparently is driven by one of these modulars. I bet you his vision of a temporary classroom — I bet you he walked through those old plywood buildings they used to have at Memorial where you could walk up the corridor and you could feel the plywood bending under your feet and it was going thump, thump. You were not sure if you were going to go down through it or if you were going to make it down the other end of the corridor.

These modular classrooms we are putting in today are state of the art. As a matter of fact, when we get some teachers in some of them they almost prefer to stay there as to have to move out of that into one of the regular classrooms. These classrooms are not second class, Mr. Chair. Again I say I am not quite certain if the Member for St. John's North understands the K-12 system or the zero to three and the zero to six learning as much as he does at the university level.

I know I only have a few seconds left. I will clue up with this again: there is no government in the history of this Province that have invested in the K-12 system and the early years from zero until they enter school as this government has. I will stand on that. I have said it time and time again and I will continue to say it. As minister for the Province I truly, truly believe it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's East.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

MR. JACKMAN: Now we are going to hear from somebody who knows something about education.

MR. MURPHY: Absolutely.

Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the constituents of St. John's East as well for allowing me to stand in my place and speak on their behalf. At the same time it is a pleasure to be back in the House again and be working hand in hand with my cohorts from the other districts around the Province. I hope they had a good rest but it is time to get down to hard work. I think that this next session of the House is going to be a very heady session of the House, heated at some particular times. No doubt the Province hopefully will come out in the better for it.

Mr. Chair, in hearing the Speech from the Throne yesterday and in going over the Speech from the Throne yesterday, there were a couple of things that were really quite evident in what government's program for the next year is going to be presenting. To me, it was cloudy with a chance of hope.

I was reminded of that, actually, when I was sitting down watching the *Rick Mercer Report* this week, when Rick Mercer said the line: cloudy with a chance of hope. What the whole skit entailed was Rick Mercer looking at the weather forecast and, again, accusing or pointing the finger at Environment Canada when Environment Canada was saying that next week, seven days down the road it was going to be a chance of plus one degree. Believe you and me, Mr. Chair, it is awfully nice to see the temperature rise that one degree after seeing the cold winter that we have had.

We have had a very cold last couple of months when it comes to governance in this Province over the last little while. That is what I mean when I am talking about cloudy with a chance of hope, because again, to me, what the Speech from the Throne is actually representing is kicking that can down the road again. They are

telling us that down the road again there is a chance of hope.

Well, Mr. Chair, we have gone on long enough in hearing that. Particularly as I have been a Member of the House of Assembly since October 2011 that is what I have been hearing: kicking the can down the road. One of the most prime examples that I have heard happens to be with municipal funding. That is where I will start right now when it comes to municipal funding. What we have heard from the Speech from the Throne and from the announcements from the various ministers over the last little while is kicking the can down the road, when they are talking about a municipal funding formula.

Nearest as I can research it and nearest as what my researchers can find, we have heard it from government for approximately the past thirty-odd years, kicking the can down the road in the pursuit of a municipal funding formula. I have gone back as far as the 1980s for it. It was Churence Rogers, I think just last week, and I think that he referred to it from governments way back when he said that they have not been updated or applied since the mid-1980s, for example, when it came to Municipal Operating Grants.

There is a problem here when it comes to funding. Do you know what, Mr. Chair? It is the taxpayer who is getting caught in the middle here. It is the taxpayer who has to end up paying the piper at the end. That is what the residents of St. John's East are telling me.

At the same time, we want to hear government. Government comes out and they keep saying, for example – just to give the Chair an example of what I am talking about, we keep talking about wanting to keep seniors in their own homes. How many times have we heard that? It is both a health care thing in keeping people home for as long as possible so that we do not have to deal with them in the health care system. Government at the same time has failed in its initiative to find that successful Municipal Operating Grant formula or the municipal funding formulas at the same time.

It has hit my district pretty hard and it is probably going to hit my district pretty hard again in the future. When it comes to, for example, just the suggestion then the alarm bells start going on the part of government, when I hear the City of St. John's say, when I hear the representatives of my city saying that we want to hear government start to pay for its buildings, its services that the city is supplying to provincial government buildings.

Let's look at St. John's East. Let's look at what happened in the last provincial budget, Mr. Chair. What we saw was a lot of municipalities being hit when government ordered the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation, for example, to pull all of its grants. That worked out to be about \$10,000 I think it was per store. I think the City of St. John's alone, when that was pulled from the Budget as a cost-saving measure – about \$190,000 I think it was. The City of Mount Pearl lost a lot. Corner Brook I think lost \$80,000 in funding, and that funding was not replaced. That is one example.

When it comes to government buildings in my own district, the new Registry of Deeds down there at 55 Elizabeth Avenue, government moved in down there. It does not pay any taxes. Before, where Child Youth and Family Services are now, right there on the corner of Elizabeth Avenue and Portugal Cove Road, it used to be owned by Johnson Insurance. Now Johnson Insurance is a good corporate citizen, but they were paying municipal taxes to the City of St. John's – that building was, the property taxes. A couple of different levels of taxes actually.

You go around the corner to the corner of Argyle and Portugal Cove Road. It was owned by Johnson Insurance, another building owned by Johnson that was paying corporate taxes to government, yes, but paying municipal taxes for the properties that it owned. It is now owned by government and Transportation and Works down there at the corner of Argyle and Portugal Cove Road.

Those taxes are not being paid by government to the city in lost fees and services. This is where I

am talking about where the taxpayers are now at risk. If we have these government buildings that are not paying taxes for services that they are receiving – yes, guaranteed they do pass over some money back to the city when it comes to Municipal Operating Grants but they are not paying taxes on these particular facilities.

What we find is the taxpayer is going to end up being squeezed if the city is going to have a shortfall in revenue. That is where the problem lies and that is what I have heard from my own constituents. That is why government should be addressing a full proof way of funding for municipalities. Again, the taxpayer is caught in the middle.

The old Municipal Operating Grant system was based on population. Yes, the City of St. John's is growing as probably the City of Mount Pearl and other municipalities also have the initiative to show growth. There was some population loss of course in the 1990s and 2000s, so that was a little bit unsteady. The amounts have been so different over the years when it comes to funding for Municipal Operating Grants. They have been a little bit erratic when it comes to that, so government needs to find something that is steady, and working with the various municipalities, in particular Municipalities NL, Newfoundland and Labrador, and help work towards that system.

Since I have been elected we have heard this a multitude of times. I heard it in October 2011 during the general election. I heard it in March 2012 when it came to the provincial Budget. I heard it again in March-April of 2013 when it came to the provincial Budget, and I am going to hear it again in the next Budget. What do I read in the Throne Speech? Kick the can down the road because the Municipal Operating Grant and municipal funding is not going to be ready until the 2015-2016 Budget. We have to wait.

Mr. Chair, I will come back and I will talk to that again at a future time. Just a quick word on what else I did not see in Throne Speech and a very quick word at that because I see my time is running out. I did not see a single reference in there to environment and conservation, which

disturbed me. I know that while government wants to be progressive in its development of business, I did not see anything that came to the most alarming environmental concerns that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador tell me about, and that I get e-mails about all the time.

Particularly, I did not hear anything about the WERAC Committee that was so important the last time that they actually met with the Minister of Environment and Conservation. It was some time back when the former Member for St. John's South used to be Environment Minister. That was back in 2006. It has been a long time. It is time to appoint a new board so that we can look after our environment in the Province.

