



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume XLVIII

SECOND SESSION

Number 18A

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

Monday

15 May 2017
(Night Sitting)

The House resumed at 6:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly pleased tonight to be able to stand and participate in the Budget Speech, Budget 2017-18, that was announced a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, in this very House.

Before I begin about some of the comments I want to make tonight, I really want to reach out and thank the public sector workers that have worked so tirelessly in support of the Budget and putting this Budget together. This is a lengthy process that occurs; there are hours and hours, many weekends that people actually bring all the information together to put together a budget as intense and as detailed as we have, as we've been debating here in the last few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make mention of the people that actually participated in the public consultations. Quite a few people submitted briefs and ideas to address issues in their communities with their associations and so on, but also in this particular case the Women's Policy Office who put in place the women's perspective on this particular budget throughout the full course of this. So all of these are important when you put together a budget as detailed as what we have here.

Mr. Speaker, much of the debate that we've had has been over the last year. Lots of the comments that have been made would have been around *Budget 2016* and *Budget 2017*. I'm very proud today to be able to stand here and talk about the amount of progress we have made with Budget 2017-2018. No doubt, no doubt this year we have spent a considerable amount of

time as a government trying to correct the course of this province.

It kind of reminds me of a story that was told to me early last week about an individual said to me – and I've relayed this story once before, but I think it's worthwhile telling it again. It said when you look beyond the election of 2015 it reminded the individual of a situation where you saw people rushing in to put a fire out, but the group that had set the place on fire, well what they were doing, they were rushing out. When they got out, the people were there trying to put that fire out, the group that caused it and started it, what were they doing? They were throwing rocks at the individuals who were doing their work, who were trying to secure the particular site.

Mr. Speaker, that, in some ways, illustrates exactly what happened about a year and half ago. So this year, there was a considerable amount of time making sure that we found the correct balance and where we are as we secure the financial ship of our province and as we put together programs that we could actually control the fiscal situation.

Mr. Speaker, we also know once you build a province and once you generate revenue, we cannot do it on a volatile commodity such as oil. Over the last number of years what we see in the province that has been managed, been run primarily by decisions made on what today's price of oil was. We've seen where that has taken us; nearly \$25 billion over a 10-year window that has been brought into this province related to the oil industry.

Mr. Speaker, yet we find some-10 years later, massive deficits that were run by the prior administration, forgetting the fact they would actually put aside, set aside some money for the future to deal with situations that currently exist within our province today. That didn't happen. Mr. Speaker, when you just primarily focus on that one volatile commodity you miss the opportunity to actually put in place new revenue generating streams, the way we would actually create economic diversification which is much needed in our province.

Mr. Speaker, this year's budget is about \$7.3 billion in revenue, expense is somewhere around

\$8.1 billion which leaves a deficit this year, which is still significant, of some-\$778 billion. But, Mr. Speaker, that is a far cry of where this province was heading just a year ago.

If took and lived with the plan the PC Opposition continues to support – this province, last year, was facing a \$2.7 billion deficit. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that again. If you take the Tory plan that was put in place in 2015, \$2.7 billion, that is where it was headed.

Mr. Speaker, to put all of that in context, some-65 years, if you go back to last year, we would have seen the per capita debt in our province double in five or six years. That is what this government was facing just a year ago. That is the ship we had to correct. Multitudes of people who have looked at the situation we inherited, said: when I spoke to premiers in other provinces, when I spoke to leaders in other provinces, they realize the significance of the financial situation that we inherited in our province.

Mr. Speaker, on and on. When we come into Question Period, we have debate in this House of Assembly, many Members opposite would say: you're the government now, tell us what you're going to do. You deal with this situation. They do not want to talk about the past, Mr. Speaker. Although, the Leader of the Opposition said last week that maybe we should remember the past, but when they get up and ask questions they do not want to accept the responsibility for the past.

Mr. Speaker, you can go around this province, you can go anywhere you want, when people try and distance themselves from their past – if any individual wants to distance himself from their past, that tells me one thing, Mr. Speaker. They're ashamed of it. They are ashamed of their past. They have no record to stand on.

What are they going to talk about? How they put in place budgets primarily based on the price of oil. That, they cannot talk about. It wasn't successful. Do they want to talk about doubling the debt in five or six years within our province? Do they want to talk about record setting debt reduction measures? Mr. Speaker, they simply can't do it. The reason why they do not want to

talk about their past is because they are ashamed of it.

Also, Mr. Speaker, a major project they made a big commitment to in this House of Assembly and for this province would have led to doubling of electricity rates in just a few short years. So they don't want to talk about that either.

Mr. Speaker, this is the record of the previous administration. We will remind the people of this province of the situation we're into. We will not let people who do not want to accept the responsibility for their own actions; we will not just simply dismiss this. We will do the heavy lifting that's required. The courage is on this side of the House to put in place a future that is secure for the next generation, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We will not mortgage the future of the next generation.

An example is how you plan for the future, Mr. Speaker, and there are lots of them. Just a few minutes ago a Member from the Official Opposition said to me: Let's talk about ferries. We all want to talk about ferries.

I want to talk about a very important ferry, and that's the one that connects to Bell Island, Mr. Speaker, a very important piece of infrastructure. The fact is they built the ferry. What did they forget to do?

AN HON. MEMBER: Build a wharf.

PREMIER BALL: Make sure the appropriate wharf was in place, Mr. Speaker. That's the level of planning and management we've seen from the previous administration. Go and order a ferry but forget about the wharf. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. Ordering a ferry from Romania and forgetting a wharf in Bell Island and Portugal Cove. Just imagine, Mr. Speaker. Just imagine going out and spending millions and millions of dollars on a ferry and you don't have the docking facilities in place to do it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the ferry is actually stored and waiting for this government to finish the wharf job. That's what we're doing right now so the people of Bell Island can actually have the

connection. That's the type of management and the situations that we've had to deal with in the last year and a half.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

PREMIER BALL: Yes, that's a good question. One of the Members just reminded me of the tariff that they forgot to include in the cost, Mr. Speaker. We worked very diligently with the federal government to make sure that tariff got reduced, so it was not left as another burden on the people of our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: So, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about it – I want to get back to the budget for a few minutes, because we have made some significant progress this year. As I said, last year, some \$2.7 billion is the situation we inherited from the previous administration. We got that down this year, after some considerable work, to some \$778 million.

That was done with a tremendous amount of work. We've had to reduce expenses. Just back in the summer of last year, when you look at the structure of government in Newfoundland and Labrador, we had the same number of deputy ministers in Newfoundland and Labrador as they did in the Province of Ontario – Newfoundland and Labrador, the same number of deputy ministers as they did in Ontario.

That's the situation this province was allowed to grow. Mr. Speaker, that is not the fault of those great deputy ministers. That is not the fault of the public sector. That is a result of the leadership that came from the previous administration. They made those decisions, not the people that were sitting in those chairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when you look at the progress that has been made this year and you compare the work that's been done, so many people have looked at the current situation and so many people who were in government in the '90s have looked at us and said it kind of reminds us a little bit about Newfoundland and Labrador in the mid-90s.

It was actually one of the leading financial institutions in the country that had a quote when they looked at the situation and the budget that was put in place just a few weeks ago. The quote goes something like this – and I want to read it, because it is a very important quote. It said: Indeed, had the province not taken some of the action it did over the past year, next year's debt levels would have been pushing the 1990s and they would have done that in very short order. They went on to say that some swift and aggressive policy action have quickly stabilized – and this is the key, Mr. Speaker – the swift action quickly stabilized a fiscal ship that was taking on water. The province compared to the fiscal ship was taking on water.

We know that a ship that is taking on water is not a safe environment to be in. A ship that is taking on water ultimately sinks, Mr. Speaker. We were not prepared – people on this side of the House – to see Newfoundland and Labrador sink.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We were not prepared to do it.

Another institution that did some analysis of this year's budget – last year, Mr. Speaker, the budget in 2016, it was graded at an E, and rightfully so. The decisions that we made last year were very difficult decisions; responsible to actually salvage this province. This year, it was a B rating, so it went from an E rating to B rating in one year. That's because of the decisions that were made by this government, and some very good decisions.

We realized last year that some of the revenue-generating measures that were taken, the decisions, like the gas tax, would have an impact on the economy in our province. So this year, when we saw the opportunity, when the window was there, we knew that we needed to do something; we did. So in June 1 of this year, some 12½ cents will come off that gas tax, Mr. Speaker. That will put money back to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That's the approach we're taking. It's very methodical, it's sustainable, that money will be there to go back into the economy.

But we didn't stop there because in December, again, we know now we will be able to give back another 4 cents of that. So that will be some 12½ cents from June to December of this year that will directly go back as we reduce that gas tax.

Mr. Speaker, if the opportunity is there to actually further reduce that, we will do that too. We realize that these decisions that we've had to make to generate some revenue for this province last year, we're now in the position to get those taxes back and give back to the people of this province, but we can only do that in a sustainable fashion.

So we went to work and, over the last year, there was a considerable amount of work that was done to actually help us. I know from the Department of Finance, the staff there did a tremendous job, very focused, very disciplined in making sure that this work got done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I would say, Mr. Speaker, that this year there's very little that hasn't been analyzed. We put in place a zero-based budgeting this year and many people of our province right now are becoming aware of the impact because simply that's how they would run their own household. You go back and see where you've spent every single dollar to make sure that it's relevant to where you are today.

So that's what zero-based budgeting has done for our province. It saves some millions of dollars that will go back in now to support other services. Mr. Speaker, it didn't stop there. All our departments worked very hard with our federal colleagues. We put in place a federal loan guarantee to help support the Muskrat Falls Project.

Mr. Speaker, I will speak to that in just a little bit, because that's a project we had some significant debate; we led a filibuster in this House of Assembly when we were in Opposition. Ironically, after the government changed, we were left now in a position to actually manage that very same project. So we scrutinized – we did a big piece of work on where we were with that project, the amount of commitments that were made, and really, to go

back with the contracts that were put in place, the agreements that were put in place on a number of fronts, that would have been a sunken cost to the people of this province.

We are now managing our way through that. One of the things that we did was to negotiate the federal loan guarantee, amongst some other measures, to actually help reduce the cost with federal support. That is where we are. The other thing, there was a – this is ironic, because I understand a Member opposite might have been talking about something like an equalization. They had forgotten about it for 10 years.

Just imagine, in some of the largest amount of revenue that we ever had in this province, they had completely forgotten about a repayment commitment they had to make, which was some \$27 million a year. So that was another thing that was dropped in our lap immediately after taking office. Just imagine, ignoring some \$27 million a year. Just ignore it. It was an overpayment that occurred earlier, you just ignored it. So, Mr. Speaker, we were able to work with the federal government to actually address that issue.

Things like the Core Sciences Building, almost \$100 million that the previous administration had made a commitment to. We were able to work with them to get money from the federal government to replace the money that was put in place by the province. So that money really comes back for use within our province, now, Mr. Speaker, to support a project at Memorial University.

The Atlantic Fisheries Fund, they asked lots of questions about that, and talked about a fund and an agreement that they thought they had in place, never had in place. I've talked to many people, including leaders within Atlantic Canada, that made it quite clear in the negotiations that they were having with them that that fund was never finalized. We've worked hard, and we know now there's \$100 million that will be available to the fishing industry in our province. I will guarantee you we will not be showing up at announcements that include the federal government, without the federal government there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We will not be doing that.

We've seen that all too often. Blame someone else. We don't need Ottawa; we'll go it alone and so on. They've asked a number of questions about where we should be, Mr. Speaker, but I will guarantee it now, if we make the announcement and the federal signature is supposed to be on it, we'll make it when the federal government is there to support the announcement. That's the way we work.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about are the significant investments that have been made within infrastructure. We've leveraged a lot of federal money. There is some community money that gets leveraged in that. I would say, when you look back over this budget, and especially when you look at infrastructure investments, it includes leveraging almost, in every single instance, some federal money involved in it.

Mr. Speaker, that wasn't just dropped in our lap. There was a considerable amount of work that had to be done in getting criteria changed. I know the Minister of Transportation and Works and Municipal Affairs, everyone on this side of the House did quite a bit of work in making sure the criterion was changed. Nothing is probably more relevant, and probably one of the best examples we can have is the money that's spent on the Trans-Labrador Highway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We know the previous federal government had put a cap on the amount of money that would be spent on the Trans-Labrador Highway. Mr. Speaker, we've worked hard to get that criteria changed. Now, we get 50/50 dollars and it's now cost shared. So we can actually get this work done for the people in Labrador.

Added to that, even with our own provincial roads, criteria that would have normally – based on their relationship with the federal government – taken some 10,000 vehicles a day to actually qualify, we were able to get those numbers down so people in Newfoundland and Labrador can take advantage of federal money to leverage provincial money, Mr. Speaker. Bring it together

and get more work done for people in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to actually talk about some of our most vulnerable people in our society. We have many families that often struggle. In a lot of case, some of those individuals would be seniors. We all have them in our communities.

We should never forget that it's the seniors in our province who actually built this province through some of its difficult times. It's our seniors, and we have not forgotten that. If you go around those communities today, it's those seniors who are actually volunteering on just about every single association we would have in many of our small communities. This government has not forgotten the work our seniors have done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We will never call a Seniors' Advocate a luxury. Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, the previous administration called the Seniors' Advocate a luxury. Imagine telling the people of our province, some of the lowest income earners that we have, some of them seniors, many of them living alone, if you want a Seniors' Advocate, well that's a luxury. Not with this government. It's important and we're putting in a Seniors' Advocate. It is not a luxury.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: This also gives me an opportunity to speak about the supplement and how we provided some extra subsidies for the people in our province; some \$120 million, Mr. Speaker, when you look at low-income families and our seniors, some 155,000 people that are impacted. That's a big portion of our population. We're happy to be able to support them with \$120 million for this program.

Mr. Speaker, they deserve it. They helped build this province and we will never give up on those seniors. When we can support them, where they live, keeping them in their own communities and their own homes as long as possible. That is

important for us. It's a priority for us as a government, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, this in some ways helps bring us in to the discussion that we had last December, just before Christmas, about some extra health care money from the Health Accord. In some ways, it helps target our seniors in home care. That was a big part of this new Health Accord that was negotiated with our Minister of Health and Community Services, some \$87.7 million over 10 years.

It was important because, as I said, when you talk to seniors and their families they want to stay in their own homes and in their own communities as long as possible. These initiatives like the recent agreement with the new Health Accord with the federal government, Mr. Speaker, helps seniors stay in their own homes longer.

A few minutes ago, I talked about the importance of infrastructure and how do we deal with some of the major infrastructure deficits that we would have in our province. We made a commitment through our election platform that we would do things smarter. We would use the taxpayers' money of Newfoundland and Labrador – we would take a different approach. It would be evidence based. It would be a smarter approach.

Working with industry, and many of those I would have met when we were in Opposition, Mr. Speaker, we put in place, for really the first time in the history of this province, a five-year road plan, Mr. Speaker. This year some \$77 million so people in our community will get an understanding, they will know where they fit into the infrastructure and the road work over the next five years.

Added to that, it was important that we get tenders out early. We know that if we get tenders out early, we do it over a multi-year approach, we're going to get better value. Mr. Speaker, that is working to the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Tenders are our early. They are multi-year funding. People know in advance what the

Provincial Roads Program will be, Mr. Speaker, and we are getting better value for people in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Also, Mr. Speaker, some of the challenges we face in how the work gets done in our province has always been a question. This year there is a pilot: Can we do work in the nighttime? It's not unusual. It happens in many jurisdictions. So we've taken it upon ourselves to actually try this out in Newfoundland and Labrador. There's a nighttime pilot that will occur in our province.

Everyone who travels the roads, no matter where we go – I see it in my own district. I have many rural communities, Mr. Speaker. As I travel in my own district as an MHA representing the District of Humber – Gros Morne, people have asked us often: What is the asphalt mix in our roads? Why don't they seem to be lasting as long now as they did in the '70s and the '80s?

