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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA*

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22 March 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

**Statements by Members**

**MR. SPEAKER:** For Members' statements today, we have the Members for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, Burin – Grand Bank, Terra Nova, Ferryland, Mount Pearl North and Bonavista.

I recognize the Member for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair and Deputy Speaker.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Thank you.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the racers in Cain's Quest who bravely signed up to challenge the legendary Labrador course earlier this month. This 3,500-kilometre snowmobile race through the four corners of Labrador is truly unique. Cain's Quest has earned its place among the world's greatest endurance challenges. It was followed by people in 73 countries outside of Canada and racked up some 1.3 million page views online.

If Cain's Quest is one of the world's toughest races, its participants are some of the world's toughest racers. That's certainly true, Mr. Speaker, of the teams from my district. Four intrepid teams from Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair embraced the challenge. Team 24, the Cartwright Orange Eagles, blazed across the finish line in 13th position – a remarkable achievement considering there were 37 teams that entered.

Team 85, the Mary's Harbour Backcountry Riders, to the delight of spectators, decided to complete the race despite being outside the mandatory 18-hour finish. Team 62, Labrador South Racing and Team 16 of Charlottetown, like so many others, were forced to withdraw but not before putting up a good fight.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing the courage and the strength of all Cain's Quest participants.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Burin – Grand Bank.

**MS. HALEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in psychology the Stroop effect is a demonstration of the interference in the reaction time when completing a task. Jenna Hennebury, a 13-year-old grade eight student at Holy Name of Mary Academy in Lawn, was so fascinated with the effect that she made it the topic for her project at the Burin Peninsula Regional Science Fair held at Fortune Bay Academy in St. Bernard's-Jacques Fontaine on March 8.

The judges for the fair were so impressed by Jenna's project, which she dubbed Colour Confusion, they awarded her top prize at this year's regional fair, and with it a place representing the English School District at the Canada-Wide Science Fair being held in Montreal from May 15 to 20.

Mr. Speaker, students in grades seven to nine from six schools around the Burin Peninsula presented 38 projects in a number of categories; however, it was Jenna's project in the Life/Environmental/Biotechnology category that was deemed best overall. Jenna is the daughter of proud parents Earl and Anna Hennebury of Lawn.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Jenna on her win and wishing her continued success at the national science fair in Montreal.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

**MR. HOLLOWAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to recognize Mr. Wayne Hallett, owner and operator of the Prints of Whales Inn, located in Sandringham, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Hallett was chosen as the Tourism Champion of the Year in this year's Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador Conference and Trade Show held at the Delta Hotel and Conference Centre here in St. John's on March 1 to 3.

The Tourism Champion of the Year Award is presented to an individual, company or organization that has worked diligently to ensure the tourism industry prospers, and has given freely of their time and energy to champion the interests of and enhance the tourism industry.

Wayne Hallett, along with this wife Ruth, has operated multiple accommodations in Newfoundland before moving on to the Prints of Whales Inn. Wayne has been involved in various tourism organizations, including those in the Coast of Bays and the Road to the Beaches, as well as Tourism Quality Assurance Newfoundland and Labrador and Adventure Central Newfoundland.

Mr. Hallett demonstrates how a small tourism operator can play a significant role in demonstrating the direction and success of the provincial tourism industry.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Mr. Hallett for being the recipient of this year's Tourism Champion of the Year award.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Ferryland.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the Goulds Volunteer Fire Department. This past year they celebrated their 39th anniversary. I've had the pleasure over the past years to attend a number of events to celebrate the work of this brigade.

I would like to acknowledge and say thank you to the Goulds Volunteer Fire Department, as well as all volunteer members over the years. The unselfish giving of their time to the

residents of their communities ensures people they have someone to rely on in the event of a fire or any type of emergency.

We all hope we'll never have to avail of the services they provide, but if required, people of the area are very thankful knowing they would do so without hesitation and can rest easier knowing they're ready to respond at any time.

The volunteer fire department will be celebrating their 40th anniversary in October, and I look forward to being a part of that celebration.

I ask all Members of the House to join me in congratulating Fire Chief Jay Green and all members of the Goulds Volunteer Fire Department for their many years of service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the Mount Pearl Sports Alliance on a very successful Annual Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Banquet. At a recent ceremony, four athletes and builders from Newfoundland and Labrador were honoured and inducted into the Mount Pearl Sports Hall of Fame.