The other thing that I did not hear in the Throne Speech was about the whole issue of fracking and where we are going to be going with it in the Province when it comes to that. Not a word out of the government in the Throne Speech as to where it stands on its own internal review, what they have been finding, when they are going to be opening up this review to outside consultations and indeed to more scientific studies with regard to what is going to be happening in fracking.

Mr. Chair, I will leave it at that. I will pass the floor over to somebody else. My time is up. It will be a pleasure to stand again and stand in my place to speak on behalf of my constituents.

Thank you very much.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I stand in my place today with pride, to be honest with you. I am going to talk a little bit about, number one, my department but particularly who work in my department, and especially how proud I am in regard to the services that they deliver to the people of the Province. In three-quarters of my department it

is mostly the vulnerable people of our society who we service, Mr. Chair.

I just have to reference as well before I get into exactly what I want to talk about, I hear sometimes in this House that we do not do things, or the impression is left that we are not trying to do things and we have not had any kind of an impact in regard to the most vulnerable people in our Province which includes our seniors, Mr. Chair. My staff at Advanced Education and Skills, the various divisions of Advanced Education and Skills work tirelessly every day, long hours, to address the needs of the people of the Province when they are in need.

The Member for St. John's East referenced today in regard to a member's statement the seniors who were affected by a fire at Maplewood Apartments.

AN HON. MEMBER: St. John's South.

MR. O'BRIEN: St. John's South; I am sorry. I got the call over in Corner Brook and the Premier had a call from the member – yes, he did. When the Premier gave me a shout and when I had a call back to the member, my staff were well into the plan in regard to addressing the needs of those seniors. They were way ahead of the curve.

As soon as the fire happened, we go into action. We wait, we make contact, and we let the first responders do what they have to do. Then my staff goes to work in regard to addressing the needs. In this case here senior citizens were out of their homes; they had nowhere to go. Very few of them had family members who could take care of them. We took them and we took care of them. They went into various hotels across the city and we serviced them.

As a matter of fact there were relationships built between those senior citizens and my staff. At times I have heard that my staff actually embraced them, to comfort them. I thank my staff for that; I absolutely do. It makes me proud to be a Member of the House of Assembly, makes me proud to be the MHA for Gander, but

also makes me proud to be the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

As a matter of fact, there was an issue over in Corner Brook as well, and we responded instantly in regard to the displacement of several people in a boarding-type house who had to be displaced and we took care of them, without question.

So, it concerns me at times when the questions come and the impression is left that government, the people, the public servants, do not respond to the needs of the people, especially our most vulnerable – because we do. Can we eradicate poverty in one swoop? Absolutely not. Why did we invest across all government departments \$149 million, just about, annually in various things that help the most vulnerable of our Province? It is because we care about the most vulnerable of our Province.

We introduced the Poverty Reduction Strategy back in 2006, and now I can safely say that according to the stats that are accumulated on the national side, we have removed 36,000 people, approximately, from poverty. They no longer live in poverty in this Province, according to the methods that they use to measure those facts.

Have we still got people who need help? Absolutely, we do. I wish at times that we are not governed by a dollar, that we can do anything and everything that might come into our minds to help those people, but that is just not reality as well. So we have to make some decisions in regard to how we help those people, when we help those people, and how far we can go.

Again, the staff of Advanced Education and Skills – but not only that, let us move off the most vulnerable people and the services we provide. Not that long ago, only a few weeks ago, Cliffs Natural Resources made a decision for various reasons, economic reasons, financial reasons, to idle the mind up in Wabush.

The Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources went into Wabush right away to see

and comfort the people. I got a call from the Premier and said: Listen, what is happening? What can you do? Again, my action plan went into place and myself and two other ministers, along with the MHA and the Minister of Transportation and Works, were in there within a week.

I am happy to report that actually the first training session for those displaced workers was started this week. We are on the ground continually there addressing the issues, trying to solve the issues for those particular displaced workers. Trying to make sure that we transition them into other jobs, skill them up for other jobs, whatever we can do, and keep them in that region. It is really important that we keep the people in their various regions for various reasons.

If we were to lose that skilled workforce out of Lab West, well then we will have issues getting that workforce back again. My staff went way beyond that forty hours a week to address the needs of those particular people, both in Lab West Maplewood apartments and over in Corner Brook, and I thank them for that here today.

As well, I was listening carefully yesterday in regard to post-secondary education. We have done more than any government in the past with regard to supporting our students, students at MUN, students at the Marine Institute, students at CNA college, with tuition freezes and various other things with regard to moving loans to grants and so on and so forth.

Another item that people forget about with regard to our students here – and I am not saying that we cannot do more and we will not do more, but I just want to outline a couple of things. We have the lowest rate for residents in Canada. Somewhere we are 60-odd per cent lower than what a student will pay in, say, Nova Scotia, Dalhousie, or in the University of Ontario or the University of Ottawa or out in Alberta. We are actually 60-odd per cent and I know of one – I cannot quote it exactly, what that university is, but we are below everybody else.

That is a huge cost to students, huge cost in regard to their accommodations and where they are going to stay – and we have built a new residence down at Memorial that are being occupied right now. It is not just the tuition freezes that we have had in place since we took government, but it is those kinds of things that we have done. As the Premier referenced today, we opened up the new residence over in Grenfell last week, a beautiful facility. These are the kinds of things we have done over the last several years and we will continue to do so, but we do it in a fiscally responsible manner.

You just cannot get up in the House of Assembly or go into the Cabinet room in regard to the Budget process and decide we are just going to do it all. You cannot just do it all; that is not reality. It is absolutely not reality. That is not the way it works and I think the hon. members across the House know that, as well. They have to ask their questions, but I just wanted to clarify a number of things.

We are working right now, and we are pretty close to it, in regard to our Population Growth Strategy. We did our consultations across the Province in October and that strategy is just about ready, within the next weeks or so. It is very important to this Province in regard to our aging population. That is something that I will get up in my place in the House at a later date. I am running out of time here and I want to have a little chat about that with regard to the Population Growth Strategy and the immigration strategy we have in our Province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for the Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Just on a point of order, Mr. Chair.

To the minister and his staff, I do recognize the staff in Corner Brook and the hard work they did with the residents in Humber Road when they

helped move them. So we do recognize the staff in the department and the hard work they do.

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to get up and respond to some of the things that the Minister of Education had to say when he was on his feet. He is quite right; it is 14,000 and 17 per cent. I believe I had the numbers reversed.

As I said, we all make mistakes and as the government admitted yesterday, it has made many mistakes. That is why we heard the sound of beep, beep, beep, backing up throughout the Throne Speech, Mr. Chair. There is a whole book full of mistakes in fact, I say – a whole book full of mistakes – that was read from yesterday.

The minister said he has been out to schools all over the Province, and I envy him because that is a great opportunity he has to go out and see on the ground the impact of the lack of resources and the lack of supports we have for our teachers, our educators, our students, administrators, and school staff. It is a great opportunity to go see the direct impact of the cuts made last year and other problems in our schools. Hopefully, he will act on the things that he sees.

He said he was up to the Northern Peninsula. I do not know if he went to St. Lunaire-Griquet because they recently closed the school up there, Bayview Collegiate. I am not sure if he dropped by that school but it is no longer open and now those kids are all being bused, and really against the wishes of a good number of parents, to St. Anthony in inclement weather in the winter. They do not have balmy tropical weather on the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula. It can be quite difficult driving conditions and quite a long commute to school for kids.