We're going to take a look at that and find out what the appropriate asphalt mix should be for the conditions and the environment that we have in our province. These are just some of the things we are doing differently, some of the things we are doing smarter, Mr. Speaker, all with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in mind so that we can get better for the hard-earned taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that as the mega projects within our province come to an end – we've seen Long Harbour, Hebron and the Muskrat Falls Project. As they come to an end, it's important that we look at jobs; jobs for Newfoundland and Labrador.

We put in place a multi-year infrastructure plan. This is a \$3 billion plan. It will provide employment for some 4,900 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through this infrastructure work that will need to be done. Mr. Speaker, all of this will lead to jobs.

We have then taken the focus and put a Cabinet Committee on Jobs. We're working very closely with the industry like the aquaculture industry, like the agriculture industry; many of the industry leaders in our province who already

have the ideas. They've been through their strategic plans. They know where the opportunities are in our province to create employment, Mr. Speaker, in all our communities and we are committed to working with them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Many times in Question Period or in debate we get comments from the Opposition saying: Well, these are things we were talking about. These are things that we would have had in our plan. These are things we were talking about. Sure, we were discussing that. We were putting a strategy in place for that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the people in our province there's a difference between motion and movement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We are moving things for the benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador. So while they talk a lot, Mr. Speaker, this government is making movement. We are moving things along, but we will do it with evidence-based decision making and we will do it with the people of our province in mind.

An example of that, Mr. Speaker, is how much Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will pay for electricity rates. In this particular budget, when you look at the forecast of where we are, they had made a commitment to the Muskrat Falls Project. We know now that based on the schedule that we have in place right now this will be a significant factor in doubling of electricity rates in our province.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the people in this province, seniors, our associations, our communities, our recreation centres, cannot afford doubling of electricity rates. They just cannot do it. So we felt this year it was important that we signal quite early to the people in our province that we understand this and we are going to deal with it.

When you look at the forecast that you see in this budget, in 2020-2021 you'll see some-\$210 million that is there to offset the increasing electricity rates in our province, Mr. Speaker.

That is making a decision. That is a demonstration that we understand this problem and we are going to put in place measures to actually deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, the following years –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Added to that, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Muskrat Falls Project, we've seen a new CEO at Nalcor, we've seen that company turn around to some degree. This year it's making some profits. Last year it was a loss that was in place.

Last year, it required over \$1 billion in borrowing to support Nalcor. This year, Mr. Speaker, it's a significant reduction to some-\$485 million. We are moving things along for the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, I touched a little bit about the Health Accord there a few minutes ago, but I also want to send out a thank you to the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions who did some remarkable work. They did some great work as they went around the province and spoke to many people that have been impacted by mental health and addictions.

This seems to be a story, Mr. Speaker, that we have to deal with on a daily basis; the face of our young people and our young adults as we deal with mental illness on a daily basis. People find themselves struggling with addictions. The All-Party Committee made some excellent recommendations. We put in place an implementation plan that will be announced now in a few weeks. It will quickly deal with some of the most extreme issues that we face in our province, Mr. Speaker.

Added to that, back in the mid-1800s there was a facility that opened up in our province. Just think about all of this, Mr. Speaker, how the face of this province has changed over that period of time. Back in the mid-1800s the Waterford Hospital was opened up to be the mental health facility in our province and that's still the facility that's used today.

Mr. Speaker, when you think about that, it's really hard to understand why it is we're even talking about this today. But we have made a commitment – it starts in this budget – to actually replace the Waterford Hospital.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: It doesn't end there, Mr. Speaker. We understand that the people who deal with this on a daily basis will need supports around the community as well. The face has changed and we have made a commitment to work with those individuals, to work with the health authorities, to work with the association to actually make Newfoundland and Labrador a better place to get access to those services.

Mr. Speaker, on the West Coast – I couldn't tell you, maybe seven, eight, maybe nine times, it seemed to be every weekend when a former premier or when someone went to Corner Brook one of the things that they always did was announce a new hospital for Corner Brook. It seemed to happen on a regular basis.

I can remember this being issue some-10 years ago on the campaign trail: Oh yeah, we're going to replace the Western Memorial Hospital. Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, if you're living out there today, if you're living in Western Newfoundland today and you have heard this story so many times.

Our story, the story of this government, will be quite different. We will be replacing the Western Memorial Hospital. It starts with a long-term care centre, Mr. Speaker. The previous administration, when they announced long-term care in Corner Brook and other areas of the province, what they wanted to do was privatize the whole thing. The government would never own the building; it would be run not by public sector workers. And we find them now asking questions about all of this when they were the group that were actually going to privatize all those services.

We went out; we did the request for qualifications. That's step one. Those reports will come back. We will pick a company that is best qualified to actually do this work. They will put the building up, Mr. Speaker. The government or the people of this province will

own that building and it will be staffed by public sector workers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: That starts and we also recognize, Mr. Speaker, that long-term care is just not an issue in Western Newfoundland; it is an issue in Central Newfoundland as well. There is provision made in this year's budget to address the long-term care needs of the people of Central Newfoundland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when you look at health care, people ask questions why it is that you're putting such a big focus on long-term care for people in our province. It is really about outcomes.

For years, we would talk about a government that spends this much money on health care. Well, 40 per cent of this budget goes to health care. Mr. Speaker. The previous administration spent a lot of money on health care. They spent a lot of money on health care but outcomes just weren't there.

We also know, as I mentioned earlier, people should receive those services at the right location. What we find, Mr. Speaker, is that we have so many of our acute care beds in our hospitals right now that are tied up with people that are medically discharged. Really what they need are long-term care services. This is the reason why we are taking the approach that we are taking, put the long-term care site in and get the hospital going so people receive those services in their rightful place.

I just mention about job creation. One the things I think that is often lost on people in our province – and particularly in some of the smaller communities that we live in – is the impact on Alberta. We've seen the three major projects as they begin to wind down, but also we see Alberta that doesn't have the requirement or doesn't have the – they just really do not need as many employees to support the industries in Alberta. People would say: Why is it you're raising that issue? I raise the issue simply because for 10 years the previous administration

did nothing to help diversify the economy in our province.

Mr. Speaker, that is why it was important to us to really get focused on working with our industry leaders, as I just mentioned a few minutes ago, about the agriculture industry and the aquaculture industry. When you speak to those associations and you speak with people that are actually working there right now, especially in agriculture, and I've talked about this quite a bit, it's important for a number of different reasons. It's important for the jobs that it creates in Newfoundland and Labrador, but it's also very important when you look at food security.

Mr. Speaker, when you drive around our province there's one thing that you will see: lots and lots of land, lots and lots of area that we could actually support the agriculture industry. So what we've done is we've carved out the best agriculture land that we have in our province. We're going to make that available to that industry so that they can actually help diversify the economy, grow things here in Newfoundland and Labrador, create food security for people in our province, but actually stimulate the economy and create jobs for our province as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: In doing so, Mr. Speaker, we realize the aquaculture industry also can be very important to the future of our province and is one of the reasons why we put in place *The Way Forward* which is a vision document for sustainability and growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. We laid that out and it gives me an opportunity now to just speak to that for a few minutes.

In November of last year, we laid out *The Way Forward* document which was a vision document for sustainability and growth for our province. In that we addressed where we would like to see the aquaculture industry in the future. It would create employment for our province, doubling its capacity. Already, we've helped support investments into the Stephenville area with a hatchery that will then go out and support the aquaculture industry in our province. There are a number of different opportunities that we have to create employment in Newfoundland

and Labrador and we are going to continue to work with those associations.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate and just point out quite clearly, there is another fishery and that's, of course, the wild fishery, the traditional industry in our province that we will never forget. Right now, people in our province, some 17,000 people that are attached to the fishery, in many places are going through some difficult times. We're seeing this on the Northern Peninsula; we're seeing it on the South Coast of our province, throughout the province. There are a lot of challenges in our fishery right now, but I can tell you that we will not give up on the wild fishery in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about – I had the privilege this weekend, on Saturday, to spend some time in my district, in the Rocky Harbour area. We had a federal minister down.

Yeah, the federal minister actually came to Newfoundland and Labrador. What an experience that was. For 10 years, Mr. Speaker, we did not see that in our province. We actually had federal ministers, and there are two more that will be here later on this month, coming down because they are interested in helping us in the situation that we are in.

We were in the Gros Morne area. We were chatting about things around the impact on culture, the impact of infrastructure, the impact of the arts community. Mr. Speaker, I was very proud to say that in this year's budget we were able to increase the budget by 9 per cent for the cultural and heritage industry in our province. It's important to us. If you go into those very unique areas that we see throughout our province, it is creating jobs for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as well; some-\$20.2 million into the cultural and heritage initiatives in our province.

Supporting that – and it gives me an opportunity as I bring up that area of the province – one of the things that we're into this year, which will be a banner year, will be the tourism industry. As I spoke to people in the Rocky Harbour area,

already you can see the enthusiasm, the energy of people that are actually there even now early.

Next weekend we'll see the opening of the Trails, Tales and Tunes, Mr. Speaker, and that all starts with a very aggressive marketing campaign. This year it's some over \$13 million for tourism marketing. We've got to continue to build on the momentum.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, some of this work has started quite some time ago. I will acknowledge credit where credit is due but we've got to continue to build on that. Never give up; never lose the momentum on things like tourism. We are seeing accommodations; we are seeing bookings will be at historic levels. We know that when we made the announcement and made the commitment in *The Way Forward* document, I just mentioned a few minutes ago, to double non-resident spending in our province from 2009 levels. This is a multi-billion dollar industry that we have available to us and we will continue to work with our tourism leaders to support their industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: When you talk about culture and you talk about the arts community, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's anything that actually brings it home more than the film industry that we've seen in our province and the success that we've seen with *Doyle, Maudie* and *Frontier*. Now we're seeing *Come from Away* hit the streets of Broadway in New York. It makes us all feel good. But that starts, in some cases, with investing government money to support that industry. We will be doing that and continue to do that in a more aggressive way.

Mr. Speaker, this budget I've talked now for quite some time on, but I want to talk a little bit about education before I move on. The one thing I'm very proud to say again tonight is last year we had a group from Memorial University, with Enactus, make us all proud as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as they approached the world stage, competed and won. They won.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Well, guess what? This weekend in Vancouver, guess what happened to

Enactus? Mr. Speaker, this is a group of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They did it again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: They are now the Canadian champions and they will be going on to London, representing Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador to compete once again on the world stage, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly enough, their project talks about food security and how we can help some of the communities in northern climates, and that is the ingenuity – that is so special when you look at Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and our young people that we are so proud of when we look at the education that they get right here in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the K to 12 system; one of the first things we did was put in place a Premier's task force on improving educational outcomes because we know when we put in place a good foundation for young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the world then becomes their backyard, they can compete. We need to put in place a good foundation of education for them. So, Mr. Speaker, in this budget there are many millions of dollars to support infrastructure, to support education, inclusive education, full-day kindergarten, another \$13 million that is there for us to continue to support.

I just mentioned the Enactus group, and I've talked a bit about the K to 12 system and the investments that are going to be made on behalf of our province. Mr. Speaker, let's not forget, education starts at earlier years than that. The informative ages could be at the early childhood education stage.

In this year's budget we will be lowering the threshold for people for the early childhood subsidy, Mr. Speaker, but added to that, recognizing the great work those educators do, their wages will be increased by a subsidy of another dollar an hour. They do a tremendous job in preparing people for the K to 12 system. Also, it actually helps some of our young families get into the workforce again earlier. So, Mr. Speaker, it's important that we get that foundation in place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Not only as the MHA for Humber – Gros Morne and Premier of the province, one of the portfolios I took on as Premier was around Labrador and Indigenous Affairs. Mr. Speaker, we took it on because we firmly believe as a foundation to the way we work, that we believe in working with our indigenous leaders in a government fashion, and we will continue to do that.

I meet quite regularly with our indigenous leaders, but, added to that, was recognizing some of the gaps around the infrastructure. In this year's budget to support the people in Labrador, Mr. Speaker, there's some \$55.7 million on the Trans-Labrador Highway that is added to the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: – over \$60 million that went into last year's budget.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

PREMIER BALL: Over \$60 million last year, some \$55.7 million again this year, Mr. Speaker, to complete the Trans-Labrador Highway.

It was a Liberal government that started it, Mr. Speaker, and with the support of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador it will be a Liberal government that will ...

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I said in an interview that I did last week, I know for me personally, and as I speak for the four Labrador MHAs that we work with very closely, in my capacity as looking after the Labrador Affairs, Mr. Speaker, is that I will not be satisfied until you can get on a paved road that begins in L'Anse au Clair and ends in Vancouver. It is what the people in Labrador deserve. They've waited a long time, Mr. Speaker, and investments that you will see in this year's budget will go a long way in making that a reality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: When I look at my colleague who is sitting to the left of me here, one of the things the Minister responsible for Justice and Public Safety constantly reminds us is about the court system in Labrador. In this budget you will see some \$370,000 to support the court system in Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on; about our Northern Strategic diesel subsidy that helps support just over 2,000 people in Labrador. Mr. Speaker, my point is this, the people in Labrador deserve the investments and there are many investments you will see sprinkled throughout this budget that will have a profound impact on that area of our province.

Mr. Speaker, before I finish up I want to talk about something that's been extremely important to us and that is how many of our community groups and associations access some of the \$150 million that's available in this budget to support community groups.

When preparing for our election platform, many of the leaders within those associations made it quite clear to us that they have felt for many years that they have almost become fundraising experts. Really, what they wanted to do was actually get to the work they enjoy doing; working with front-line people that needed the supports of those community associations. So what we're doing this year is to look at this \$150 million that's available to those community groups and give them a single point of entry into applying for this money.

Those grants for community services make it a little easier so they can actually spend more time doing what they want to do, is supporting our community groups. So they would go into a single portal, Mr. Speaker, get an understanding, and in some cases you would see multi-year funding that goes in place to support those community associations.

I mentioned earlier about one of the lenses that was put on this budget – and the Minister of Finance mentioned this in her Budget Speech back in early April – and that was about transition houses and the importance of some – added to that, Mr. Speaker, it's one thing to talk about it, but this government has demonstrated how important those transition houses are to the

tune of some \$780,000 that will go into support those initiatives.

Just this weekend, when I was in my district a young woman came up to me who works in one of those houses and said: Thank you, it now gives us an opportunity to add some supports on weekends, as an example. That is what this money will do to support those transition houses.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude my remarks in just a few minutes, but before I do, I just want to remind the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, you know what? We will not forget the past. We will not forget the poor planning and the mismanagement of the previous administration. We should not do that. We must constantly remind ourselves that we have hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who contribute to the economy of this province and we must spend their money wisely. We must continue to spend their money wisely. We will always challenge ourselves to do better. We must do that, but spending the taxpayers' money wisely is important.

We will take a methodical approach. We will not base our decisions on the price of oil. I will remind the people in this province that when you listen to the PC Opposition or you listen to any opposition in this province, they talk about their plan for the future of this province.

Well, I will remind the people that their plan that they stand by today, the plan they stand by today in 2017 suggests the price of oil would be over \$80 a barrel. They stand by that plan today. I challenge every one of them when they stand up today; do they believe that oil today is at \$80 a barrel? Because that's the plan they put to the people of our province and they have not distanced themselves from that yet.

Also, I want to remind the people of this province of the Muskrat Falls Project. For some 50 years, the previous administration – this was their wisdom. This was the wisdom of the previous administration. Not once did they think that oil would ever go below \$100 a barrel. They never believed that oil would ever go below \$100 a barrel. Well, less than 50 months in the whole history of the world, it hasn't been over \$100 a barrel, Mr. Speaker.

They made a decision to mortgage the future of our province on \$100 a barrel. That is why today it takes discipline, it takes courage to stand up for our future and this government will do that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I have a few minutes left. When I look back over the last year, and when I look back over the progress and some of the great moments we've had – I go back to July 1, and what a proud moment it was for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at The Rooms, with a blue sky and a sunny day. Newfoundland and Labrador was showcased across the country because of the sacrifices that have been made at Beaumont-Hamel. That was on July 1, Mr. Speaker.

July 1, last year, Newfoundland and Labrador was showcased and in streets that we've seen within the Canadian capital in Ottawa. You saw banners showcasing, highlighting, reminding the people of the country the work and the courage of Newfoundlanders at Beaumont-Hamel. We were highlighted, Mr. Speaker.

It takes that same courage in many of our young people today to stand up for their future. It's very different than it was. That was a courage that we've never seen and will probably never see again in history. We certainly hope we will never find ourselves in those situations again.

On July 1, last year, it was a very proud moment for the people in our province. I was able to share, Mr. Speaker, at The Rooms that day. Newfoundland and Labrador was highlighted on that national stage.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I raise this is that we should never take for granted where our future will take us. We have to work hard; we have to work hard to secure it. Mr. Speaker, many people in our province have paid the ultimate sacrifice for the challenges and the benefits we have to share with all of us today.

Mr. Speaker, I will finish up my comments by saying we should never be satisfied to pass the tough decisions of today to the next generation. We should never be satisfied to do this. We have made significant progress today and I will take

comments and ideas and suggestions from any of the Opposition leaders, from any of them. I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker, in some year and a half, do you know one call that I've never received? It's an idea or a suggestion that comes from any of the Opposition Members. It will not happen; it just doesn't happen.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to listen to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We will secure the future of the next generation.

I want to thank you and the work that's been done on this year's budget. I thank the group over here and the people who have worked with us as a government for the courage they've had in bringing those ideas forward. Mr. Speaker, we have made significant progress. The future is bright for Newfoundland and Labrador. We will work together to secure our future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a privilege to get up here again today and to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. I want to thank my colleagues across the way for the standing ovation for getting up here tonight to say a few words.

It was pretty interesting to listen to the Premier that time. I listened intently and listened to what he had to say. Obviously, there are a lot of different views on how we look at things, and that's what we are here for.

Premier, I know you didn't receive either phone call from me yet to tell you how to run the province, but that's your job. That's your job. The people of the province elected you to – it's my job to do Opposition and it's also my job to make sure that I'm fair, and I always do try to be fair.

If there are good things that are happening in this province I want to be one to recognize them, but when there are things in the province that we

do have concerns about, that is my job. That's my job as an Opposition Member in this House of Assembly, to speak for the people of the province and speak for the people of my district.

Maybe since Thursday I have a little bit more jump in my step because it means a whole lot more to me to be here in this province, to be a poppy for the first time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I'm very, very proud of my daughter. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs, no, they didn't name him after you, okay. I'll let you know that right off the bat.

I think it's all of us; I hope we're all here for the right reasons. I know we may disagree and we may have a different train of thought sometimes but I'm sure every Member here wants to represent their district in the best way they can. When they have concerns, no matter if it's a health issue, if there's something I can do to help anyone in my district – and I'm sure the Minister of Health, the few times I've called over there I've gotten an excellent response. I thank the ministers for that, because that's their job. We all should be working together here to do things the proper way, no matter what it is.

There are concerns out there. I know that in each one of your districts, just like in my district, people do have concerns and that's what we're here for. I know sometimes it's very difficult to be in government. I've been here for eight-and-a-half years now, so I know a little bit of being there and I know what it's like over here. It's two completely different jobs by the way and it's difficult sometimes. Sometimes I think it's more difficult to be over there than it is to be over here, because you have to go back and you have goods that your government is trying to promote to sell to your constituents.

Not all your constituents are going to be happy with you – no matter if you're on this side. Not all my constituents, believe it or not, are happy with me sometimes, but I try to tell them the truth. I try to be honest and upfront. If a person calls me and they say: Kevin, can you do this for me or can you do that for me, I give them the right answer. I don't try to use any bull with them at all and say this is the way it is, this is

how things are and this is how government works.

The Premier started tonight and talked about how you have to look at the past and stuff like that. Since Thursday, Premier, I'm looking at the future a lot more than I'm looking at the past because I think it's going to be a nice future to come home and be able to see little ones running around again hopefully. The future is important too.

I'm not here tonight to bash anybody. I look back at the past and I look at the past as a very positive thing. I look at the positive things that have happened in this province. Some decisions were good and some decisions may be not that good. But when the Premier tonight talked about going back to \$80 a barrel oil and everything else, I'm sure the Minister of Finance uses experts to predict that. They use the experts that are out there in the fields no matter if they're different consultants all over the world. I think there are 14 or something different groups of consultants that you do use.

I'm sure while the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Transportation were on the board of Nalcor when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned, they wouldn't be on the board and not support it. They wouldn't be out there saying no – well, I didn't see it. I never saw anybody stand up and say, no, that's not a great project and they were on the board.

Everybody has questions about how things work and sometimes you look at one thing and things change. I'm sure if you went to Alberta or Saskatchewan, provinces that do rely on oil as their main source of income and revenue, that they didn't predict it either. They didn't predict the price of oil would drop like it did, so sometimes it's just a job.

I also look at this year's budget and when I look at the revenue last year that was predicted to be around \$500 million for oil and what money we were going to get out of the oil industry through production and through the price of oil, it went up by \$400 million. I'm sure the Finance Minister, when she saw that, she was pretty happy to know that the revenue that we received from oil last year brought us back to – listen, we're all in this together.

Probably the Minister of Finance looks at it a lot more than I do, but every evening I look at the price of oil. I want to see, I'd love to see the price of oil go up to \$80, \$90 a barrel again. I would love to see it because I know it will be good for our people, it will be good for the province. It will mean that we can do more with money.

When we talk about \$80 a barrel or \$120, there are experts out there who do that for government. Government just doesn't just sit down and say: What do you think the price of gas is going to be tomorrow? There are people there who can figure that out. They look at the long range, they look at how production is in different countries and they look at production all over the world. They come together and they say this is the trend we see going now. So they're forecasting –

AN HON. MEMBER: George Murphy.

MR. K. PARSONS: George Murphy was here. George was the gas guru. He was pretty good. Sometimes he was off by a bit but most times he knew what he was at. I didn't know how to do it but George knew how to do it.

That's what you use. That's what people in the Finance Department use each year to calculate what the price of oil is going to be. I dare say they look out and they go to these experts, who are experts in the field, and they look at it out over a long period of time. That's how it's done.

It's not done by – I don't think it's done by Cabinet. I would imagine that the Finance Department has their people there who are experts in the field. They consult with these different groups all over the world to see which way it goes.

So when you hear the Premier get up and say: Oh, all of you predicted it was going to be \$80 a barrel; I have to say he's wrong there. I didn't predict it was going to be \$80 a barrel because I didn't know. But if the experts told me that's where it should be, then I'd take their advice. That's what we do.

The Premier got up here tonight and spoke pretty good, but the part that kills me the most is this blame game that's always played: Oh, it's

your fault. No, it's your fault. We should be here working for the people of the province. We all have to be here working to make sure that everything that's done in this province is for the children of the province, for the seniors of the province, for our families, for different areas of the province.

There are places in this province now that are having a crisis, a huge crisis when it comes to home care, when it comes to affordable housing, when it comes to sending their children to school. No matter what it is, people have difficult times so we all have to work to make this place a better place for everybody to live. That's what we do.

That's why budgets are important. Budgets are so important. Budgets are about choices that we make and how we're going to do things. Like I said earlier, I'm here to be in the Opposition, I'm here to see what government is doing. If government does something good, I'll get up and say thank you for what you did. I did it last week to the Minister of Municipal Affairs who came down in my district for a couple great announcements; a great thing for the Town of Torbay. They had a new depot opened up. The money came from our side when we were doing it. They had a new fire rescue vehicle put in the area.

These were all good announcements. I really have to applaud the government. Two weeks before that, there was an announcement in Pouch Cove about water. So we're all working together and we all want things for our district. There are good announcements and there are bad announcements.

When we look at the budget and last year's budget, we saw it here at Confederation Building. We saw people here at Confederation Building last year out on the steps. We saw people protest. People were scared, people were nervous. People didn't know what was going to happen. They were really scared of what was going to happen. Today we're seeing it. The problem I have with this budget this year is there's no change. There's no change in the effect it's having on the average person here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Minister of Finance, in her budget speech, stated it. She said we had to reach into the pockets, and that's what they did, they reached right in. But they went down a little bit too deep, Madam Speaker. They went too deep into the pockets of individuals in this province and they're finding it today. When you look at projections by this government – the Premier got up here tonight and talked about jobs and 4,900 hours' work on this. Still, their prediction is that by 2020 we're going to lose 33,000 jobs.

How many people does that mean? How many families are going to be affected by 33,000 jobs? How many young families and how many families that are here are going to have – it's huge. I'm sure that in every one of the districts over there you're hearing it. You're hearing about tradespeople finding it really difficult to get work.

I mean the Premier was right, megaprojects are slowing down. Bull Arm is, I think, just about finished. As far as I know, the tradespeople are finished out there. Long Harbour was a great project that put a lot of revenue in. Look, for every job produced at one of these megaprojects, there were five spinoffs, there were five other jobs created.

Again, I speak to people in my district. I talk to young people that have small companies on the go – whether they're framers, whether they have a little small plumbing company on the go, whether they're roofers – and I'm telling you right now there's a problem in our province. I know that everyone over on the side of the House, and I know everyone on this side of the House, is hearing from people. We're hearing people. We're hearing that people are hurting; we're hearing that people have a problem because they can't find work.

That's what this tax on people, taking money out of people's pockets, taking it out so that you have to make a decision on what you're going to do when it comes to renovations or building new homes or anything else. People get scared. We talked on this with the public service lately. I don't know how long more it's going to go on with the negotiations. We're not hearing much on them these days at all. Again, it's scary times for people that work in our public service.

While I'm just talking about public servants, I'm going to talk about for the last number of days I was at the Health Sciences over to the Janeway. I watched the people over there work. My God, it's unbelievable to know the care and the kindness that people show you when you go to the hospital.

I really want to applaud all our health care workers and everyone in our health care because for families that are going through a little difficult time, to know that there's that much care and compassion in Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is absolutely amazing. My hats are off to everyone that works and takes care of individuals because they're a special breed.

I believe that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are a special breed. I believe that we have the passion; I believe we care about each other and I believe we're concerned about each other. I think that people are concerned about what's happening in our economy today and what's happening in our province.

The Premier got up tonight but he made lots of promises during the last campaign. He made promises that he knew he couldn't keep. Listen, I'll be the first one to say the polls and everything else were definitely leaning your way. I don't think you need to tell the people or promise the people what you promised them. You promised them no layoffs. You promised them their taxes wouldn't go up and here we are. We even got a tax, the one now that everybody is talking about now these days, the last month or so, when people did their income tax: The levy. It was just a line on the income tax showing that there's a tax to live here now.

We pay a tax just to be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Probably we should because we do live in the best province in the country, there is no doubt about that, and we have great people. But that's hard to swallow for a lot of people. That's a hard tax for people to swallow; hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that work so hard and people that want to say here.

You know I haven't met anybody yet that really came and said: I can't wait to move out of there, I can't wait to go. Do you know what they'll always say? They'll always say: I hate to go. I

don't want to go. I don't want to leave my family.

Then when you talk to grandparents, you see them and they'll say: Oh, it's some hard, b'y. It's some hard to know that your two or three grandchildren are up in Ontario or in Alberta or wherever they're to. I wish they were here with us. That's what we're all about as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're about family. The biggest slogan with the last election and the promise before the last budget was a stronger tomorrow.

Now, I'll ask you, and I'll ask everybody over on that side: Do you believe that it's a stronger tomorrow, what's been happening in these last two budgets that you put out? I don't think so. I don't think the people of Newfoundland and Labrador think it's a stronger tomorrow either.

Do you know what? It's devastating. It's devastating to so many people in this province. Just to give you an example, just talking to seniors, everybody really is affected by this budget, but I really think in particular our seniors are really – they paid the price years ago for us. They paid the price years and years ago and they worked so hard. They worked to make sure that they survived the worst. They lived in hard times.

These times, what we're living in today, they know harder times than this. They've been around when things were really hard when they came home to feed their families. I talked to a guy a couple of weeks ago and he told me they had 14 children in the family. I said my God, I had two. How'd you do it with 14? He said it was difficult. You worked like a dog.

Can you imagine though, back then, calling the mother of the home a stay-at-home mom with 14 children? I bet you she wanted to be out working more than he did to keep the family going, but that's the way it was back then. They worked hard for it. They worked very, very, very hard.

What we're doing today when it comes – just for example, the denture program. We heard from across the way over there, and the Minister of Justice in particular, he was up all the time talking about dentures and dignity. He talked about – I think when we first brought it in, we

either brought in you could get the top or the bottom. He talked about the dignity that it was to make sure that the person got a proper set of teeth.

We understood it, but they cancelled the whole denture program. That's gone now, altogether gone. Even if they had to go back and say we can't afford a full set, but that thing is gone.

I talked to seniors, when they go to a drugstore now to get over-the-counter drugs – I believe I saw somewhere it saves \$3.6 million or something like that for over-the-counter drugs. That's just simple little things that cost \$4 and \$5. That costs only a small amount of money but the effect that it has on our seniors is unbelievable.

The other one I talk to seniors about is insurance and the price of insurance. Insurance is hard on everyone because insurance is really, really high. I heard the minister today say that he's coming in to – there's some new legislation coming on auto insurance. I can't wait for that. I can't wait to hear it. I hope it's good because I mean everybody – the insurance.

This 15 per cent; we're the only province in Canada, other than Saskatchewan, that is charging this. It's unbelievable that we have to be treated so differently. I realize that it's revenue, but I think there are other expenditures we can have a look at.

When you look at this budget over the last number of years, the taxes and the fees, people got pounded. Got pounded, got pounded to death, but last year's budget was an increase in spending. This year's budget is \$283 million in the difference. It's not like we did a lot of cutting or a lot of (inaudible) out of this budget, but what we did last year, we put it on the backs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Do you know what we did this year? We took the gas tax off, half of it. That's not gone yet. It goes June 1.

What we did to people last year in this province, to our families, to hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we're doing the same thing again this year. Don't kid yourself. When they got up and they said there are no fee increases. Guess what? There was

nothing left to increase. They had it all done last year.

People are finding it hard. Families are finding it hard. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve better. They deserve to be treated with dignity. They deserve to be treated with respect and they deserve a better government.

We have to look at the past and we have to look at the future, but let's look at the individuals in this province today. If we're going to say that in the next number of years 33,000 Newfoundlanders are going to be out of work in this province. Where are we going to be?

Not only does taxing people and taking money out of people's pockets – I don't think the plan, which I don't know was a plan. I thought they had a plan but now we don't know if they have a plan, but whatever plan they had, obviously, it's not working because it's doing – I mean their red book that they had, apparently that's gone offline. You can't find that any more. That was their original plan. Now that plan is gone.

It's just that people of the province expected better. The people of the province wanted better. The people of the province had a choice to make and they made a choice, but they were sold a bag of goods that just didn't come true. I don't think that they needed to do it.

I really believe we all have to look at what's happening in our province today, and as elected officials in this province, I know we can do better. We can do better for our people. We can do better for the children of the province and I believe that we can do better for everybody. I think this budget this year was no different from what it was last year. It was an attack on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

I think I'm actually saddened that this is going to be my last time that I get to speak to *Budget 2017* because we're winding down. We are winding down in the budget debate, I say to all of you out there who may be watching this show. I think we're closing in now on close to 70 hours.

As I listened to the budget debates, in particular those of Members opposite, I kept hearing a recitation come to mind and I think I'm going to start tonight with a quote. "Tall are the tales that fishermen tell when summer's work is done, Of fish they've caught, of birds they've shot, of crazy risks they've run. But never did a fisherman tell a tale, so tall by a half a mile, As Grampa Walcott told one night in the Smokeroom on the Kyle."

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: Madam Speaker, that has come to my mind so much as I sit here and listen to the speeches I hear from Members opposite. I say to myself, well, Grandpa Walcott would have a run for his money with his tall tales because I don't think the squid would cut it anymore with some of the things that we have been hearing here in this House of Assembly, I'd say, Madam Speaker.

I want to start out again, I want to talk about some of the key messages, and you hear in their speeches, they all say the same lines so the key messages become easy to pick up. One of them was, as we started out last year, we wasted \$25 billion. That crowd opposite in government for 12 years wasted \$25 billion.