He was talking about these modulars and how they are state-of-the-art modulars. Well, in the

Goulds, Paradise, and Mount Pearl system they are now trying to deal with government's lack of planning for population growth and demographic changes here on the Northeast Avalon. They are grappling with that in the city now and in the periphery. In Goulds, in Paradise, and in Mount Pearl they are reconfiguring a lot of the schools out there as a result of that. It is creating no end of problems.

We have elementary school kids now who are going to be going to junior highs. We have junior high students who are going to be put in senior high class schools. There is not a whole lot of communication about the impacts that is going to have on the curriculum where you are taking children who are in the junior high school system, a non-credit based system, and putting them in a credit-based environment. There are a lot of challenges associated with that.

There are a lot of challenges associated with having schools that are K-3, Grades 4-6, Grades 7-9, and Levels I-III. It is hard to build a school community when every other year you are going to a different school. It is hard to keep siblings together. Moms and dads like it when their kids are close in age for them to be able to go to school together. They like to be able to drop them off at the same school in the morning, especially when you have two working parents. It makes things a lot less difficult.

In terms of those modulars, the parents at St. Peter's Elementary would like to have one of those state-of-the-art modular gymnasiums, Mr. Chair, because they need one at St. Peter's. They would like to have a state-of-the-art modular resource room. They need one because they are losing it at St. Peter's Elementary. They would like to have a state-of-the-art modular music room because they need one at St. Peter's Elementary.

We talk about the size of schools and not being big enough. In some schools, the minister has to admit, kids are jammed in there. They are eating their lunch at their desks; they are doing phys. ed. in the cafeteria. All is not well. There are a lot of problems and a lot of them are associated

with space and failure to plan for demographic changes over time.

Then in other communities we have schools that are closed. It would be nice for the minister to be so generous as to table an inventory; a list of all of those idling closed schools across Newfoundland and Labrador in rural communities, because there are lots of them. The lights are on, the heat is on, the power is hooked up in the middle of the winter, and somebody is paying for that. Somebody is paying for that when the light is on because sometimes the energy warehouse is empty. We all experienced that this winter.

There are all sorts of problems. The pipes freeze-up, then the power is out, and then they put it all back on. Who takes care of all of that? There are communities in rural Newfoundland and Labrador who would like to be able to access these buildings. Some of them would actually like to buy them.

If the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District is not planning on using these for educational purposes, then God knows we can use them for community purposes, for economic development rather than have them there, like I said, all year long, lights on and heat on. Businesses in those communities wanting to get space, communities wanting recreation space, and here are idling schools up the road using up power and electricity at a cost to the taxpayer and no one knows when they are going to be available for use.

Back to what I was saying earlier about the lack of consultation and openness with respect to the shutdown of those three school districts, when the Member for Gander district, the Minister of Education, went out to Gander there last summer and they had this meeting that was referred to as not having a lot of substance with the area Chamber of Commerce, they were talking about the decision to consolidate these school districts. I know the minister has said he is not getting a lot of complaints, but people ought to question because certainly we were promised that this was being done for the sake of student achievement. I would like to see the evidence

that has changed in the last number of months since we have consolidated to this school district. He made all sorts of promises otherwise and we have not seen a whole lot of evidence to that effect.

The person who was interviewed for this story said, "From my perspective, this whole decision lays with the Minister (of Education)... there's been no background, there's been no research... he (Minister Jackman) did say there was research done with Halifax Regional Municipality and Durnham Regional Municipality (in Ontario)." He said: I cannot understand why they would look at a municipal setting and not a rural setting like Manitoba, like Saskatchewan, or something like that.

He went on to talk about the impact then, the economic impact, of the school district consolidation, somewhere in the order of forty-odd layoffs. Of course, in communities, that has a significant impact. There is a ripple effect through the economy.

From the Chamber of Commerce perspective, in the Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce, they said: We think the economic impact is going to be huge, about \$2.3 million in terms salary losses. Of course, we have not seen any savings of money, so that is really just shifted somewhere else. I mean, that is really a consolidation of another kind: the consolidation of government services, government operation, closer to the minister's office here in St. John's.

The other thing he said: The government is not seeing the whole picture of this going down the road. What is going to be the long-term impact of that? That is just from an economic perspective; that is not from an educational perspective.

Then, on top of that, you have to consider last year the cuts in the budget, cuts to specialist teachers in intermediate schools. As of September last year, there was only one specialist teacher for every 150 students, instead of one for every 125. Those are important jobs. Those are teachers who teach music, teachers

who teach fine arts, teachers who teach physical education.

There was a news story that was the top of the news there just recently, last week – I know the Minister of Health and Community Services knows what I am talking about – obesity, an epidemic almost in this Province. These are serious, serious issues and here we are cutting back specialist teachers in the area of physical education. Again, we have kids in schools doing gym class in the cafeteria. Of course, cafeterias, even if they are in these state-of-the-art modular classrooms that they have to back up and put into the parking lots a couple of days after they build a new school like they did in my colleague, the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace's district, even if they are in those state-of-the-art modulars cafeterias were not made for gym.

While the kids are doing gym in the cafeteria, the other kids that are supposed to be having their lunch in the cafeteria are eating it at their desks and it causes serious problems with respect to cleanliness and hygiene and so on in schools.

CHAIR (Verge): Order, please!

I remind the member that his time for speaking has expired.

MR. KIRBY: There is a whole lot to this and I will have a lot more to say later.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It certainly is a pleasure to stand here in the House today and talk to Interim Supply. It is good to be back in the House so we can do some debating. I want to talk a little bit about my district, Wabush, what has happened in the last recent months. There has been quite a bit of

changes in Wabush there. I certainly have to compliment government, not because I am a member of the government, but on the fast reaction that we had when government found out on a Tuesday afternoon that Wabush Mines was going into an idling mode. That meant that approximately 400 people were automatically out of work.

What Cleveland-Cliffs did rather than give a twelve-week notice, which is in legislation – they had to give a twelve-week notice to the employees that they were going into an idling mode – Cleveland decided to give all of the employee twelve weeks pay in lieu of notice. You went to work that evening and as a matter of fact that evening at 4:00 o'clock if you were not at work and you were scheduled to go to work, you were told stay home for the rest of the week and then we will let you know what is happening.

The word devastation was used quite a bit. I used it myself when it came to the employees of Wabush Mines. It was devastating to watch in a community that was very vibrant, all of a sudden there is no smoke coming out of those stacks. When government found out at 4:00 o'clock that afternoon, the Premier called me and he said: What do we need to do? I said: Premier, I would like to have you in on the ground. Myself and Minister Dalley, the Minister of Natural Resources, were going in anyway. Immediately the Premier said: Let's make the arrangements. The quick reaction that government had did not go unnoticed in my district.

Myself, the Minister of Natural Resources, and the Premier were there the next day. We met with the union representatives, we met with both municipalities, and we met with the company. The Premier listened to the people, he listened to the municipalities, and he listened to company. He came out and he reassured everybody that within a week there would be a full team in on the ground.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Skills was put in charge of that team. I have to thank the minister for his promptness. Within six days there were four ministers and a full team of

senior officials who went in and immediately set up a program to start what is happening on a daily basis now. As you heard the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills allude to earlier when he spoke that there are extra programs. There are all kinds of programs started now to assist the people on bridging through this gap that we are going through there.

I have to compliment government on how fast they have reacted. I would also like to take this opportunity to compliment the unions. The union president of local 6285, I have a very good relationship with him, with his executive. I talk to him almost on a daily basis, we work very closely together, and he is doing a phenomenal job just keeping things calm in the community. He is getting answers for the people. People are getting into programs. He is out job researching. There are job fairs happening in the community now, not just for the displaced workers with Wabush Mines or Cleveland-Cliffs but for all of the displaced workers, because you have 400 employees at Wabush Mines that would be displaced, but that affects about 1,100 people who would be affected in jobs.

I am really pleased with the work that the union is doing, and the union and government working together. Also, there is a new young mayor in Wabush, and that mayor has certainly dug his feet in. He is doing a very good job keeping his municipality at a very calm, steady pace that things are happening, and working again closely with government and working with the unions.

So, out of all of the negativity that we have seen, we are also seeing some silver linings; we are seeing some positive things. Things that I have wanted in my district for a long time, through different programs now, especially through the Advanced Education and Skills, that we are trying to expedite different programs in the community – in the College of the North Atlantic, there are new programs. Getting the blocks done – normally, there is a space between doing one block and then you have to have so many hours to go into the next block.

So, Advanced Education and Skills, through the college, is really working with the displaced employees to try to get them into their Red Seal programs, and it is working well. We have the other companies within the municipality – the Iron Ore Company of Canada, for example, has had a job fair there; Nalcor is having a job fair this coming week in the community. Of course, the announcement of the third transmission line, the timing of that was very good.

I have to comment that a lot of people, the naysayers, I will say, were saying that the reason the third transmission line was announced when it was, was to try and sort of blanket the issue that was happening with Wabush Mines. There is nothing further from the truth. This government was negotiating to make sure that we did not end up with a deal like we had in 1969 with the Upper Churchill. We wanted to make sure that corporate tax dollars stayed within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – and that is exactly what we achieved. I remember sitting with the Premier when we finally got the go-ahead that the deal was done, sitting down in a room in Wabush at 10:30 that night. That is when we got the word that we could move on that.

I was really pleased that happened. That will also create more jobs in the district. In Labrador as a whole, this government for the last ten years – and I have only got about three minutes left so I certainly cannot get into depth. In every portfolio in this government there have been investments in Labrador.

One of the things that we have done was the Northern Strategic Plan which was put together in 2007. At the time it was put together it had 145 commitments and it allocated \$250 million. To date, we have over 244 commitments in that Northern Strategic Plan and we have invested over \$870 million. I think that is a great investment into the Labrador region.

Recently, I was at the Combined Councils of Labrador on the South Coast of Labrador. It reminds me of the medical attention that is being put into Labrador. I guess I had the displeasure - not the pleasure - of having to spend my

Saturday at the clinic there. I have to say when you are on the South Coast of Labrador – sometimes you hear we do not have this, we do not have that, and the medical is missing this and it is missing that. I will tell you when I went to the clinic in Forteau I received very professional and very good service.

The Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair can certainly pass that on to the medical staff there. They are a very professional staff and they have what they need. It is a beautiful clinic in the area there. Those are the investments that this government have made. That is one example. I had to spend my Saturday there and I was shocked. One of the things I had to have done was a chest X-ray. I had the results of the chest X-ray within ten minutes.

When you hear that of these remote areas and they do not have the medical services, I can guarantee you the service I received was second to none. I was very pleased. More pleased I did not have to spend the night in a hospital, which was the original thing that they told me. The service that I received – and the technology today allowed them to get the job done so I did not have to be admitted into the hospital there.

I think one of the other big things – because I only have a minute left and I want to touch on it. I know I will get other opportunities to stand up and talk about some of the things. It is really exciting. For many years now the Trans-Labrador Highway is being built, it is one of the largest pieces of road infrastructure that this government has taken on. It is over 1,100 kilometres of not resurfacing a road or not fixing a road, it is actually building 1,100 kilometres of highway.

This summer - there is sixty kilometres left from Labrador West and Happy Valley – Goose Bay. I spoke with the Member for Lake Melville last night and I said to him, I would love for the both of us, with both of our districts coming together with that pavement, that both of us are going to be there that day to make sure that we are there when that last inch of pavement is laid. That is a milestone.

I am running out of time. I will get an opportunity to stand up again. I do not mind patting this government on the back because I know we are doing very good things and we will continue to with that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

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

I am very happy to stand and to speak today. I am very happy that the House is open and that we all have this opportunity to be together as people who have been elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to speak on their behalf, to be their voices. I know that many of us have done a lot of work in our districts in between when the House was last open and yesterday.

Mr. Chair, I have had the privilege of listening, really listening, listening with the intention of hearing, listening to people in my district, listening to community groups in my district, community groups that are doing incredible work sometimes under the most difficult of circumstances because of the load of work that they have to do, the minimum funding that they have but doing incredible work, being experts in their areas. I assume that people will say oh my God, here she goes again, she is going to talk about the Family Violence Intervention Court. You know it is what I have to do. I feel that I have a moral obligation to stand today and to speak about the Family Violence Intervention Court because it is such an important court and it did such important work.

The wonderful thing about the Family Violence Intervention Court is that this current government under the leadership of the current Premier – was actually the Minister of Justice when the Family Violence intervention Court was instated. Before the court was actually put on line there was a lot of money, a lot of energy, and a lot of work undertaken to ensure that this

was best practice. There was a lot of research that was done. The court was built on a foundation of expertise. It was not something that was whipped up out of nothing. There were a lot of community groups, women's groups and experts in the area who were not only consulted they were actually involved in the design of the court. The court was a jewel in our crown in terms of the justice services that were provided by this government. It worked; it did what it was supposed to do. Even our current Minister of Justice has said that the court did what it was supposed to do. He had no problem with that.

I do not think anybody has given us a good explanation as to why the court was cut except the Minister of Justice did say it only served St. John's. I do not think that is a reason to cut the court. The court was doing well; there was an internal review that was undertaken that showed the court was doing well. There were some areas where some improvement could be made, which is great, that is what reviews are for. I have asked a number of times for the Minister of Justice to release that review and he says no, that it is Cabinet secrecy, Cabinet confidentiality. That also makes no sense to me at all. This is a public program that was paid for by public money, serving the public. This is not about Cabinet confidentiality, this report; the internal review of the court should be released.

One of the things about the court is it was a pilot project for a year, and then it was renewed and renewed and renewed, and there were recommendations from Women's Policy. There were recommendations from the Department of Justice that the court be actually a permanent project and that the funding was coming from justice, it was no longer a pilot project.

The unique characteristic of the court was that an offender – similar to drug courts which we see all across the country, in order for an offender to be able to take part in the Family Violence Intervention Court the offender had to plead guilty, had to take responsibility for his or her, but in most cases it was his, actions. He had to be able to stand up in a courtroom and say yes, this is what I did, I take full responsibility and I am willing to change, and by willing to

change means that he would go to therapy and rehabilitation programs. It was an ideal situation. Particularly there were a lot of young families who used this court. The reason they used this court is because they wanted to be able to stay together.

It is not just any offender who could go to this court, there was a risk assessor. The risk assessor would meet with the family, meet with the spouse, the partner who was the victim separately, and would meet with the offender and assess whether or not this person would be an ideal candidate for the rehabilitation and treatment programs and to ensure that the woman and the children would be safe. The goal was to be able to keep the family together, if that is what they all wanted, and to assess whether or not that was a possibility, whether they were ideal candidates for the courts.

The other research showed that any intervention in domestic violence is most effective when it happens as close as possible to the time of offence. What we see in the regular court system is that it is often up to a year before an offender goes to court. Then if the offender is mandated to treatment, that does not happen until a year after the offence has taken place. We all know that does not make sense. Who can really remember exactly what they did a year ago? What happens then is that a lot of victims want to drop charges.