Well, I've heard in speech after speech after speech Members opposite get up and brag about investments in their districts. When it happened during the 12 years that the PCs were in government, that was a waste of money, but the Liberals are out doing it and it's a wonderful thing.

Madam Speaker, we're not allowed to say the word hypocrisy in the House of Assembly but when you sit here and listen, b'y, you almost

come out of your skin sometimes. You really, really do.

Another thing that the Liberals would often say, Madam Speaker, is that there was a spending problem. So I say to myself, and I've been watching closely the last two budgets: What have the Liberals done to reduce spending? They talk about this year; they like to tout zero-based budgeting.

Sure, it did result in some savings and I'm very pleased to see that actually. It's something I commend the government for; however, all of their savings, and then some, are been offset by the millions in severance that they're spending to fire bona fide civil servants, qualified civil servants, experienced civil servants, move them out of the way so that they can hire the Liberal campaign managers and former Liberal candidates and Liberal friends.

To me, Madam Speaker, that's absolutely shameful. If there's a spending problem, acknowledge there's a spending problem. Do something about it, but don't sell it to the people as a bag of goods under a guise and then turn around, send people out the door, pay them millions in severance and then turn around and hire political friends. It's wrong and I think it's shameful.

One thing I'm very, very happy about is that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I don't think will continue –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: – to fall for tall tales any more. We've learned quite a lesson. They voted for a better tomorrow, as my colleague has so eloquently stated in his speech prior to mine. They voted for a better tomorrow and what they got was something far, far worse.

In fact, the Liberal record is one that I'm glad we don't wear – a record of having the highest bankruptcies since we were established as a province, not a great record to have; a record of the highest taxation policies since we were a province, not a good record to have; a record of

two years into power and still no plan, not a good record to have.

Like my colleagues have said when they got up if we see good things happening, we have no problem commending them and working with government; but it is our job, as Opposition, to stand up and ask questions on things that are important to the people of the province, and no one will bully us into not doing that. That's our job, and we're going to do it and we're going to do it well.

One of the things that I'd also like to question is when the Liberals talk about a spending problem, yet they turn around and they're going to move Crown Lands offices from St. John's to Corner Brook, but there's no money budgeted for that in the budget.

Now, zero-based budgeting doesn't allow you to move money around like you did in the past, so how is the cost of that move going to be covered and is that going to be hidden from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador until the budget documents come out next year? Then when the budget documents come out next year, will their format be changed so that it's all hidden again and you have to work really hard to find out what's actually in there?

We're truly hoping that we're going to see a significant improvement in openness and transparency. Because just the economy has gone backwards, I do believe the amount of openness and transparency has gone backwards in the last two years as well.

As my colleague for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis has just stated, the people of the province were sold a bill of goods and there have been a lot of layoffs. Slowly, the information is being trickled to the Table Officers. In *Budget 2016* we see that there was a reduction of 450 full-time equivalent positions, agencies, boards and commissions, and 200 positions in core government.

This year, we see something that they're tabling as a flatter, leaner management review. We have a chart that outlines the positions to be abolished and it outlines the positions to be created. I'd like to read these into the record. The documents do exist. They're available here from the Table

Officers, but I just would like to read into the record so that the public themselves can formulate their own opinions about what they see is happening, and we can all keep a close eye as to when these positions are eliminated, how are they being filled. Are they truly being filled by an Independent Appointments Commission? Are they truly being filled by the best person for the job? Or are they positions that were just moved out of the way to make room for friends?

MR. K. PARSONS: I'd say the latter.

MS. PERRY: We've seen overwhelmingly it has been the latter, unfortunately to date, which is so sad. We have encouraged our young children to go to university, or go to trade school, get an education and look for jobs. When they see things like this happen, make no wonder they leave Newfoundland and Labrador and move on to Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. It's incredibly discouraging to see politics at play with taxpayers' dollars in terms of the jobs that are available in the public service.

It's appalling actually, and I'd heard about it a lot as a child. I'd heard about the Joey days a lot as a child. I'd never heard so much about Joey as I have in the last two years because people are saying it's just like the Joey era again. And, no doubt, all governments have done it, it's the way of politics, but what was different about this government is that they said they wouldn't. They promised that they wouldn't. They brought in their signature bill as an Independent Appointments Commission, yet, lo and behold, we're seeing more political appointments than we have seen in decades.

So under the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, they are abolishing three directors, 25 managers and two executive support positions for a grand total of 30, and there will be no new hires actually. So in Advanced Education and Skills – hats off to the minister there – no new creations, all eliminations there.

At the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, there are 17 directors being eliminated, 11 managers and one executive support for a total of 29, but three directors and

eight managers are being hired in new positions. We don't know who they are yet.

MR. K. PARSONS: Are they Liberals?

MS. PERRY: We're still tracing it, but the question my colleagues are asking: Are they Liberals? That's the whole point of why I am reading this out because I'd like the media to keep an eye to this. I'd like the public to keep an eye to this. We, as Opposition, are going to keep an eye to this because it's wrong.

These positions, if they're being created because they're going to make government better, then put the best person in the job, not the person who ran the Liberal campaign or who was the Liberal candidate in a former election because too much of that has happened in the last two years.

At The Rooms two managers positions are being eliminated and no new positions are being created. In the next department, CSSD, we have 10 directors being eliminated, 11 managers and three at executive support; however, we're seeing four directors being hired back. Who would those four directors be?

At Executive Council, five managers eliminated, one executive support and no new hires. In the Executive Council, Human Resources Secretariat, one director eliminated, 20 managers eliminated and one executive support eliminated; two will be replaced by one new director who is going to be coming in, and three new managers.

In the Women's Policy Office, we've seen one director eliminated, but one manager is being rehired. So who's going out the door and who's coming back in the door there? Something for us all to keep an eye to.

At Government House, one manager was eliminated and one manager has been rehired. As I continue down the list – and the chart is small so it's a little hard on my eyes here tonight. In the Department of Finance, four directors are being eliminated, 22 managers are being eliminated and two executive supports are being eliminated.

In Health and Community Services, we see four directors eliminated, seven managers eliminated, but we're seeing one new director being rehired and we're seeing one bargaining unit position actually being rehired. I can keep going, but I'm sure that this is quite long; you get the picture.

They're taking jobs out – they're taking a fair number of jobs out, but they're putting jobs back in and we still don't have the position titles of the jobs that they're putting back in. We do have the position titles for some of the jobs they've taken back out.

Again, the reason I raise that and why I wanted to speak about that tonight is because it's incredibly, incredibly disheartening and it's wrong. It is absolutely wrong to fire people from their jobs and then, a few weeks later or a few months later, put someone back in the job that has a political connection. In this day and age, that should never, never happen.

I hear heckling over there; you can get up and you can talk about Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and who ran all of that. I can get up and I can go into a tirade of everybody who was in a political post in the '90s. I can go through a tirade of everybody who was in a political post in the '80s and in the '70s. What's different is you can campaign to not do it anymore.

Do you know what? We can all support that. If we could actually see that to be true, I think that would gain incredible respect, not just from Newfoundlanders but all across the country and all across the Commonwealth because that is how politics has worked and you promised to do it differently. But we didn't get that. You promised a better tomorrow; we did not get that. So it is all very disheartening.

One thing I did notice this afternoon was that finally I heard one of the Members opposite get up and talk about the good things that are happening in the province. I said well, thank God, because for the two years leading up to the election and two years since they've been elected, they've been playing a political game, catering only to our population of 500,000, trying to brainwash the people into thinking we're into a serious problem when in reality –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. PERRY: Yes, we were in a serious problem because you elected a crowd that didn't know what they were doing – that was the serious problem. It wasn't that the sky was falling. Every other jurisdiction across this country, across North America, and around the globe is dealing with the oil crisis in a much better way than we are. But finally, they're starting to talk about the good things that are happening in Newfoundland.

They got up today and actually said b'y, the doom and gloom, got to stop talking about the doom and gloom. We were never talking about the doom and gloom. That was your message that you brought in when you took government, not our message. We have confidence in the people of this province. We have confidence in their skills and in their expertise.

Newfoundland and Labrador is indeed a great place to live. I truly hope I hear you talking more about the great things that are happening. Instead of selling us short to our residents for the next vote, sell us strongly to the global stage because we are very much contenders in the global stage, if we position ourselves that way.

That was where our government was positioning us and it is where true leaders will position us. Please God, we will be back to true leadership before too long.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

Another thing that I heard in one of these speeches from the Member opposite this afternoon was talking about debt and the debt load that the province has and not wanting to pass debt on to your grandchildren. I took note when the Member opposite was talking about that, the Liberal Member, and I said could you please have that conversation with our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau because Justin Trudeau is bringing significant debt, \$30 billion and counting in debt to this country. Your grandchildren's grandchildren will never withstand it, so please have a talk to Trudeau about your concerns about budgets because he's

doing what you guys get up and condemn on a daily basis and it's kind of scary.

If you could share some of your insight with respect to managing the books in a more fiscally responsible manner, that would be great because no matter what we do to take ourselves out of debt provincially, federally we'll never climb out from in under it at the rate that the spending is taking place.

Madam Speaker, I'm quickly running out of time. In terms of the good things that are happening in Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm going to end by talking about that tonight. Hydro power, today is the 50th anniversary of Newfoundland and Labrador's hydro generating facility that exists in Bay d'Espoir and I tell you

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: – it's quite a special day for us. Hydro has been good. Hydro has been incredibly good to the people of Bay d'Espoir. It has enabled my family, my friend's families, to live there. We all were afforded the opportunity to remain living there and grow up there, despite the fact that there was incredible hardship in the province with the downturn of the fishery. Because hydro created that opportunity for us and it created a stable employment base where over 100 people still live and work today, operating that plant in Bay d'Espoir.

In fact, I've spoken about it in the House just a couple of weeks ago; we're seeing a particular boom now with the development of Muskrat Falls and the construction of a new transmission line across to the Avalon. In terms of ideas, I'm sure the Premier has heard me talk about one idea and his colleagues will tell him one great idea that I think is worth pursuing, and that the Cabinet Committee on Jobs could really benefit from exploring this idea, is converting the access that's being put in place now for the hydro transmission line, which is a Class 4 road, converting that into a proper road that opens up the interior of the Southwest Coast, opens up new agriculture farmland, opens up the opportunities for significant expansion in aquaculture and tourism and it would benefit not just the Coast of Bays region, not just the Burin

Peninsula region, it would benefit the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

On that note, I do truly hope, once we put *Budget 2017* behind us, we do all stand up and talk more about the positive things in the province. I do commend, like I said, the government Members opposite for taking strides to reduce budget expenditures through the zero-based budgeting. It is definitely a commendable initiative and we look to seeing more and, as we see more things, we will commend them.

Thank you very much.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I don't have much time to speak. We're taking part in the budget debate here this evening and for everyone watching at home I wanted to say that it was quite inspiring to hear the hon. Premier deliver his comments here this evening.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: As he pointed out, there are quite a lot of good things in this budget and we're making a lot of progress, there's no question about that. But I also wanted to respond to some of the things that have just been said in the last couple of hours by the Opposition Members here in the House of Assembly.

Specifically the Member for Mount Pearl North, the Member for Cape St. Francis and the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune raised issues associated with two themes I guess as part of the speaking points that have been done up in the Opposition office because they don't have a lot to say to criticize this budget, so they're talking about issues of trust and issues related to patronage.

Again, going back to something that the Premier alluded to in his budget speech a moment ago, the former PC Party premier pointed out last week in the House that we should not forget history; we have to remember our past, at our

peril. There are issues associated with trust and with patronage that we have to remember about the previous administration, especially when they get up one after the other after the other and after the other and don't talk about this year's budget but they talk about issues of trust and issues associated with patronage.

I've been sitting here in my seat for a number of weeks now going over the report of the Auditor General, the review of the Humber Valley Paving imbroglio, which seems to be forgotten by the Members of the Opposition for some reason or another, but this was only September 2014. That wasn't very long ago. So if people want to talk about issues of patronage and trust, therein lies patronage and trust, I say, coupled together –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: – in a fairly thick report from the Auditor General.

It's shocking to me that they don't remember their own history. The Humber Valley Paving situation – and I don't want to belabour it but I will just review it very briefly. In that situation, the individual who was about to be acclaimed Leader of the PC Party was mysteriously relieved of his obligations by the minister of Transportation and Works for \$19 million worth of obligations to the people of the province, in just a few hours, in a way that was absolutely absurd.

The Auditor General pointed out at the time that he was not able to satisfy himself at all that all of the questions had been answered. That's why I'm glad we're going to see a public inquiry into this issue before this term of office is over. We have to see that done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: There's stuff in here. In the House of Assembly, I remember the minister responsible and other ministers standing up and saying: I didn't know Gene Coleman was related to Frank Coleman. I didn't know he had anything to do with Humber Valley Paving.

Right here in the report of the Auditor General it says: The deputy minister also reminded the

minister that there may be some sensitivity around this course of action because of the relationship of Mr. Frank Coleman with the company. He told that to the minister and yet stands up here in the House of Assembly and say I don't know anything about it.

Page after page after page, we have not been able to satisfy ourselves why two ministers within a half an hour independently contacted the deputy minister of Transportation and Works to inquire about the status of Humber Valley Paving on the morning of March 13, 2014. When they were asked about it about here in the House of Assembly it was coincidental. They just happened to, in the space of a half hour, both –

AN HON. MEMBER: A different group of Colemans.

MR. KIRBY: Yes.

Both contact the deputy minister and asked about exactly the same project because, of course, the next day their guy was going to be acclaimed leader and they wanted him to be relieved of his obligations, his fiduciary responsibilities to the people of the province. That's just one thing.

I don't have much time so I'll leave Humber Valley here. There's a lot of reading there and, like I said, I can't wait for all of that to come back and for people to be subpoenaed, to speak under oath and to finally tell the truth about what happened there. You lecture us on issues, trust and patronage; that brings me to another issue: Muskrat Falls, speaking of imbroglios.

In the summer, prior to the election in 2015, we were all wondering what was going on with the fiscal situation of the province. We were also wondering what was going on with the situation at Muskrat Falls. We were hearing all sorts of rumours.

That spring there were pictures being posted on the Internet of this Integrated Cover System, they called it. It was this dome that, in their wisdom, somebody decided they were going to build in a rugged interior of Labrador, to put a dome over Muskrat Falls so that they could work during the winter.

Well, the dome blew down. Tens and tens of millions of dollars, basically, just garbled up and wrapped up, basically thrown away for scrap. Tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money just tossed away. This is one of the selling points of Muskrat Falls. So during that period of time, we know now that there were very serious issues with Astaldi and the contract. They were looking for hundreds of millions of additional dollars from the people of the province for their contract for Muskrat Falls.

I will never forget the day the leader of the Opposition, who is the hon. Premier right now, stood in his place right there, he looked over, he asked the then minister of Natural Resources about how the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador would be left on the hook for all of this dome issue. That minister stood up and he said: No, the people of the province, the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador, won't have to pay for any of this. We knew, he knew, at the time that's exactly what was going on, that Astaldi was looking for additional funds for compensation for this problem with the dome.

Subsequently, we had to bring in a new CEO who went in and fixed that contract issue, but all of that was known at the time. So don't lecture us about issues of trust when people stood up here in the House of Assembly and said things that were absolutely not the case.

Then the Member for Cape St. Francis talks about our election platform and the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune discussed the same thing. We wrote, the Premier wrote – he was leader of the Opposition, leader of the Liberal Party at the time. He wrote to the PC premier, he wrote to the premier of the day, asked what the fiscal situation was in that September. He never got a response. He never got a single response and all of these financial issues were piling up and piling up.

After the election was over, the true nature of the fiscal situation became known. It was completely a mess. Not what we were sold that year.

Going back to the whole issue again of trust and political patronage, anybody remember the public service pensioners? Remember that? The Member for Cape St. Francis got up and said

you have to respect seniors. That's the way they respected those seniors. They went after retired public service pensioners, on an \$8 billion budget, to get \$900,000 or so in overpayments that were made on their watch to these pensioners.

There was one woman in her 90s who they went after. Who did they hire to do that? Speaking of patronage. They hired a guy by the name of Leo Bonnell. This has all been in the news. I can say this; this has all been reported publicly. They hired an individual who was a member of the district association for the PC Party for the PC Finance minister of the day to go after seniors for overpayments on pensions that they had no role in causing.

In the end, I have to hand it to the Minister of Finance right now because one of the first acts she took when she assumed that office was to say: Hey, you know what, we will respect seniors. We're going to stop this because this is

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: That's what happened there.

Again, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said we have never seen patronage like this before in our life what we're seeing here today. I pointed out the irony that just five portraits down the wall there is a distinguished Newfoundlander and Labradorian by the name of Len Simms. He had a distinguished career in the House of Assembly. He was leader of the PC Party and he was also Speaker. That's why his portrait is on the wall. He was Speaker while the PC Party was in government. He had a distinguished career.

One of the things that happened after the Conservatives, the PC Party, assumed power is they used the public service to keep Len Simms on retainer so he could run their elections. Basically, they had another fellow, again another distinguished Newfoundlander and Labradorian by the name of Ross Reid. He was a deputy minister. According to everything that's been debated here, the Members of the PC Party would say, well, that's a non-partisan post.

They would basically take these two chaps, they would resign or they would leave their positions in the public service. They would go out; they would run the PC Party election campaigns. Then a week after the election was over they would mysteriously be rehired to positions in the public service until the next election when they would step down again, run the election campaign and come back. Absolutely, this happened on more than one occasion.

They seem to forget what happened on their very own watch. Over and over again, we can recount these things. I have a list here, a lengthy list, of people who appointed one day – the former deputy premier who is now the Opposition Member for Mount Pearl North, one day he made 40 appointments – 40 appointments in one day.

Another gentleman who was running for the leadership of the PC Party, was a former PC Education minister, held a number of portfolios, interestingly enough, which you probably won't find in the Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. John Ottenheimer was actually principal of St. Joseph's Academy when I was in grade one – another distinguished Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

After he failed to become Leader of the PC Party in September of 2014, they decided to appoint him as CEO of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation – a position interestingly enough, previously held by Len Simms who was also appointed to that position.

To stand here and to be lectured over and over again about patronage and issues of trust, you don't have a leg to stand on. It's funny because the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island he stood here one day and he was slinging mud at someone who works on my staff and he made some comment to my running mate. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, he appointed the fellow who sits behind him in the House of Assembly to be his second executive assistant during the hiring freeze, after the hon. Member failed to win a by-election in Conception Bay South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: It is galling to stand here, for him to stand over there and accuse me of patronage when he hired the guy who now sits behind him to a second executive assistant position during a hiring freeze, after the gentleman failed to win a by-election and get a seat in the House of Assembly. It's, again, no leg to stand on.

AN HON. MEMBER: Imbroglis everywhere.

MR. KIRBY: There are imbroglis everywhere, absolutely.

I think we've established the whole issue of the Romanian ferries and the failure to plan for the wharf on Bell Island but, hopefully, and we are working hard – I know the hon. Minister of Transportation and Works is working hard to make sure that the people on Bell Island finally get the ferry and the wharf that their Member was unfortunately unable to deliver on.

I could go down over and over and over, all of these other issues of trust. Remember the Fisheries Fund? Now, they claim that we don't have one but, as the hon. Premier said, he will not have events with federal officials that do not include federal officials.

This is what happened. On the eve of the by-election in Carbonear – Harbour Grace when Sam Slade was elected to the House of Assembly, on the eve of that, what they did was they went out and they announced the fictitious Fisheries Fund as a way, as far as I'm concerned, to try and influence that by-election.

They went down to The Rooms and they had the biggest kind of a party; they cost the taxpayers thousands of dollars. The Leader of the NDP who is now Leader of the NDP, he was there. They had a grand ole time; they celebrated this money that was never ever agreed to by the federal government.

So again, we have an agreement with federal government. They had none, but they had absolutely no problem trotting this out and pretending that this was the case. I could go on and on and on because there's quite a lot to all of this, but I guess the point is those in glass houses should not be throwing stones. And there are so many stones that have been thrown here today that I really find it hard to believe.

The other thing that I just want to quickly comment on because I know I've been asked to spare some time for other Members of our caucus to speak –

MR. JOYCE: If anything you said is not true, get them to stand up and speak on it.

MR. KIRBY: If anything I say is not true, stand up.

The other thing that is really fatiguing is to stand here in Question Period day after day after day and answer questions, be asked questions why they made decisions of a certain nature while they were in government. Today again in the House of Assembly I was asked to explain why it was that the previous administration, that the PC minister of Education made changes to the public examination for English 3201. It was like it was my decision. I was not minister when that decision was made, but I did explain to the Member why it was. He sat around the Cabinet table, had no idea.

Likewise the school that they had planned for Witless Bay, they put a \$28 million price tag on that school and I'm being asked where did you get that number – where'd you get that number? We got that number from their materials. That was their number; I got that number from them. These are all decisions that were made around the Cabinet table.

You would assume that ministers at that time, the PC Members, would have known what it was that was being decided on their watch. They're completely divorced from those decisions, and you have to wonder. That's why things went on like the Humber Valley Paving mess. That's why we had that scandal, because people did not have their eye on the ball, they were not paying attention to the decisions that were being made, and that's how messes get created and that's how we ended up with a \$2.7 billion disaster on our hands when this government assumed power.

I could go on and on about this, but I will say one final time, there's enough material here to write a number of books about – and I'm sure people will be doing that at one point or another. But please don't stand here and lecture us about trust and issues associated with patronage and

transparency when you wrote the book on this over and over for 13 or so years that you were in power.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's always a great honour to speak in this hon. House on behalf of the people of the beautiful District of Lewisporte – Twillingate. I'm not sure I'm going to follow that act there by the former speaker. Being a veteran MHA, I must say he did a great job there. I'm going to focus my time on the budget to talk about some of the great things happening within the province.

First of all, I'm going to start off – I was hoping to speak last week, Madam Speaker, to talk about Municipal Awareness Week. As a –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is having trouble hearing the Member recognized to speak. I ask people for their co-operation.

MR. D. BENNETT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Last week was Municipal Awareness Week and I just want to commend all the mayors and councilors and municipal workers who are doing such a great job in running our province. In my district, I've got 43 communities; 11 of which are municipal councils and the other 32 are LSDs.

Like my colleague for Fogo Island – Cape Freels and some of the other Members in this hon. House, I, too, served within a municipal government there. I served as a recreation director with the Tourism Department for 25 years, so I know the great work that's being

done by our municipalities, by many of the volunteers and all the other people that help to run our communities. I just wanted to say a thank you to a number of the mayors and councilors in my district that have chosen not seek re-election this year. There are a number of them. However, I do want to recognize one: Mayor Johnny Hamlyn from the community of Crow Head. Mayor Hamlyn has served the Town of Crow Head for 55 years as mayor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: Madam Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, that's the longest, current serving mayor in all of Canada. I would think highly that it's probably one of the longest, if not the longest, serving in all of North America.

I've spoken to Mayor Hamlyn there on Friday night during the high school graduation and he's still deciding whether he's going to run again for the next election this coming September. More than likely Mayor Hamlyn will. God willing, he'll have the strength and health. I know he's a very vibrant man and he's very passionate about the Town of Crow Head. I look forward to continuing to work with him over the coming months, as I do with all the other mayor and councillors in my district.

I just want to take a few seconds to encourage new people in our communities to step up. Far too often people get up and are quick to criticize the work of mayors, councillors and members of local service districts, but I do commend the work they do. I know the countless hours they put into running the communities. In most cases this is all volunteer work, time they're taking away from their families and taking time away from vacations and things like that.

If you're out there and you're interested in becoming a mayor or councillor in a community or local service district put your name forward, see what work is really involved into running a municipal council. Again, thank you to all the mayors and councillors in my district.

I also have to acknowledge – last week was another, I guess a special occasion for me and my family. Actually, my wife on May 11 was 10 years smoke free. I just want to say

congratulations to my wife, Tina, for quitting the bad habit of smoking.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: It did not come without a lot of struggles and a lot of hard work, and I must say a few disagreements between ourselves over the years, but I have to commend her. She put up with me for 25 years, so 10 years of smoking, not bad.

I would like to encourage anybody else out there that's listening tonight who do smoke and would like to try to quit, to contact our Smokers' Helpline at 1-800-363-5864 or also go on the website and visit www.smokershelp.net. Again, that's 1-800-363-5864 or www.smokershelp.net. They do provide a great service.

Madam Speaker, back to our budget; like I said, there are a lot of great things happening within our government this year. Since we took office there has been a great change in our position. While we're still financially challenged, and some of us might say we're in a precarious situation, there's no doubt our province is seeing light at the end of the tunnel. We're going to be better off for the direction our government is taking and the choices we are making.

Last year's budget forecast a \$1.83 billion deficit.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. D. BENNETT: One point eight three billion dollars.

As a result of our commitment to restoring financial footing, the 2017-2018 deficit is projected to be \$778 million; \$22 million less than predicted last year.

Budget 2017 includes expenses of \$8.1 billion – and I think the Premier referenced that a little earlier – with a reduction of \$283 million over last year's budget, Madam Speaker. Revenues are only projected to be \$7.3 billion.

I'm proud to say that this year, Madam Speaker, our government will not have any new taxes or increases in *Budget 2017*. I'm also very pleased to say we will be honouring our commitment to

reducing the temporary gas tax by 75 per cent this year, taking off 8.5 cents June 1 and an additional 4 cents per litre reduction on December 1, 2017.

Madam Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Low Income and Seniors' Benefit will be maintained this year through a \$120 million investment. These programs benefit approximately 155,000 individuals and families annually.

Budget 2017 also requires borrowing of \$400 million, which is \$2 billion less than forecast last year. That's \$2 billion that we are budgeting less for borrowing.

Madam Speaker, this budget is about building to put a plan in place for future years. We have to keep our costs in check over the medium term and we have to invest in our province as we move forward. To that end, there's a lot of investment in this budget; an additional \$73 million over 10 years for mental health initiatives. Rather than sitting idle on recommendations and legislation, like was put forward before the previous government, we will be acting on recommendations put forward by the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: – and also moving forward on a number of other great initiatives for the benefit of our residents.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to supporting our communities. We have invested \$115 million to be provided to community groups for operational funding, as well as support for projects and programs that we deliver to our residents. This includes a commitment to maintain core funding for 2017-2018 for the multi-year approach funding to our community grants.

We have also budgeted \$14.4 million for economic and business development; \$100 million for municipal infrastructure over the next three years, with \$70 million going into multi-year capital works, and \$30 million for municipal capital works programs; \$22 million for municipal operating grants, which will

remain at our current levels; an additional \$23.3 million will be put in place to maintain the HST rebate for municipalities; and \$7.1 million for the provincial gas tax revenue sharing, which will increase to one cent per litre this year for our municipalities.

Madam Speaker, the provincial government is committed to collaborating with the Government of Canada to leverage federal funding to maximize infrastructure and investments. *Budget 2017* has committed to \$15 million for municipal projects funded under the national-regional project component for the new Building Canada Fund.

The Way Forward, Madam Speaker, was launched late last year. This document is guiding and giving direction to work forward. It has provided agencies and departments with a focus on saving funds wherever possible and maintaining quality public services. Two of the key elements used this year to make it possible were the zero-based budgeting and a more balanced management approach structure. As we proceed, it is important to manage government benefits and salaries.

Of our total budget, a full \$3.3 million is committed to salaries, which is why a wage freeze has been implemented for management and non-union employees for this current fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to talk about our government's investment in a couple of industries that play an important part to the economic development and sustainability of communities in my district. There are a number of commitments in this budget that are very encouraging from my perspective.

Under Tourism, we will be contributing \$20 million to support cultural and heritage initiatives; allocating \$13 million to continue our marketing on tourism destination, and increasing the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation's equity investment program by an additional \$2 million.

The fishery and aquaculture are also very important to me and my district and our caucus. In 2016, seafood production value reached a high of \$1.4 billion and directly employed

17,000 people; more than \$5 million for investment in wild fishery and aquaculture industries. This funding will leverage significant investment from the private sector and the federal government. This includes \$2.8 million for the Aquaculture Capital Equity Investment Fund; \$2 million for the Seafood Innovation and Transition Program, which will support technology and innovation in harvesting, processing, aquaculture and marketing, with a focus on recovering the groundfish industry.

Mr. Speaker, \$100,000 is allocated for the Fisheries Advisory Committee, comprising of stakeholders to provide input to government decision making around the province's fishing industry; and another \$500,000 for the Fish Plant Worker Employment Support Program.

In agriculture, which is also very important to me, as we have a number of agriculture industries within my district, we will be investing \$3.9 million to continue on the Growing Forward 2, which is a five-year, \$37 million, cost-shared project with our federal government.

We will be investing \$3.25 million for the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program to focus on food self-sufficiency, land development and industry growth, and approximately \$1 million into agriculture research and development to crops such as canola. An additional \$500,000 will be invested for the Cranberry Industry Development Program.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple other good things I'd like to speak to regarding my district. I know my time is getting short and we have few other speakers who would like to speak. Fire protection is very important to my district, as I'm sure it is to all districts. Over the last number of months, eight communities within my district, including the communities of Laurenceton, Brown's Arm, Lewisporte, Little Burnt Bay, Embree, Campbellton, Comfort Cove-Newstead and Loon Bay have been all working together to form regional fire services.

This is probably one of the largest initiatives showing regionalization of fire departments anywhere in the province right now. They have signed an MOU among all the adjacent communities and hopefully, within the next few

months, they will be signing a full document that will incorporate the fire services throughout those eight communities.

The regionalization of the service is not designed to eliminate any of the local fire departments but, rather, to enhance the fire services. These eight communities will work together for training, work together to share services and to provide a superior service in fire protection to my area.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, in speaking with these communities and the residents of the area, we're very excited about this fire protection and the initiative of the regionalization of services. It's going to make a big difference on fire protection because many of my communities, although they may have 15 or 20 members in their fire department, many have all volunteers, many of them are seasonal workers that work out of town either during the daytime or working outside the province.

So, at times during the day, although they may have a full contingent of firefighters, there's a good part of the day they may only have two or three in the community. Now this regional service will make sure that in the event they're not fully staffed that other firefighters will be able to come and help out. So it's very reassuring.

Another big part of that is the fire training. We all know that no matter what job you do, as the old saying goes, you're only as strong as your weakest link. By providing services together, all eight fire departments will be trained equally and be able to provide the same level of service.

I do look forward to continuing to work with our local fire department, as I'm sure our minister is very excited about that, and also Fire and Emergency Services. I think once this program is implemented, it is definitely going to be something the rest of the province is going to want to follow. Because, like I said, eight local fire departments is an exception.

I want to commend all the firefighters throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. There are approximately 5,900 volunteers that service our province. So a big thank you to all the fire departments. Again, I just want to say hats off

and congratulations on what they do on regional service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to speaking again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly I'm happy to rise to speak to *Budget 2017*. Mr. Speaker, this budget is a combination of a lot of hard work by the Minister of Finance and the Finance staff that worked diligently to bring forward a budget that helps us pave the way forward.

The other part of this combination that cannot be ignored is the fact the former administration caused this province to incur a \$2.2 billion debt. Now, in order to find out where we stand in our financial situation, I think we must first understand how we got here. The uphill struggle to get our province back on keel, even when it comes to our financial realities, was not caused by the current government; rather, it was caused by the former PC administration.

Over the last 12 years of the former administration's time in government, they negated through several Blue Books promises that would practise solid financial management. I'd like to share some of those promises, Mr. Speaker. Here's an extract from one of the Blue Book promises from the PC administration when they were power. I quote: "Our fiscal policies will keep a tight rein on government spending and orient new spending to areas that enhance economic growth."

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Mount Pearl, in 2012, went so far as to say: Prosperity is about fiscal responsibility and, once again, we are delivering a budget that is all about fiscal responsibility. All this time, Mr. Speaker, the people of the province were being misled and the comments on our financial status in 2015 stating that the deficit was \$1.1 billion, which is half of what the reality was.