It was an ideal situation and it really worked. In order for it to work the police had to refer victims to this court, so it took a long time for the police to trust this new court. Also, because the offenders had to plead guilty, it took a long time for defence lawyers. What defence lawyer on the face of the earth wants their clients to plead guilty? Nobody wants their clients to plead guilty so it took a while for defence lawyers to buy in. It took a while for the police to buy in; it took a while for defence lawyers to buy in. Also, it took a while for offenders to buy in.

As well, we know that women and children have not really had an easy ride in the justice system. We know that they have not been treated really

well in the justice system. It took a while for victims as well to believe, to trust this court that they would be protected. We know that family violence often is very cyclical. It took a while for everybody to buy in but, Mr. Chair, buy in they did.

Finally, defence lawyers were trusting the court, victims were trusting the court, police were trusting the court, and we saw an increase in the number of referrals to the Family Violence Intervention Court. Now is not the time to stop it. As a matter of fact it is quite the opposite, now is the time to encourage it, to support it and to expand it so that families of Newfoundland and Labrador could avail of the services of this court.

This court was about healing; it was about true justice, it was about rehabilitation, which is what we want from our justice system. We do not want to lock up people, we want people to rehabilitate. That is what this court did.

The stats proved it. The recidivism rate for offenders was 10 per cent. Only 10 per cent of offenders reoffended. That is significant. That is incredibly significant. There has never been any hope before about violent offenders in domestic violence really rehabilitating, so it was working. The interesting thing about this program is that it was collaborative.

A few months ago a participant in Youth Parliament presented a private member's resolution to restore the Family Violence Intervention Court. Do you know what happened? Within twenty minutes every single participant in the Youth Parliament voted to reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court. Perhaps it is the youth who are going to lead us in the future. Perhaps it is the youth who understand this better.

Mr. Chair, I challenge every single member across the floor to have the courage to stand up and support the reinstatement of this court. This court is about saving, it is about protecting the women and children in your district. In each and every one of their districts, Mr. Chair, there are victims of family violence because we know

we have among the highest rate in the country. We have among the highest rate of family violence in the country.

I challenge my colleagues across the floor to have the courage and the commitment to stand up for this court, to ask their government to reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court. At times it is about saving money and it could be very well about saving lives as well. I am not being overly dramatic here, Mr. Chair, we know, everybody on the other side knows that it is the right thing to do. It is no longer a political issue. This is not a political issue. This is about doing the right thing. I invite you all to do the right thing.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation and the Minister Responsible for Innovation, Business and Rural Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Like I have said in this House many times, I used to display a big calculator here one time that I still have over in the office. I am soon going to have to bring it back because every time I see the Third Party up speaking all I can think about is money and the amount of money that they would spend. They never talk about the fiscal side, some of the fiscal realities you have to face.

It is very easy to be everything to everybody, Mr. Chair, but there will come a time when you have pay the bottom line. There is only so long you can buy the groceries on your Visa before it backs up and stops. That is something the Third Party always forgets about. That is why every now and then in jest and for fun I break out this

big calculator, but there is a serious point to that. We only have to look at what happened in Ontario a number of years ago. The NDP was in charge of things and they just about bankrupt Ontario, one of the most well-to-do places in the country.

I can give you example; I remember in the last election there was an issue, and the NDP were gaining a little bit of momentum. They were throwing around jugglers, going around handing out oranges and cans of orange drink, and it was Orange Crush. It was love, hope, and I believe faith was their other word.

They were doing very well and they were starting to bleep on the polling. All of a sudden somebody in Lab West, where my friend and colleague is elected today – that was a fairly close race at one point in the early going. Someone said, where are the NDP getting all the money? Lab West is a union town. There are a lot of hard working people in Lab West.

All of sudden someone said, where are they getting all the money? Someone said, let's read the NDP's book, their orange book, or whatever they want to call it – the love, hope, and faith book. They read the book, and somewhere in the fine print, right down in the back was we are going to increase taxes. That is how we are going pay for everything; we are going to increase taxes. The people of Lab West are hardworking, they are earning good money. They started to think about that for a minute.

It is alright to promise the moon, but somebody has to pay for it. That is what happens with the NDP. When you read the fine print in their policy and their dreams, then you quickly find out that they do it on the backs of every person in this Province by increasing taxes. That is how they pay for the promises that they make, they have no other choice. They can be everything to everybody, as long as you take money from people. That is their policy and that is their platform.

Mr. Chair, I wanted to talk about a couple of things, a couple of events actually that I have been to in the last few weeks, and some of the

good things that are happening in this Province that I am proud to say our government played a significant role in, as well as members on this side of the House played a significant role in. It is good things happening in this Province that sometimes we probably do not talk about enough.

The first area I would like to talk about is sports. We just saw the 2014 Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games in Clarenville. I have to say, it is the twentieth anniversary. Twenty years ago they hosted the winter games, and twenty years before that it was Carbonear – Harbour Grace which did a great job as well. The twentieth anniversary for CBS will be 2016. Three of those games were announced together.

Just let me say, Mr. Chair, if I could, that I have been to several games, and I have been to the ones in my own community. I am telling you, Clarenville has raised the bar to a new level. For anybody now to host the games, the people of Clarenville have really shown the rest of the Province how it should be done.

There were 1,400 athletes, coaches, and about 500 volunteers. They had a host committee that was phenomenal. I went out there and I spent a couple of days out there, presented some medals, and watched some sports. Being a sports fan, of course, that was not too hard a task. I walked around and you run into different people within the sporting community. Everybody to an individual came up and told me how well the games were going.

I remember one of the people came up to me in particular and talked about the food. Now, Mr. Chair, these people who are working in these kitchens and catering to 800 people a day, with all due respect, when you are serving 800 people, anybody who has cooked anything, if you made Kraft Dinner, you know that if you have to make it for 800 there is a good chance the people at the end of the line are not going to get it as good as the people at the front of the line. The reality of it is they praised up the food. I said to the organizers after, when people are coming up complimenting the food at this kind

of an event, then obviously it was a well-run event and it was very well orchestrated.

Government helped the group. I think it was about \$500,000 that this government injected into the games. It is one of the areas as a government we have continued to grow and grow. When we first formed government, Mr. Chair, the budget of the sports department or the recreation department in this Province was \$1.3 million. Today that stands at \$7.7 million, a significant increase in the sports community and one of the things that we have tried to protect because we realize how important it is for us to have our kids involved in sport.

I have read articles on this. The people who have been involved in sport and recreation, many of them, men and women, have gone on to achieve much greater things in life. They become good citizens, they learn value, and they learn how to win and lose – to lose and win. It is not always an easy thing to handle sometimes, someone who has been on both sides of the coin. It does make you a stronger individual. The people who you meet and the leadership that follows with that certainly help our young people.

Then we have just from a health and wellness piece. I know myself and the Minister of Health here, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, both our departments have actually partnered on the seniors' recreation grants, which we have just seen released now: \$400,000 to seniors' groups all across this Province. It is great to see. It is a significant investment in seniors' recreation throughout the Province.

Mr. Chair, I think it is about \$600,000 we have invested recently throughout the year that goes to small communities. Some of the larger communities obviously have recreation directors and so on, but some of the smaller ones struggle with that. Places or communities that have under 8,000 people can also qualify for a recreation grant. Then we have of course our recreation capital grants, which are broken out through all regions of the Province, are shared throughout the Province, and pay great dividends. I have seen the letters. I have

received the letters of people who have used them towards playgrounds, ball fields, fences, hockey nets, and the list goes on and on.