More promises by the former PC administration – in 2007, the Blue Book stated: “We made it our goal to chart a far more responsible course: to stop overburdening future generations with an ever-increasing burden of debt that was siphoning more and more public money away from the programs in order to pay for debt servicing.” Mr. Speaker, does that not sound familiar?

The only question I have for the former administration: What happened? What did you do? How could a government with \$25 billion in revenue manage to contradict its own mandate and put the people of this province in such a financial mess? How could a government with such high royalty over 15 years leave us with \$2.2 plus billion debt?

There is more, Mr. Speaker, on the 29th of April, 2013, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island stood on his feet in the House of Assembly and this is what he said: In 2003 when the new government comes in, the books are open. We get a reality check. We are in bad shape. We are borderline bankrupt.

He went on to say: How do you deal with this? How do you get through the first year? This is how he answered it, Mr. Speaker: You assess, you make harsh decisions and you move forward.

I ask again, Mr. Speaker, in 12 years with \$25 billion in royalties, what happened? Where did you go wrong? I remember the Member for Cape St. Francis a few years ago when he stood on his feet and said, I don't blame the Liberal government; times were different. They did not have the money that we have.

The hon. Member went on to say: I just want to take responsibility for what we're doing and what we have done since 2003. We are making smart investments.

Mr. Speaker, I can't blame the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis because given the financial status that we inherited in 2015, the hon. Member was clearly misinformed. I can't remember the word now.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hoodwinked.

MR. EDMUNDS: Hoodwinked, yes.

Mr. Speaker, we checked out the investments made by the former administration, there was no surprise. Even with the economic indicator showing a drop in oil prices, the PCs thought that stimulating the offshore resource sector would solve the financial crisis.

The Premier of the province went on to say the price of oil would not go under \$100. In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, the price dropped to \$27 per barrel at one point. Now the comment about the PC government not being very good at math turned out to be most true.

In the face of the downslide in our finances, the Member for Mount Pearl North stood on his feet and he said this, Mr. Speaker: We are a government that demonstrates maturity and shows financial responsibility and demonstrates sound planning for the future. We are prepared to make the necessary tough choices that need to be made today to ensure we have a strong future.

This is what the Member for Mount Pearl North said, Mr. Speaker. My question again, what happened? What were they thinking about?

In 2015, when this government had a chance to reveal our financial situation for the first time, the financial situation that was turned over to us by the former administration, the truth was shocking. We had an idea the debt would be substantial but to see it more than double what the PC administration said it was, it was a little hard to comprehend.

Again, to use the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island's own words, how do you deal with this? How do you get through the first year? You make harsh decisions, you move forward. Now it's okay for them to do that but it's not okay when the reality is that you do have to make harsh decisions.

The Member for Mount Pearl North also stated when it comes to the civil service, he said, yes, it seems to be brought to a bloated level – I think was the word, a bloated level. I think 75-plus people of the province agreed with him, Mr. Speaker.

Now, that being said, we have a job to do. We have to stave off disaster. We have to do what the former PC administration said they would do, but they never did. We have to get this province back on track; and, yes, Mr. Speaker, like the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island stated, we have to make some difficult decisions.

These aren't decisions that any government would want to make, Mr. Speaker. These are decisions we had to make. The only other option was to declare bankruptcy, and I can't even imagine how worse that would have been. For the people of our province, we have not let the financial burden handed to us by the former PC government – it would have been the end of our province.

Mr. Speaker, as a government, we didn't have a choice. We had to step up. Essentially, we have to fix a problem that was caused by the former administration. Last year we had such a short window to let the people of the province know exactly how serious the state our province is in financially, especially when the former premier, current Leader of the Opposition, told the people of the province the debt was \$1.1 billion. The Minister of Finance had a tough job to do last year, and it wasn't a job she wanted to do, it was a job she had to do.

I hear Members of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, continuously criticizing government for doing what they should have done, and more importantly, what could have avoided if they would have practiced their own preaching we wouldn't be in this problem. Now our job, Mr. Speaker, is to get this province where we want it to be, where it should have been when we formed government. Unfortunately, we've been in damage control for quite some time, and we have to adjust the damage caused by the former PC government.

I think it was a CBC reporter that put it in a good description, Mr. Speaker. He said the PCs are like the foxes that ate all the chickens and are now asking for the eggs. I think that's probably the best description of the former administration.

Mr. Speaker, we had to set our own goals to get ourselves back on track. We couldn't follow the

path of the former administration, because that's what caused the problem. The Third Party doesn't have any plan except to criticize every plan that's there. I think I could go on as far as they made a plan themselves they would probably criticize it, Mr. Speaker.

We also don't have the luxury of running away from a problem and we don't have the luxury of being provided with a plan. We have set tough challenges to ourselves in the *Way Forward*, Mr. Speaker, and we are meeting those challenges.

Budget 2017, after just one year, shows ability in taking a crisis and turning the tide and moving forward with ongoing and continuous improvement as we go forward.

My colleagues on this side of the House, no doubt, have given many examples of how we have moved ahead and how we are well underway to fixing the crisis that was handed to us by the PC government in the past. We have reduced the deficit from what could have been \$2.2 billion to just over a billion dollars. Furthermore, we set a goal to reduce the deficit to \$1.83 billion and we surpassed that number in one year.

We have reduced the borrowing requirements from a staggering \$2.4 billion that was handed to us by the former PC administration to approximately \$400 million, which is a difference of \$2 billion. I think that's something I'd be proud of. We've set a goal to return to surplus in the next five years.

The Premier in his statement said this is not about politics; this is about repairing our province and not ever again being dependent on the fluctuating prices of royalties, especially oil. The former administration did this, and this is why we are in the state we are in.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I'd just like to say that we still have a lot of work to do, and we will continue to roll out initiatives; initiatives such as the Job Growth Strategy that will create prosperity and diversity in our province on the way forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak to *Budget 2017*, following my colleague the Member for Torngat Mountains. He certainly set the context for where the Opposition, the PC administration had left the province, the state they had left government and the people with \$2.2 billion deficit, onwards of \$2.7 billion by their inability to manage and properly make decisions when they had tremendous, tremendous amounts of revenues coming in to the province. They had a significant spending problem and I go back and say a matter of PC math and PC economics – and the Premier mentioned a little bit earlier this evening how they bet the future of Newfoundland and Labrador on \$100 per barrel or more oil. Not just for one year, but for 50-plus years. In the whole history of the world, that has not happened for more than 15 months.

So when you talk about their reliability and their ability to plan, their history and their past dictate – they have their fictitious infrastructure, their \$5 billion infrastructure plans that the Auditor General, when went looking, couldn't find it.

Our government collectively, as a whole, we work as a team, a team of leaders where we have a vision to offer a strong future for all of our residents, and we're realizing our potential for that stronger tomorrow in our budget. That's why we've mapped out a very clear plan to be able to return to surplus; that in *Budget 2017* there are no new taxes or fees; that 75 per cent of the temporary gas tax will be removed in this year's budget; where 8.5 cents will be removed in just a couple of weeks; where we will see not just 8.5 cents, but the HST that will be stacked on top of it, so that's almost 10 cents relief to consumers. That is a good thing, Mr. Speaker. That is a good thing, and it is a responsible thing to do.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and the Seniors' Benefit will be maintained through \$120 million investment.

When they get up and they talk about we're not doing anything for seniors – that's \$120 million investment in the budget. This is from the PC administration that thinks that a Seniors' Advocate is a luxury. Well, I will tell you that this benefit is for 155,000 individuals and families annually that are availing of this.

The budget this year, through proper planning, we've been able to reduce our borrowing requirement to \$400 million – \$2 billion lower. If you have to borrow less money, that means there's less interest that has to be paid in servicing the debt. When they got into government, they chose to start paying down debt and lower that debt servicing; but when they left government, they left government in worse shape than what it was, causing more dollars, more of that dollar to actually be spent on debt servicing than when they started. That's the actions of the previous administration, the PC administration, and their financial astuteness.

When it comes to our actions, we've been able to find \$283 million in savings, a significant amount from zero-based budgeting; \$42 million from reviewing expenditures at agencies, boards and commissions; looking at removing duplications and streamlining different structures within departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

If you look at just in the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, the former administration was offering a \$2 million program, but they were making sure that there was over a half million dollars in administration costs just to administer that program. If there is more and more for administration – it's the same way when people criticize the Home Heating Rebate being removed. We've removed the administrative cost of the Home Heating Rebate, which was \$2.3 million to administer.

All the people who were eligible for the Home Heating Rebate previously are still eligible for that amount, and more, through the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement in quarterly payments and the Seniors' Benefit, and they're receiving more. Whereas the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands gets up and talks, no, but you took this away – you took this away. Well, the facts are the facts. These people are eligible for more

money than they would have previously. By being able to take that \$2.3 million that was used in administration it will be able to go back and benefit more people. These are 155,000 individuals across Newfoundland and Labrador that are benefiting from this service.

If you look at strategic investments that we've made for healthy living, for safe and sustainable communities, education and skills development, industry and business and infrastructure, the budget has \$573 million for infrastructure investments for roads, schools, health care facilities, municipal infrastructure programs. There's also investment to diversify the economy, to create more jobs; committing \$8 million for an Investment Attraction Fund, which will encourage and support foreign direct investment in the province; \$14.4 million for investment in economic and business programs to support communities all across Newfoundland and Labrador; \$19 million for research and development.

There's significant federal leverage for trade and investment. When we look at rural broadband, it was something that I raised when we were Estimates, that the previous PC administration when there was federal broadband program of \$225 million, they choose to ignore the federal investment and used the taxpayers of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to subsidize Internet through that capacity, whereas they could have used the federal leverage.

We're actually reaching out and being able to get up 90 per cent for broadband through the federal government. We're making the provincial dollars work smarter, Mr. Speaker, and that is the responsible thing to do. When it comes to trade missions, they were paying 100 per cent of the cost for trade missions when they could be leveraging up to 95 per cent. They were paying out unnecessary rents to the tunes of hundreds of thousands of dollars. We found savings in my department alone.

So growing their lease space, growing the footprint and the size of government year over year over year – their ghost telephone lines, there were dozens and dozens of telephone lines in government departments that they were paying the bills for but there was no one sitting at the desk. Because remember in 2013 they laid

off 2,000-plus employees and they kept the phone lines going for years.

Then there's duplication, as I said earlier, around the administration cost. When we look at investments in tourism, they were contributing \$20 million, an increase of 9 per cent for culture and heritage, the arts community. These are significant.

When we look at, we've basically doubled the investment in the Film Development Corporation's Equity Investment Program to \$4 million. Film last year was \$46 million in production cost alone; 600 direct, full-time equivalencies and post-production work – a lot of great work is being done in film and the things that lead into artistic and creative and cultural industries; \$13 million for our tourism marketing campaign and to get people to our destination. We're seeing a significant investment when it comes to tourism; it's 18,000 jobs, over 2,000 businesses.

The fishery, in 2016 last year, seafood value production reached a historic high of \$1.4 billion, directly employing over 17,000 people, and there's \$5 million investment in wild fishery and aquaculture industries in this year's budget. There's also money for the Seafood Innovation and Transition Program; plus we've worked very diligently with the federal government to deliver \$100 million from federal funds for the fisheries investment program. That's something that they didn't deliver when it comes to the federal government for the fishery.

In fact, they replaced a lot of federal government funds when it comes to fishery science and other investments. That was a DFO responsibility, but they decided to use the provincial government tax dollars to fund those initiatives, and that continues, go and go and go.

There was \$3.9 million for Growing Forward; it's a five-year program, \$37 million, cost-shared with the federal government. Having a good relationship with the federal government has leveraged and created benefits for Newfoundland and Labrador right here in our province.

We've also seen where we've done a lot of research to look at things like canola, look at

barley. We're seeing a lot of craft breweries start up here, cider companies, people are getting into these microbusinesses and that will lead to future employment and job growth.

The mining and resource extraction: If I look at the Minister of Natural Resources, 7,000 people employed in the mining resource extraction and we're seeing new mines starting. I've had the pleasure to help extend a loan to Canada Fluorspar. These are positive things. Junior Exploration Assistance and Prospecting. All of these things are helping grow the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When we look at roads and ferries, \$77.2 million, a five-year roads program, being very open and transparent, it's something the previous administration couldn't do. They wouldn't reveal. They wouldn't release tenders early. It led to less value, worse outcomes for the people of the province.

It shows the PC math; it shows the PC economics. But when you have good economics and when you understand math, you can deliver; you can meet your targets. You can make a budget that works for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to realize our potential so that we can create the jobs and build that economy for tomorrow, so that Newfoundland and Labrador is on the right foot.

This is the right team to be able to deliver for Newfoundland and Labrador. I will certainly encourage everybody on that side of the House to vote for budget 2017-2018.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm happy again to have an opportunity to stand and speak in this House to *Budget 2017*, although sometimes I get confused because the Opposition has been referring to *Budget 2016*. They haven't had much to say about *Budget 2017*, although it's been disappointing because there have been a number of positive initiatives

in this budget from various departments that the Members opposite have indicated that they will not be supporting. I've spoken about those. That's unfortunate that they won't be supporting Sexual Assault Response Pilot Program and other initiatives.

I'm going to get to Justice now in a second. I just wanted to take a few moments to speak to the District of Burgeo – La Poile which I haven't had much of an opportunity, but now is as good as any. It's an opportunity to speak about some of the things that we've seen and it's an opportunity for me to thank various people for their support.

When it comes to Burgeo – La Poile, it's a district that there are a lot of positive things happening, but unfortunately for a number of years it was neglected. I think purely the reason that it was neglected was due to the fact that it was not of the same stripe as the administration.

We've seen this in the past, we've seen how this works, but it's been unfortunate in situations where Members opposite like – and there's nothing that boils me more than when Members opposite talk about rural Newfoundland and rural Labrador, but at the same time the fact is that they neglected it. They neglected it. I'm going to give you one example.

It was only a couple of years ago that the Burgeo Road – and I don't often use this word, but it's the appropriate one. Sometimes people don't use it appropriately. The Burgeo Road, Route 480, literally started collapsing. Literally, it collapsed. Through work done by the dedicated staff of Transportation and Works, they identified a number of culverts that were in disrepair, were in danger of collapsing again – we already had one collapse where there was actually a member of Transportation and Works who came very close to losing their life, but did survive, thank God – I've had an opportunity to speak to this gentleman on a number of occasions. The scary part is that those issues were identified to the previous ministers of Transportation and Works and they were not addressed – they were not addressed.

When I hear about that, there's a legal term that comes to my mind, and it's called willful negligence – or willful blindness, perhaps. And

it's unfortunate that the previous administration left that road in the state of disrepair where it hadn't seen any significant repairs for the decade. But you know what? Thankfully, due to the work of the Minister of Transportation and Works – the current one, not the previous ones who knew the issue was there, it was identified by bureaucrats and they ignored it. Thankfully, due to this minister and the dedicated staff, I can tell you due to investments, especially in *Budget 2017*, this road is probably in the best shape it's been in a number of years.

It's a road that deserves treatment, just like every road in this province does. There have been significant improvements to a number of roads, but I am very happy about this one. We haven't seen any work done in some time, even though the fact is we actually had another collapse during Thanksgiving of 2016 where the road collapsed. People were disconnected from the rest of the province, having to get choppers, and it's because of repairs that could have been made, but they weren't. They weren't not because of lack of money, because this was a crowd that was flush with cash, they weren't made because they just – who knows why those repairs weren't made. I don't want to speculate, but one can guess.

The other thing I want to talk about is I have a number of municipalities in my district and they're trying to do very good work. They're trying to work on their infrastructure, trying to work on water projects and things like that. There have been a number of investments made – especially again, I have to give credit to the Minister of Municipal Affairs who's actually taken the time to sit down with the leaders of our communities, whether it's at conferences, whether it's here in Confederation Building, whether it's out in the district, they've actually had these meetings. I'm very thankful for that. We've seen investment in capital works in the district.

The reason I'm happy about that, and I would have been happy with a minimal investment of something – and this is where you play *The Price is Right* game – I would have been happy with \$10, because I actually had years where the investment made in the district was a big doughnut. It was zero; it was absolutely nothing. This coming from an administration that was

flush with cash, talked about the money, about the billions of dollars, but couldn't see fit to invest in the district.