I have to say I am delighted with the games in Clarenville. They have certainly set the bar for us in Conception Bay South in 2016. I have every reason to believe that we can compete and we will do our best to do just as good a job as they did in Clarenville. I take my hat off to them, and especially the host committee because having my family being involved in previous games I know the amount of hours that this takes for individuals, taking away from their families and their regular lives to create an atmosphere for our kids to enjoy a sporting event. Again, I take my hat off to it.

As a government, I am certainly proud we could play a role. I think we gave them about \$200,000 for the operations of the games. We gave them another \$150,000 for the transportation for the games and then there were other things that were all sent.

I have to also, Mr. Chair, mention the Speaker of the House. He is not allowed to be political and certainly he is not political here in this venue or outside this venue, but I want to tell you the games in Clarenville would not have happened without him. The reason I say that is because I was minister of sport before they became announced and obviously I wanted them in Conception Bay South. The Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace at the time wanted the games, I wanted the games in Conception Bay South, and everybody wanted the games, so we had to make some tough decisions. The Member for Trinity North was certainly advocating strongly, to put it mildly, for his group.

As well, then he went on to look after the venues. He went to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Member for Gander at the time actually, and the Member for Gander made it happen for him and helped him along with some of the venues. Of course, then he went to recreation as well and we did our thing for him. He has been an advocate for his area, for Trinity North, and I want to take my hat off to him. As

I said to him throughout, you could not beat the smile off his face because it was such a great thing for community.

We think about it from a sporting event, but obviously from a community event it certainly brings your community together like nothing else. As well, I certainly want to take my hat off to the mayor and council who also played a significant role and used some of their money to help sport. Sport is one of these things, Mr. Chair, that if you are not dedicated to it, it is very easy to knock it off the ledger when you are trying to balance the books. To lead a balanced lifestyle you have to have a bit of everything obviously, and sometimes sport and rec takes the back seat in a lot of communities in this Province because it is an easy thing to say no to. I am delighted to see that Clarenville is certainly not one of these places.

Our government does not believe in that either. Like I said, we have taken it from a \$1.3 million budget to a \$7.7 million budget and I am certainly proud of that.

I want to thank you for the time to speak about sport here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is nice to be back in the House for my second sitting. We are hearing lots today. My colleague was mentioning the Speech from the Throne. I felt like walking in today with two big Labrador flags and saying here we are, we are a Big Land, and we are half of the Province.

As I was listening yesterday to the Speech from the Throne I heard reference to Labrador twice, a couple of times regarding Muskrat Falls. Every day when I am back in my district people remind me of all of the things that we are not getting from Muskrat Falls. The other thing I

heard in the Speech from the Throne was about the third line going to Labrador West and how that is going to help sustain the pulp and paper mill in Corner Brook.

Labrador is a beautiful part of this Province. We certainly contribute, we feel, more than our fair share through projects like IOC, Voisey's Bay, and soon we are going to have the power flowing from Muskrat Falls. The thing is, Mr. Chair, we have never asked. Sometimes people say you are always whining about this and that, and they make you feel like you need a little bit of cheese to go with your whine. In actuality, we have been trying to catch up and trying to catch up. There is no comparison. Yes, it costs more to do business in Labrador, but sometimes to have true equity you have to have the unequal treatment of equals.

The year started, and it was a tough one for us so far. While most of the people on the Island were dealing with DarkNL, we started with big ferry woes. Yes, the minister said it is an old-time year; we have lots of ice and we know the ice is four feet thick. However, there are a lot of things that can be done to improve that situation.

I know sometimes in social media people will jump on and say Labrador is talking about the poor ferry service again, but here is what happened. We moved off a little island because we could not get good ferry service. We could not get all of the services that we needed where we were in a rural remote area.

Mr. Chair, the thing is this ferry to Labrador is not to one small community. We have a population of about 30,000 people in Labrador. We do not have a road on the North Coast. This ferry serves about 25,000 people in Labrador and that is why. When the ferry cannot move because of ice conditions, why were there no alternatives that were offered to the people?

I have been talking about the medical transportation program. We have got a lot of seniors in the area who depend on that. So, we have a lot of people travelling on that ferry, who get into Corner Brook for what they think is going to be two or three nights and it has been

turning into seven, eight, and nine nights, because of the conditions of the ice.

We have a school being built in Charlottetown – and like my colleagues, I do not mind giving credit where credit is due. I worked closely with the Minister of Education on that, and we really did not have to build the case, the case was there, the school was full of mould, the kids were sick. I am very thankful that the Minister of Education did something to help us, because our school board certainly was not at that time.

Now, a couple of days ago, because of the ferry situation, I was told by the inspector they may have to shut down the school project. Here we have kids who are stuffed in a little room, it is a clean, dry environment, it is good for learning in, but it is not a school environment when you have a high school shoved in a little room doing CDLI. Most of the time this year my daughter wants to stay home. She is doing a heavy course load and she cannot focus.

That is just another one of the barriers that we are dealing with, and talk about poor vision and poor planning. It is really, really disheartening when we think of all the ferry woes that we have had this year, and all of what it is costing us, why have we not begun the planning to go under the ice? We have got a subsea cable that is going across the Strait of Belle Isle that is going to cost over a billion dollars, and we have got over 900 tunnels in Norway.

The engineers in Norway are saying: What is wrong? There is not one tunnel in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. When Route 138 is connected, we are going to be so far behind and we are going to miss the boat. What a waste of money. With that subsea cable going across, it could have gone through a tunnel and the millions and millions of dollars that is spent on a very unreliable ferry service each year could certainly be dealt with.

The ferry woes have cost residential and commercial traffic. I have business owners calling me saying there are no fruits, there are no vegetables, and there is no milk in the store. Just imagine, here we are, my colleague from

Burgeo – La Poile was talking about the high cost of health in the Province and the forty cents on every dollar that we are spending in the Budget, yet the people in my area right now are prohibited from even eating healthy because the supplies are not there.

I am going to touch on a number of different issues, but it is very sad that we did not have the planning and we did not have the vision of this government to bring all that together. Then we have the deplorable conditions of our roads –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS DEMPSTER: It is 5:00 o'clock now? Well, it looks like I am going to have to pick up the rest of my issues for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair next week because we have something else that is coming down that I will speak to shortly.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to have a few words this afternoon on the Supply bill. A lot of the members in the House here are standing up and talking about different things. I am sure the people out there are saying: What are they talking about today?

When we debate a money bill, we can basically talk about anything within government. That is why you will hear different stories. Some of it has to do with district issues; some of it has to do with provincial issues, Mr. Chair. It is always a pleasure to get up and speak in the House, especially when members like myself on the government side see what this government is doing and all the good things that we are doing in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to continue doing these wonderful things.

Mr. Chair, just this fiscal year alone more than \$20 million has been approved under the IBRD programs for regional and business development initiatives. I do not think there is going to be

enough time this afternoon to talk about the Regional Development Fund through IBRD that this government has brought in and the investments we have made in rural areas. That is where a lot of our focus is, on rural areas. In order to have vibrant and sustainable communities, we need to build capacity. That is what we are doing as a government. It is being appreciated by a lot of people out there, especially the ones who take control of their community. They want to work together and collaborate together with the different organizations, and then work with government. They can see the rewards for their efforts.

Just this past week I had the pleasure of joining the Minister of Justice and the MHA for Grand Bank in St. Lawrence on Monday. We had a great investment there with the Heritage Run Tourism Association. That amount of money was \$101,000 announced on Monday to improve access to Chambers Cove Trail Network. We all know the story of the *USS Truxtun* and *USS Pollux* shipwrecks and the story of the rescue that took place there. They are building from that, Mr. Chair, and they have hundreds of visitors there every year. Of course, we know where tourism is going in this Province and the type of industry that we are building.

On Tuesday, I had the privilege of attending another announcement with the MHA for Grand Bank in Fortune actually. That announcement was \$177,000 for a new ferry terminal extension in Fortune, Mr. Chair. Again, another rural area of our wonderful Province and the mayor and the councillors and the port authority are all working hard down there to build capacity, to build industry, to make the communities economically viable. That is what we are doing as a government, and we intend to work with the communities in the rural areas and we intend to build on that in order to keep doing this good work that we are doing, and there is going to be more.

I do not know if I have time, Mr. Chair; I know there are so many people who want to speak. I would just like to touch on a couple of investments, and it is only just a few compared to what this government has done, Mr. Chair. In

January, \$279,000 to Alpine Development Alliance Corporation in Clarendville to support the resort infrastructure there; the Barber Living Heritage Village, \$115,000 in Cape Freels; \$250,000, Goodfellow in Deer Lake – that is, of course, the district of the Leader of the Official Opposition – for a pressure treated wood facility, and these announcements were made back recently; \$457,000 to Conception Bay South for the T’Railway; and another \$147,000 to the marina project in Glovertown.

Mr. Chair, this is called strengthening rural communities through sound investment. IBRD, in case some people are not aware of it, has twenty-two regional and field offices throughout the Province to help continue capacity building and support ongoing development with the many community partners. We certainly want to continue these investments in rural areas.

Mr. Chair, that is what we talk about as our government is creating opportunities for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I thank you very much for the opportunity and hopefully I will get another chance.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

MS SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, it is an honour to be able to speak in the House of Assembly this afternoon. I want to speak about an issue that affects everyone in this Province, and it is certainly something that is important to all of the parties that sit in the House as well.

Mr. Chair, some issues should never be politicized. Some issues permeate the policies of every party and the platform for each and every party is the same. The public policy becomes a no-brainer and we look at a coin that only has one side.

Mr. Chair, one of these issues is violence against women. No matter what political party you represent, and no matter what Legislature you sit in this country or if you are in Parliament, you will not put forward a platform that does not support issues or measures to reduce violence against women. It is an issue that we have had in our society for many, many years and it is an issue that we continue to have in our society. Many times you would think that we are in 2014 and this does not happen anymore, but it does and we hear about these issues every single day. The ones that get the most media attention are the most violent instances of all when we hear of a murder.

We have too many women who lose their lives in this Province every single year at the hands of an intimate partner, Mr. Chair. We need to address these issues. One of the things we have done as a government for the last number of years since we have been in government is the Violence Prevention Initiative. We talk about it all the time. I am going to take some time today to explain it in a little bit more detail as to why it is so important.

Earlier today, we heard the Member for Lake Melville give his member’s statement to talk about Loretta Saunders. We are all very acutely aware of the plight of Loretta Saunders and what has happened. There is no one in this Province who was not taken aback when we heard her story. When we knew this young woman was missing we all hoped that maybe she would show up again in a day or two. Then, when that did not happen, everyone started to think that maybe something more sinister has happened here. Then, as a country we were gripped with sadness and outrage when we heard what had happened to Loretta Saunders.

Loretta Saunders was a young woman who was from Newfoundland and Labrador. She was an Aboriginal woman and she was studying. Her area of study was to look at missing and murdered Aboriginal women. There is no way that this woman could ever have foreshadowed that her life would represent her study and her research.

Her death brought out calls for an inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women. It did not start the call for an inquiry it sparked it again because this request had been on the table for quite some time. We need to listen when we hear our Aboriginal women speak. Aboriginal women experience violence at a higher rate than other women in our country. They know what they are talking about. They see it, and they have lived with it. Many of them who we have to listen to who present these issues have been victims themselves. We have to take what they are saying extremely seriously, Mr. Chair.

As I prepared for the House of Assembly today I anticipated there would be a question in Question Period about a call for an inquiry, so I was prepared. I have with me and I am willing to share it with all Members of the House of Assembly. Back in 2013 our then Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Aboriginal Affairs wrote a letter to support a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Our position has never changed on that.

I also have with me a copy of a news story where our former Premier was quoted as saying there is support for a national inquiry. We acknowledge that our position has never changed on that. It is something that we stood by over a year ago and we continue to stand by that today, Mr. Chair.

Our Violence Prevention Initiative is one that looks at several different priority areas. We look at increasing awareness and attitudinal change. This is extremely important. I want to go through these principles again, our priority areas: we want to increase awareness and attitudinal change; we want to increase community participation; we want to improve legislation, policy, programs, services, information, and facilities; we want to support Aboriginal women and children; and we want to enhance research and development and improve leadership, co-ordination and accountability.

Violence takes many forms. We often hear of spiritual, cultural violence, sexual, emotional, psychological, and physical violence. Mr. Chair, all these forms of violence typically take

place before the physical violence. Before a woman reports physical violence she has probably experienced violence many, many times and in various forms.

We identified Aboriginal women in our Violence Prevention Initiative as a vulnerable population. We have had specific programs and funding dedicated directly to Aboriginal women. We have grants that go to organizations that support violence prevention initiatives for Aboriginal women. I am sure I will have an opportunity to talk about that again, Mr. Chair.

We often have the debate of how do we best position our finances when we deal with family violence issues? Our Violence Prevention Initiative reminds me oftentimes of campaigns about drinking and driving. It is not going to help the situation if we increase the fines for impaired driving or we put people in jail longer. What is really, truly going to impact impaired driving is if people do not drink and drive. If we can get at awareness and we can at attitudes and we change people's behaviour, we then help prevent others from getting hurt. That is exactly what our Violence Prevention Initiative focusses on.

When we have to deal with limited finances we have to make a decision as government, do we put it in Family Violence Court and then we deal with people and there have already been assaults? Or do we continue to focus on prevention to ensure that we have a population of young people who understand the roots of violence, who understand to work with their community and the services that are available? Mr. Chair, these are very difficult decisions that you are faced with sometimes, but attitudinal change, awareness, working together, spreading the message and ensuring that people are safe in our communities is extremely important.

Not everyone in this House may agree with that, Mr. Chair, but if we are going to have long-term changes for any population, and in particular Aboriginal women who suffer more than the women in other segments of our society, we have to be serious and we have to have the appropriate services available. We have to make

sure that we have populations and generations of people who do not have to experience the same level of abuse that our foremothers have experienced.

Mr. Chair, after consultation with the other parties, government will be moving an all-party resolution to ask for a national inquiry on missing and murdered Aboriginal women. This is something that is extremely important to the women of Canada, the women of Newfoundland and Labrador, and in particular, our Aboriginal women.

It has been a commitment of this government since our VPI, to provide funding to address issues of violence prevention for Aboriginal women. We have taken a stand on our position for a national inquiry. That has not changed, but we would like to reinforce that in the House of Assembly. I anticipate we will be moving that resolution sometime next week, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the Opposition Critic for the Status of Women, I am very pleased to hear that the members opposite will be supporting the call for a national inquiry. It has been about two weeks ago now, March 1, actually, that I put out a press release calling for a national inquiry. I know back in July, shortly after I was elected, there was a call for a national inquiry by the Native Women's Association of Canada at a premiers' forum. At that time, all of the premiers across the country, the provinces, and the Territories, everybody was in support of this; everybody understood the magnitude and the seriousness of this issue.