I'm not going to speculate on why that happened; I'll let everybody put it together and guess. The moral of the story here is that due to the investments made in these budgets by our government, by this minister and by the dedicated staff, we're seeing significant work being done in my district. I'm very happy about it because we've been neglected. In fact, I'm looking forward to the next thing I want to talk about.

One thing we didn't see in previous budgets, in previous administrations, was a working relationship with the federal government. Whereas the previous administration held their meetings on street corners and out in the cold, we actually have federal ministers and MPs coming to our districts, coming to this province and working with us jointly to make announcements.

I'm very happy about an announcement that's going to be made in my district – something we never saw for ages. We're going to have an announcement next week. We saw announcements the weekend. It was just a couple of weeks ago that we had the federal minister of Justice come down here and invest in the Sexual Assault Response Pilot Program that's going to help victims of sexual assault all over this province. That's not something we saw before. We're seeing that coming from a relationship.

We do have disagreements, we do have opportunities where we disagree, contrary to what the other side says, but there has already been more delivered in these budgets and in this relationship than you saw in a decade before that. The positive news here: It's to the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're getting past the past petty politics and getting to inclusive politics where we work together. It's due to the leadership of our Premier, Cabinet, bureaucracy and our team here, this entire caucus, actually working together positively and constructively.

One thing that I've worked on and it's amazing because I've had – this is one I really love. I

love how we've tried to make changes here in this House of Assembly as it relates to how we work in the House. The Members opposite – and this one is near and dear to my heart because it's Marine Atlantic. Marine Atlantic, the main entry point for rubber-tire traffic in this province, which we've seen an increase in, the main point of entry, and the Members opposite like to stand up and enter petitions. They like to talk about Marine Atlantic.

Now, the fact is it's not something that was discussed by the other side while they were in government. I can remember a previous premier that stood up, when asked to list the number one priorities, I can guarantee you Marine Atlantic wasn't there. I can guarantee you there were no meetings. I can guarantee you there was no conversation, no letters, no nothing.

The fact is they enter petitions but if they wanted government's viewpoint on it they would allow us an opportunity to stand and to respond, which our rules do allow with leave. Every single time I've tried to stand here in this House and respond to one of their petitions, they say no. They say no, you shouldn't speak on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. You shouldn't talk about what your government is trying to do. They only want to put in petitions but they don't want to see what action is actually being done, but that's just par for the course for the crowd opposite. They didn't do it –

AN HON. MEMBER: They let Tom Marshall do it.

MR. A. PARSONS: That's right, Tom Marshall tried to do it once when the Minister of Municipal Affairs, when he was in Opposition put a petition in on the Corner Brook hospital, and don't get me started on the Corner Brook hospital. I'll leave that to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. A. PARSONS: No, no. We don't have enough time. He'll take care of that, but he used to do a lot of petitions. We all did, because you know there was a lot of start dates or announcements but no finish, no follow through.

One day he put a petition in and when the Premier at the time, Tom Marshall, stood up and wanted to respond, we let him. I saw that day one of the better debates I've actually seen in the House, civil, restrained, it was a debate. It was actually points going back and forth, and it's because we allowed it to happen. When we now try to do the same they shut it down because they're not worried about debate, they're just worried about spin. That's all they're worried about.

The fact is there's a lot going on as it relates to Marine Atlantic. It's near and dear to my heart, and if they want to have a debate on Marine Atlantic I say to them, the next time they put a petition in have the guts, when I stand up to speak to Marine Atlantic, have the guts to allow me to respond. I'll answer any single question you want to ask and I'll talk about all the meetings that I've had because Marine Atlantic affects every Newfoundlander and Labradorian; yet, they don't want to talk, they just want to chirp. That's all they want to do.

I had to get that out because anytime I've tried to stand up I've been denied the right to debate by the PCs. I've been denied that right to stand in the House and speak on behalf of my constituents because they don't want to hear it. You know what, if they actually want to hear it then I say stand up and have the intestinal fortitude to hear what the government's viewpoint is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I could speak to a number of other topics. I've had an opportunity to speak to my department. I'd be willing again to speak to it if the Members opposite want me to. We did the Estimates. I stood up during the debate here; I've answered any questions that they might have.

I could talk about the correctional officers which absolutely amazes me. I have to put this out there because this one really amazed me. I find it funny that last week I took an invitation from the correctional officers to go down to HMP, the first minister to ever do so – to go down, and as they say, walk the beat with them, to stand up with them.

We stood in the House that day, actually we had correctional officers' week where we had a chance to stand up and thank them. Do you know what? I'll give credit where it's due, the Leader of the Opposition stood up and also thanked correction officers. Correction officers were here in the gallery to watch. When it was the NDP's turn, they used it as the soapbox. I don't know if they actually thanked the correctional officers, they just wanted to go on a rant. Believe me, the correctional officers know.

I've received a number of messages from union leadership, from rank and file saying: Thank you for recognizing us. Then I took the opportunity to go down and work with them, to talk to them, to talk to inmates because that's what we want to do. When I did that, at the invitation of correctional officers, the NDP cried foul and said: Why would you do that? That's a publicity stunt. They didn't take the opportunity to actually listen to what the correctional officers wanted, because they took the time to thank me privately and publicly. The least we can do is show up and see what it is they're doing on a day-to-day basis.

I've been down there more than anybody probably in this House. Now I hear them chirping – I hear them chirping. That's coming from the crowd that says don't heckle. I didn't say a word when they spoke.

I say to the leader – I don't know if the House Leader of the NDP or the co-leader or whatever it is. I say if you have an issue stand up and put it out there. Stand up, but do you know what, she's not going to. Maybe if we can ask the outside Leader of the NDP if he has something to say to it. I don't know who the leader is over there. All I do know – and the correctional officers know this – is that they like to play politics.

Today, they stood up and asked about PTSD, but when I went down there to ask them about it, they criticized it. I say to the NDP: You can't have it both ways. Do you want us to go down there or not go down there? Do you want us to support them or not support them? The fact is the correctional officers know we support them and we will continue to support them. I've said in this House today that I will meet with them to discuss these issues and any issues, as I've done

ever since I was lucky enough to be put in this portfolio.

I said this outside, the NDP likes to talk from the sidelines, we're out here on the front lines. We're trying to work. It's funny; they're over there laughing now. They're over there laughing, laughing at correctional officers who want to take an opportunity to tell us their concerns. What does the NDP think? They're laughing. I think that's absolutely shameful, and if I'm wrong I'll sit down and the NDP can stand up and correct the record, but I don't think they're going to do it. I don't think they're going to do it because they know I'm right.

It's funny because this is a crowd that gets here and they talk about civility in the House, but what the cameras – they're over there chirping and heckling and getting on. It's absolutely amazing. Do as I say, not as I do. That's apparently the motto for the NDP.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: I won't get into raises here tonight; I won't get into raises. I'll leave that for another day. I'll leave that for another day, but I tell you what –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: I'll just leave it at this, Mr. Speaker, sometimes when they talk about conflicts of interest, I would say to the NDP take a good, hard look in the mirror. Take a good, hard look in the mirror because the fact is it's one thing to talk, it's absolutely amazing, holier than thou sometimes, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to continue –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear them booing and aching over there. Well, if they want to correct me, stand up and tell me how they didn't. Tell me.

I hear the Member for St. John's Centre, the one that criticizes me for going to HMP; she's over there heckling as well. This is the crowd that goes to the announcement for the sexual assault response pilot program and they're about to vote against it. They're about to vote against it, and that's unfortunate. That's unfortunate because the problem is they like to play politics.

They should support it, but they haven't said a positive thing about this initiative which is going to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They can't do it. They can't let themselves do it, and they should because it's positive news. It's positive news. Everybody in the community I've talked to says this is the right thing to do. Thank you to the leadership that we are providing on this issue.

They're over there now, I thought I heard them just say the word coward, and that's unfortunate. That is unfortunate because when they spoke I let them speak. I didn't say a word, even though I could stand there and speak and contradict a lot of what they say but, again, Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely amazing what I hear. They say they're not going to heckle and then when I stand up they can't help themselves. So I say when they speak again, Mr. Speaker, I'll listen. I'll listen to what they have to say because that's how debate works. There's a give and take, but unfortunately, that's not how it's working here now.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I could continue on, but there are a lot of people here that want to speak to this budget. Unfortunately, the other side is not going to speak to the positive things that this budget contains and there are a lot of positive things. That's why I look forward to supporting this budget, supporting the initiatives and continuing the work that we have to do to get out of the mess that was left to us by the previous administration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to speak for a few minutes because I just want to enter into the debate on some of the things that I heard tonight, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Burgeo – La Poile just gave a very honest speech about the reactions you get on one side of the face from the NDP to the other.

I just want to tell the co-leader of the NDP – and I don't know if the Member for Burgeo – La Poile ever heard this story, Mr. Speaker. It was the time when we were in the Opposition and we were helping out the government with Kruger. The co-leader of the NDP, the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi, whatever the name of the seat is now.

AN HON. MEMBER: St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

MR. JOYCE: St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what she did? She stood in this House to ask questions that she was speaking to the union – asking questions and we made a deal. I went out and I called the four union people. I said: Who's speaking to her? Do you know what they told us? Nobody. She tried to ruin the deal from the mill that the government at the time arranged with the workers and Kruger, just to ruin the deal; that's what she tried to do.

Mr. Speaker, I always said this in this hon. House, if I have something to say if I'm wrong, you can stand up right after me and contradict and say what I'm saying is wrong. I put that offer out again tonight to anybody across the way once again.

Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot of this talk about the hospital in Corner Brook, a lot of talk about if we had to go ahead with what the government did that we would have had it built. That is just absolutely, categorically wrong. It's absolutely false.

If we had to follow what the PC government were doing last time, we would have had a piece of the property put on the site on the long-term care hospital. They were to give them private property – give it to a private company, the

property on it. They would walk in, they would put their own building up, they will charge their own rates, Mr. Speaker, and make the profits on the back of the seniors, the most vulnerable people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It was shameful.

I can tell you, I can tell anybody here every now and then there are people who stand up to the plate. When we walked in government, we saw that. Do you know the first person who took that and threw it out through the door? I'd like to take credit for it, but I can't. It was the Premier of the province who walked in and said to our Cabinet seniors in this province will not give the business people from Nova Scotia profits on the backs of them, the most vulnerable people in Newfoundland and Labrador. Before I had a chance to say no, the Premier of the province had said that's off the table; that's gone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, what we are going to do, what we committed to do, is put it up, let them build and maintain and we will put public sector workers in the building, and that's what the Premier of the province committed to and that's what he Premier of the province said the first day that it came to Cabinet. That's why when he stands up for the seniors of Western Newfoundland and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and in Central and in St. John's, that's why I have the confidence in the Premier because if he's going to do something, he's going to stand up and do it, face to face. He's not going to hide behind some business opportunity from some company from BC who's making profits off seniors.

I see the Member for Cape St. Francis – I know; it's hard to believe you were going to do that. I know you had nothing to do with that; that's your Cabinet had that all planned. Now if I'm saying anything wrong, let him stand up after I'm finished and speak. Anything I'm saying let him stand up.

That's the kind of stuff, Mr. Speaker, that we found ourselves into. You want to talk about the hospital in Corner Brook. Mr. Speaker, we were just chatting about that, the big Stantec doing the big studies. There was one piece of that – you want to talk about a waste of money. We don't

even know what was done with it; \$40 million, still no hospital in Corner Brook – \$40 million, still no hospital.

I know we hear a lot about the hospital; that I always talk about the hospital. I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker, I might be out publicly talking about the hospital, I know the Member for Corner Brook is out talking about the hospital, but you know who the biggest proponent of the hospital in Corner Brook, who supports us, is the Premier of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Do you think, Mr. Speaker – and I said when I was in Opposition and I was asking question after question after question. Who stood up and said keep it coming because it's so important? It was the Leader of the Opposition who's the Premier of the province right now who is, still now, following through on his comments of the hospital in Corner Brook.

Mr. Speaker, we heard the Members opposite talking about \$25 billion wasted. There were some good things done. Absolutely there were some good things done with the \$25 billion. I wouldn't deny that. I would never deny that, a lot of great things, but there are two things you have to remember; one, if you put a program in place, is it sustainable or is it just for a photo op? That's the problem you run into when you work at \$100 a barrel oil. It's not sustainable.

They always said: Tell us some stuff you wouldn't do with it. The first thing I wouldn't do: Muskrat Falls. I heard you talking about it and say, oh, you have some people over there who talked about it and they supported it. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, I challenge anybody out watching this and I challenge any of the Opposition, when you had a Member for Mount Pearl North stand up in this hon. House and say I was hoodwinked by my own Cabinet, and you look at four of them in front, he was –

AN HON. MEMBER: Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. JOYCE: Mount Pearl – Southlands. Sorry, I say to the Member for Mount Pearl North

because I know you did the hoodwinking and he got hoodwinked.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. Because you were part of the Cabinet that hoodwinked your Member who stood up in this hon. House and said: I was hoodwinked. So if the Member of the caucus who got briefed on this on a regular basis, if he was hoodwinked, who else would know the facts?

Mr. Speaker, I said if they want to keep chirping, stand up when I'm finished. You could speak. Challenge me on anything I'm saying here.

They look at it and say: What would you have done differently with the money? Muskrat Falls, as we know, cost a lot of money. It went from \$6.2 billion now up to \$12 billion. That's just one thing, the amount of cash; they are bleeding in Muskrat Falls.

We'll just look at some small things. The \$10 million pellet plant, Mr. Speaker, up in Roddickton. Look at that \$30 million, the hole that was dug up in Parson's Pond somewhere, two drill holes in Parson's Pond.

Look at the other one, Mr. Speaker. Just imagine when they talk about seniors in this province, if they should eat or if they should pay their oil bill. Just think about it. For almost three years that government, four of those Members in the front benches, voted for it, agreed to it in the budget. They had an office in Ottawa with not one person in it, paying rent, heat and light up there. It cost millions of dollars. You know the only thing that was done there? They used to pay someone to come down to pick up the newspapers every week. You want to talk about a waste of money. Now I can go on and on about the waste of money; I can speak here for the next 10 minutes on the waste of money. But I'd be the first to admit, there were some good things done. There were some good projects; I'd be the first to admit it. And I always do admit when there are issues going on.

I remember the Member – and I like this Member, the Member for Ferryland; I think he's a good guy, I have to say. But, Mr. Speaker,

when I went to Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, not one of them knew that there were \$34.6 million of federal money on the table that they wouldn't sign – \$34.6 million that was sitting on the table and they wouldn't sign it.

Now if I'm wrong, stand up after; have your 20 minutes and speak about it. But \$34.6 million and they have the audacity –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: You'll have your 20 minutes; you won't interrupt me.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, he got his 20 – listen, I said to the Member for Ferryland you're a good guy but if you're embarrassed, it is not my fault. When we walked in, one of the first things we did was sign that and we started to get projects out the door for people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, you can chirp as much as you like, but how many of them over there are pleased with the work that we did? How many in the last year and a half – here's another opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I said it before. If there is one person over there who never benefited from the federal government work with the Canada build fund, when I'm finished, stand up and say your district never benefited, talking about working with another. Just stand up. After I'm finished, stand up. They can't do it, yet they want to sit down and criticize that we're not doing this properly. That's how bad this is, Mr. Speaker.

That's the kind of stuff that when you want to go out and promote Newfoundland and Labrador, you want to create economic development, you want to give the towns the sustainability and give them some infrastructure so they can create jobs, Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of stuff you get. This is the kind of stuff.

I asked all the hon. Members when they talk about Crown lands – when we had the Crown lands, we looked at – what was it – 74,000 hectares of land now put up for bid for Crown lands. We're starting to put them all out for bids for Crown Lands.

Right now, there are over 5,000 jobs in agriculture in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We're planning on putting that out, matching that, yet we're not doing anything for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I know the Leader of the Opposition, the number one bill in 2012 was procurement, which would save hundreds of millions of dollars for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Guess what? It never saw the light of day. Procurement, the Member – the same guy who's calling around now and wants to know who's going to support him for leader, can he run for leader again –

AN HON. MEMBER: Never say never.

MR. JOYCE: Same guy – never say never. That's true; never say never. It's the same guy. So, Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of things I have to bring up and I have to recognize.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to speak about the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment for a few minutes. The Department of Municipal Affairs has done tremendous work. I know I have a lot of support around this table and I have a lot of support in caucus, but it's the staff that does so much work around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I just want to recognize that. The work that they are after doing, when we had the Crown lands part – I know down in Service NL, the procurement, the MADD legislation, I know the Minister of Service NL brought in the MADD legislation.

This is all stuff that was on the table before. Mr. Speaker, one of the proudest, and we can't – you hear the Member for St. Johns East – Quidi Vidi talking about it. She forgets. The presumptive cancer that was brought in by this government, that was on the table for years and years and years. It took us one year – one year. We said we would do it not only for career firefighters, but for volunteers across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. What did we hear – what did we hear? All we hear are criticism.

There's no doubt there's room to – if there's some way that we can do something better, let us know. We haven't heard it yet, but let us know. We can't go back to the same old ways that you were doing stuff. Just can't do it. If not, the Minister of Finance, who you're criticizing for doing all these programs and how she's bringing in the budget, you just remember one thing – and I say to the Member for Cape St. Francis; he said something here tonight. The Member for Cape St. Francis, I have a lot of respect for you. I think you're a great guy; you're a great constituents' guy. But you said something here tonight and what you said here tonight is now you realize you're doing it for your grandkid. That's what you said; you're doing for your grandkid. Now it takes different light.

So when you look at that – and I got all respect for you; you know that. When you say that, you should walk over here and thank the Minister of Finance, because what's she's doing here is for our kids and grandkids in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: So when you say it's for your grandkid down the road – and, Mr. Speaker, I got a lot of respect for him. But when he made that statement tonight, that this is now in this House for my grandkid, he should walk over, because the Minister of Finance is taking care of his grandkid to make sure she or he won't have the debt that you and your government put us in. That's what this Minister of Finance is doing.

Mr. Speaker, it is like I said before with Clyde Wells. When Clyde Wells said I'd rather lose with honesty than win with dishonesty; that's what this Minister of Finance – so any time now you think of your grandkid, think of the Minister of Finance because she's thinking about your grandkid also, and that's why she's making the tough decisions now. All the things that we enjoy that, somewhere along the line, we have to pay for – if we don't pay for it, now it's your grandkid who is going to have to pay for it.

I just wanted to thank the Minister of Finance – listen, it's a tough job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I wanted to thank the Minister of Finance because she's speaking the truth. She's speaking the way that Newfoundlanders and Labradorian, if you're looking at your grandkids, are going to look and say we got to make the tough decisions. If not, our grandkids will have to leave. We will not even have a place sustainable enough to have them in our province. The Minister of Finance is taking care of all the grandkids in the province, and I commend her for it. It's a tough job.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, we do have our little tit-for-tats. She usually picks on me; I know that. We usually have our tit-for-tats, but she's doing it for the right reasons. It's for the grandkids of this province.

I say to the Member for Cape St. Francis, on a more light note, we were at a little function last week and I stood up and he was nervous about his daughter having a baby. We were chatting back and forth and he was getting a bit anxious and all that. I got up and had a speech and I said, the Member for Cape St. Francis, he's going to make a little announcement here. He said when the baby comes if it's a boy, he's going to name him Eddie.

The Member for Cape St. Francis got up and said if she names the boy Eddie, I'm putting two of them up for adoption. So congratulations on your grandkid and your daughter; well deserved. I'm sure the poppy is going to be great to them all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about the District of Bay of Islands for a few minutes. I have to say, there were some good things happening in the Bay of Islands under the administration. I know a couple of fire trucks went there. There was some water and sewer put out there. I have to admit that.

AN HON. MEMBER: You don't have your road, though?

MR. JOYCE: Well, I won't talk about the road going up to Summerside that we finally got done that the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island took the money for, two days prior – I won't talk about that.

Mr. Speaker, when he wants to talk about oh, you can't be political. When he stood up and he said oh, you can't be political to the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, it was in the tender. Two days before it was awarded, he ordered the department to take the money out on the Plant Hill in Summerside. I say to this day, I say to the Member and I said it to the minister: Shame on you to put people's safety at risk.

You can laugh at it, but I know one of you over there, one of you potential leadership candidates now – this is something else now on Summerside. One of the potential leadership candidates over there a week ago was going to go to Summerside. Guess what? When he found out there may be a little protest or two, he decided not to go to Summerside.

Do you know why? They all remember Plant Hill. They remember the hospital. They remember the long-term care. They remember no radiation in Western Memorial Regional Hospital that we had to fight for. So come over and have a public meeting, let's talk about the hospital in Corner Brook, let's talk about Plant Hill, let's talk about radiation where you wouldn't put it in there and you fought against us to put it in there, Mr. Speaker.

When one of the leadership candidates had a meeting planned for Summerside, they couldn't wait for them to come over – couldn't wait. No, I can guarantee you. Now that there are three of them, they may go over together, have a little debate and see if they will go in some little hall themselves. I can tell you, the people of Summerside had a lot of reasons to be concerned about your government.

I can tell you, I know four or five of them personally who had to travel to St. John's for cancer treatment; four or five of them rang the bell in the last week. When I was fighting for radiation, I was laughed at. I was scoffed at. I was told that I'm just playing politics with it.

I can tell you, the Premier of the province stood by me in Opposition to ask questions day after day after day. I can tell everybody in this House, and everybody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there will be no prouder moment than when that hospital and the long-term facility opens in Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker, when that radiation unit opens up, I hope the Premier of the Province is there because without his leadership, without his courage and without his commitment to allow me to go on for four years, to beat on that door of the PC Party to say it's needed – when you see four of your friends ringing the bell last week, it was worth every speech that I gave in this House.

I thank the Premier, as the then Leader of the Opposition, for your courage because down the road it's going to be some of our grandkids who are going to be needing that radiation unit. I thank you very much for that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

If the hon. minister speaks now, she will close the debate.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes here this evening to thank the Members of the House for the budget debate this year. It is an important exercise, activity, commitment we have as MHAs to come in this House and participate in a debate about the financial direction of government. I think certainly the Members of this House, on all sides of the House, have participated in this debate and I want to say thank you to them for that effort.

Mr. Speaker, earlier tonight we had the opportunity to hear the Premier of the province speak in relation to this budget. Certainly, I want to take a moment to thank the Premier for his leadership and his commitment as we were working, as a government and as a Cabinet, on building the budget that we would present in front of this House.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier, as he indicated, talked about the importance of making decisions today that are in the best interest of not only the generations we represent in this House but as was referenced earlier, the generations to come. I think that speaks to the type of leader he is, and I certainly want to congratulate and thank him for his words tonight on the budget and for his comments on the importance of the decisions we've made.

Mr. Speaker, the budget we presented in this House was a continuation of the plan we presented last year. As the people of the province have learned, we exceeded our deficit target for '16-'17. We are on track to achieve our deficit reduction target for '17-'18 and we are on pace to return the province to surplus in 2022-23, Mr. Speaker.

We have reduced spending by \$283 million. I would remind the Members opposite that when they did their forecast and their budget in 2015, not only did they forecast oil for this year at \$80, they also forecast spending at almost half-a-billion dollars more than we have in this particular budget this year, Mr. Speaker.

As a result of last year's efforts and this year's budgets, we've been able to reduce the borrowing by \$2 billion in '17-'18. I think that should make every Member of this House take pause when we talk about the volume of borrowing we had last year, some \$4.9 billion, and we've been able to reduce borrowing this year by \$2 billion. I think that's an example of the important work that underpins this budget that we presented in this House.

Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has mentioned, and as Members of the government caucus and ministers have mentioned several times, we took a very practical and pragmatic view when it came to leveraging federal funding. Mr. Speaker, we did this very purposely because we believe it's going to have a positive impact on the economy and people in our communities.

There is some \$3 billion going to be spent on a five-year infrastructure plan, and that's been built from leveraging federal funding, and as has been stated in this House over the course of the budget debate, that infrastructure plan will create the equivalent of 4,900 full-time jobs on average

every year for the next five years. That's in addition to the actions the Premier announced earlier this month from *The Way Forward* that will contribute an additional 9,300 full-time positions.

Mr. Speaker, last year, in '16-'17, we certainly benefited from increased oil production and increased oil revenue to the tune of over \$540 million. Expenses were down another \$81 million last year, which meant the borrowing for last year was down by \$475 million.

It spoke to the importance of making sure we bring our spending within what is sustainable when we have a volatile commodity that makes up such a significant portion of our revenue and it's moved from a high, when the Conservatives were in power and they forecast oil at well over \$120, \$130 oil, to as low as \$27. It's an important reason why that money is money that should be carefully forecasted and also not anticipated to provide sustainable funding because of the volatility of both production, the US dollar at the US exchange, as well as the price per barrel.

Mr. Speaker, in budget '17-'18 we announced as a government that there would be no new taxes and fees, that there would be no increases to existing taxes and fees. I'm very proud to stand in this House as the Minister of Finance, supported by this caucus and supported by this government, to again speak to the reduction in the gas tax.

Last year, because of the circumstances we found ourselves in, we had to introduce a temporary gas tax. As a result of this year's budget decisions, I'm proud to say that as of June 1 we'll be able to reduce that tax by 8½ cents, and by December 1 we'll reduce it by another 4 cents. Mr. Speaker, that will be a total this year, this calendar year, including HST, of about 14½ cents for the people of the province; something that our government, and I as the Finance Minister, are very proud of.

Mr. Speaker, the continuation and the enhancement of the Newfoundland Income Supplement and Seniors' Benefit, which benefits 155,000 families and individuals in our province with a spend of \$120 million is an extremely important commitment by this government. It

was an extremely important commitment last year when we announced our budget last year, and one I'm proud that as part of this year's budget we are continuing to maintain so that seniors and low-income individuals in this province will get the help we can provide, considering the circumstances we are in and ensure they have the resources they need.

Mr. Speaker, as part of budget 2017-18, we assumed oil price of \$56US per barrel. As was discussed in this House during Question Period last week, the price of oil since the budget was announced and certainly through the month of April is something that we want to continue to monitor.

As of right now, we anticipate the change in that revenue might be to the tune of about \$6 million. That said, Mr. Speaker, it again reinforces the need for us to make sure that our spending is sustainable and that every single taxpayer dollar, every single dollar that we have to go into programs and services is spent efficiently and effectively to deliver those critical services to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, as we discussed as part of the budget Estimates and the budget briefings, we expect there will be a reduction this year in oil production. That's one of the things we took into consideration with this budget and, again, makes for responsible and prudent planning when you have a volatile revenue line such as oil royalties.

Mr. Speaker, the investments this budget is making has been referenced by many Members of this House of Assembly, certainly on the government side on a regular basis. I think it would be important, since we're concluding the budget debate, to remind those listening at home and to remind the Members of the House some of the examples, and this would not be an exhaustive list, but this would be some of the examples of the investments we are making as part of this budget.

Under the area of Healthy Living we are investing more than \$4 billion in health and wellness; \$115 million to community groups; \$88 million to health care infrastructure; \$73 million over 10 years, one year included in this budget for mental health, and a specific \$5 million to start the implementation of the

recommendations of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. Mr. Speaker, I would implore the Members opposite to consider the items in this budget that they are voting against tonight, should that be their choice.

Mr. Speaker, on the area of Education and Skills, this government proudly and with confidence, as the Minister of Advanced Skills and Education has said, is investing \$68 million to maintain the existing tuition freeze at Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic. We are also investing \$14.5 million in the Child Care Subsidy Program, and a \$1.3 million increase annually for the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement.

Mr. Speaker, those are investments that will impact families, will impact children and we are very proud to be making those investments as part of this budget.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of Industry and Business, we are investing over \$20 million to support culture and heritage; an additional \$14.4 million for economic and business development; and, as the Premier mentioned earlier tonight, \$5 million for the wild fishery and aquaculture, as well as investments in the Film Development Corporation – all designed to demonstrate and yield results in diversifying an economy that for way too many years was focused only on oil and not focused on the diversification our province needs so desperately.

When we come to Infrastructure and the five year, multi-year infrastructure plan, I'd like to just reference a couple of the areas that those investment dollars will go to. Some \$573 million will be invested in key areas including roads and schools, health care facilities and municipal infrastructure; \$142 million specifically for municipal infrastructure; \$88 million for health care infrastructure; almost \$54 million for new schools, extensions and repairs and maintenance; and over \$44 million for post-secondary infrastructure projects – an investment that not only will improve the public infrastructure for the people of the province but also, as I've said earlier, will create opportunities for employment for people around our province.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of Safe and Sustainable Communities, we see an additional investment here of \$100 million, as I said, in municipal infrastructure over the next three years. We also see something that I'm very proud of, and that Members of this House have referenced, approximately \$7.8 million for transition houses, including \$780,000 in new funding for transition houses that can provide the necessary services for women and children when they need it the most and they're fleeing violence.

I'll also mention that the budget includes \$370,000 to strengthen the court system in Labrador; again, an important investment for the people of our province. As the Minister of Justice has so eloquently already communicated again this evening, we'll see \$250,000 for the Sexual Assault Response Pilot Program, an important program for the people of this province, particularly those who are facing very challenging and very difficult situations.

Mr. Speaker, the budget that we presented in this House, as I said, exceeds the targets that we established last year, puts us on pace to achieve surplus in 2022 and we continue to work to reduce our expenditures. We do that through expenditure reviews, we also are doing that through shifting the culture and eliminating waste, Mr. Speaker, and also looking for efficiency improvements.

I think it's important for those who are listening at home also to know that, as of this year's budget, after the results and the work that this government caucus has done and the Ministers of the Crown have done, led by the Premier, we are no longer borrowing for operations. As I said earlier, there was \$4.9 billion in borrowing that was completed in 2016 and this government is no longer borrowing for operations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: We are no longer relying on short-term T-bills to meet long-term borrowing requirements. We continue to have borrowing commitments and the priority now is to focus on lowering the cost of borrowing.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that this budget clearly communicated was our commitment to addressing and providing confidence and

comfort to the people of the province on what is very worrisome topic around electricity rate increases in the future.

This year's budget included the clarity around the rate management reserve that Nalcor has been directed and agreed to create, where their sourcing opportunity is to lower rates in the future. Mr. Speaker, this would be an appropriate time for me to again remind the people of this House, the Members of this House, of the support we've received from the federal government. One example is the federal loan guarantee, which has helped this province in the area of electricity rates look forward to seeing our electricity rates impacted in a positive way by lowering them by one to 1½ cents, specifically related to the enhanced federal loan guarantee.

Mr. Speaker, as I bring my speaking notes to an end, I think it would be appropriate to thank the officials throughout the departments, throughout the agencies, boards and commissions who have worked so hard since last September to build this budget –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: We can be very proud – and we have very talented people that work in the public service. They are committed to serving the people of this province and providing information to governments to make choices and decisions. I can assure those that worked on this particular budget that we have a tremendous amount of respect for them and their colleagues and are very grateful for the work that they put in pre-budget, as well as post-budget, to make sure that questions were answered and that the preparation for the Estimates debate happened in a way that provided the Members of the Opposition, the Members of this House, through the Committee, the answers that they needed.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance, who had the opportunity to speak first to this budget when we introduced it back in early April, I wanted to add a special thank you to my Cabinet and caucus colleagues who have supported our work in making sure, as the Premier has said, that we were able to bring this province back onto stable financial footing so we can continue

and focus on the work ahead, which is focusing on our economy and the social programs that are so critically needed for the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): It is moved and seconded that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of government.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): Mr. Ball, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Ms. Coady, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Trimper, Mr. Warr, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Browne, Ms. Gambin-Walsh, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Letto, Ms. Haley, Mr. Bernard Davis, Mr. Derek Bennett, Mr. Holloway, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Finn, Mr. Reid, Mr. Dean, Mr. King.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Paul Davis, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Kent, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Petten, Ms. Michael, Ms. Rogers.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 27; the nays: nine.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I declare the motion approved.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would move now, seconded by the Member for Terra Nova, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: It's 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.'

Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

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