Every time I have had an opportunity to speak about violence against women in general, I have certainly been on my feet. I have done that at events like Take Back The Night because, I

believe, as mothers and daughters, we all have aunts and sisters, it is very, very sad that we continue to talk about violence against women in 2014. We need to draw particular attention to the huge issue of violence against Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women who are five times more likely to be victims of violent attacks than non-Aboriginal women.

There certainly is a need for a national inquiry. The tragic death of twenty-six-year-old Loretta Saunders, I said from the beginning, for two weeks now, it should serve as the catalyst to launch a national inquiry. Over the past two weeks I was happy to be invited into the NTV studio. I was on On the Go with Ted Blades, I maybe had several calls to VOCM, and I have certainly done my part. Friday night in Goose Bay, when I visited the funeral home and I talked with Loretta's family, her parents, and her sisters, they were pleased with the attention that this was getting.

Any time that someone loses a child is permanently life changing. You live with it; you carry it. When you lose someone through a violent act the way we have lost Loretta, the only thing that will bring solace to the family is to know that something positive can come of that.

Sometimes I believe in our society we stereotype because the numbers of Aboriginal women being violently attacked, who are murdered or go missing, we can stereotype and look at them through a certain lens. I actually had the somber, solemn experience of viewing Loretta and I thought here is a beautiful young woman who was really going to make her mark. She was going to make a difference in Labrador.

The very fact that she was doing her thesis on missing and murdered Aboriginal women, Loretta knew herself that this was a huge issue. As I talked to her sister, Delilah, she said: We are going to finish our sister's thesis; we are going to make it matter that she lived and that she died.

I am really, really happy here this afternoon to see that we are going to do the same thing that

the Province of Nova Scotia has done. My colleague and good friend, Yvonne Jones, the MP from my district, is certainly onside and she was a part of a movement on Parliament Hill. She shared a portion of On the Go radio with me, talking about the need for a national inquiry.

We have heard Trudeau speaking out about the same thing. Then we heard Minister MacKay come out and talk about we do not need an inquiry; now is the time for action. Mr. Chair, we need a national inquiry to provide the necessary steps and give us the knowledge that we need on moving forward to help us better determine how we can begin to fix this and how we can begin to reverse this negative trend.

Right now we know there are at least 800 cases of missing and murdered women. It is startling, the findings. I am just thinking of Maryanne Pearce, an Ottawa-based researcher. She has been developing a database and I think she has 824 right now in that database. Clearly, we can see that we have a need for an independent national inquiry to examine why Aboriginal women are so disproportionately represented in cases of missing and murdered women.

I am just pleased to be able to add my voice in support as a member of an Inuit Metis group myself, the NunatuKavut Community Council. I have a daughter who is also a member of that group. I believe we need to work together to counteract this negative trend, these young lives cut down too soon who did not get a chance to go out, to contribute and leave their mark in society.

We know that back in July there was a parliamentary committee that was struck, but that was released on March 7 and it was completely dismissed by Aboriginal groups as not being good enough. It is time for us to start listening to these young women and these girls when they are asking for help, saying what is out there right now is not good enough. I think because of the staggering numbers we are seeing violence against Aboriginal women and the fact that it is an issue all across Canada, a national approach is certainly what is needed here.

I look forward to seeing and hearing further on this. Let us hope that federally we can get this government to see the need for something of this magnitude.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

I am very happy this afternoon to rise and speak to this notice of motion by the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. I am very happy that all three parties will be positively looking at the resolution when it comes to the floor and wanting to vote for it.

I had myself put out a release, and my caucus backed me in that, with regard to the need for us to do this. I knew the other parties would agree with the need for us to stand in solidarity and to show the solidarity in this House with regard to concern around violence against women, but particularly violence against Aboriginal women. I do not need to repeat the statistics that have been already quoted by my sister colleagues in the House, but we all know that Loretta Saunders' death – tragic death – brought things to a new head for us here in this Province. It has not been as big an issue for us as it has been in some other parts of the country, and I am aware of that.

It is interesting that it was only last month that finally there was special memorial service here in St. John's with regard to murdered and missing women. For those of us who were there, it was a chilling experience because the list of women's names went back to the mid-nineteenth century, women who had been murdered, and many of us I think were there at that service. To hear the names of the women who had been murdered, or who were missing and presumed murdered going back – I think the earliest was 1850-something or 1870. I cannot quite remember. We had this list of names with a description of how each woman had been

murdered. In some cases, it was a family member who read out the description of the murder and it was quite chilling.

One of the things that really was chilling that I remember was there was one small community on the North Coast of Labrador when in a period of about fifteen years two young women had been murdered by their partners in a community of only a few hundred people. That is what is happening, and very often it does not get talked about; it does not even get seen or get heard. Really, the cases that have most been seen in the Province are the ones where there has been a court case.

One of the things I realized at the memorial service last month here in St. John's was that when there has been a murder and a suicide, for example – which happens quite frequently as well where the male partner murders the woman and then commits suicide – that does not go into court. It does not really hit the papers in the same way as it does if a woman gets murdered and then there is a court case.

There is much more going on than we realize. This is why I think it is good that we are standing for a national inquiry, throughout the country, especially where the percentage of Aboriginal people in a Province is larger than in our Province, the numbers of Aboriginal women who are missing, presumed dead, or have been proven to have been murdered is just unacceptable.

The statistic that my colleague from Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair quoted is a national statistic but in some places where there is a concentration of Aboriginal population, that ratio of five times more would be much higher because of the concentration. We know of provinces like in BC and Manitoba in particular where the ratio would be even higher than five times more than non-Aboriginal women.

For us to do this is extremely important. I think the federal government, which is resisting the call for an inquiry, needs to have more provinces do what we are doing. Nova Scotia has led the way. That is sort of what inspired me to say we

should be doing the same, and to write a letter to the Premier and copy to the Leader of the Official Opposition to say let us do the same knowing that we would do it. I really did know we would do it because it is the right thing to do.

I do hope that our taking this on and our federal party as well has the same stance just as the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair mentioned with regard to her federal counterparts. I think we need to give a strong message to the Prime Minister of the country that this inquiry is essential. What has to be looked at and what they seem to be rejecting is that it is not just proving whether or not somebody was murdered, it is looking at why the system is not dealing in fair justice around what is going on. What is wrong in our system both with regard to why the murders are happening, which is one issue, but then how is the issue dealt with by our system?

I think that a lot of us have enough knowledge to know that there is a terrible inequality with regard to the way the murder of Aboriginal women is treated when compared to murders of non-Aboriginal women. We are doing the right thing. I am proud to be part of the Assembly as we do this.

I look forward to the resolution that is going to come to the floor. I do encourage the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and I encourage the Premier to engage the Aboriginal women in the Province – because we do have organized Aboriginal women in the Province – in the drafting of the resolution.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given the time of day we have exhausted debate for today I think. At this point in time I would move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation that the House do now adjourn to next week.

CHAIR: Order please!

The hon. the Government House Leader, you need to rise the Committee and report progress first.

MR. KING: I can do that too.

CHAIR: That motion will be in order.

MR. KING: As I was saying, Mr. Chair, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again next week.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte.

MR. VERGE: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

When shall the Committee sit again?

MR. KING: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: On tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted.

Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the quick opportunity to speak again this afternoon.

At this time, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

Motion carried.

This House stands adjourned until Tuesday. Monday is a holiday so we will sit at Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.

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