Mr. Speaker, this annual event, hosted by the Mount Pearl Sports Alliance, honours those individuals who have, and in some cases still do, contribute to sports and athletics in a very significant way. It is through their individual commitment that we are able to continue the work and operation of sporting organizations in our communities and in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of the House to join me in congratulating the Mount Pearl Sports Alliance in honouring the achievements of these individuals. I would also like to congratulate specifically the most recent inductees. In the category of builder: Dave LeGrow and Dave Randell; and in the category of athlete: Jennifer Andrews and Wince Taylor. Each of these

individuals is very worthy of this honour. I would like to wish them all the best in their future endeavours and hope they continue their contribution to sport and to our community.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista.

**MR. KING:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the female hockey teams of the Bonavista-Trinity Minor Hockey Association and Discovery Collegiate. Over the past two months these young women have been excellent representatives of the District of Bonavista, both on and off the ice.

On January 24, the under-12 team won gold at the Adam Parry Invitational Tournament which showcased the skills of six teams from around the province. This past weekend, these same female Cabots won gold in the C division of the provincial mega tournament. Our under-20 team won gold on March 13 in the B division of their provincial mega tournament. Finally, the Discovery Collegiate Destroyers won the student Sports Newfoundland and Labrador Female Varsity Ice Hockey championship on March 6 beating six competitive teams.

Winning isn't just about the results on the ice, but also about sportsmanship, leadership and teamwork which these young women exhibit daily. I would like to also acknowledge the dedication and sacrifices made by the coaches, volunteers, parents and guardians who make the lives of these young women much richer.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the teams and wishing them a bright future which I'm sure they'll have.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**The Commemoration of the First World War and the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel**

**MR. SPEAKER:** For Honour 100 today we have the Member for the District of Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I will now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine. This will be followed by a moment of silence.

Lest we forget: William Cox, Henry Charles Crane, John Charles Crane, Joseph Crane, Nathaniel Crane, James F. Cranford, Llewellyn C. Cranford, Kenneth Critch, Francis Thomas Crocker, Harrison Crocker, Job Crocker, Stanley Crocker, James Matthew Cron, George Graham Crosbie, William Cross, Leo Crotty, James E. Croucher, Nathaniel Croucher, George Little Cuff, Elijah Culimore, Ersatus Cumby, Arthur Cummings, John Cunningham, John Thomas Curley, George Robert Curnew, James Patrick Curran, Archibald Curtis, Frederick Dalton, James Joseph Daly, Christopher Dawe, Fred Dawe, Henry Charles Dawe, Stewart Dawe, William Henry Dawe, James Lewis Day, Norman Kenneth Dean, Walter Augustus Dean, Thomas J. Delaney, Timothy Samuel Delaney, Harold DeLouchrey,

(Moment of silence.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

**Statements by Ministers**

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to speak about Labrador's premiere sporting event, the Labrador Winter Games, which took place from March 13 to March 19 in and around Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

It was my pleasure to participate in the opening ceremonies and to see the athletes preparing for their events and representing their respective communities. I was particularly pleased to see my hon. colleagues and several other leaders from across Labrador.

The games brought together athletes, team leaders and excited fans from all over Labrador.

They highlighted Labradorians' love of the outdoors and the celebration of culture and traditions, while presenting some of the most spirited competition this province has to offer. I had the opportunity to watch the table tennis and the snowshoeing matches.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador was the primary sponsor of the Labrador Winter Games and I thank the Board of Directors, guided by the Chairman Joseph Goudie, the Labrador Winter Games staff and over 375 volunteers for yet another successful Labrador Winter Games.

I also congratulate all the athletes who participated as well as those who were successful in winning their events.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues to join me in congratulating the community of Cartwright for winning the overall event and taking home the Labrador Cup, and indeed all those who participated in what truly was an amazing event.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement regarding the Labrador Winter Games, which people may know is nicknamed the Olympics of the North and goes back to the present structure to the early 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Official Opposition, we, too, want to congratulate the organizers, the athletes, the sponsoring agencies and particularly the Board of Directors and Mr. Goudie, who has been a leading force for the last three decades when it comes to the Labrador Winter Games.

We'd also like to thank the government for their continued support for these games, and we note the value they have around outlining cultural diversity, inclusion, competitiveness and active living.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour over my career as a former civil servant of attending a number of

those games in Labrador and was very much impressed, not only with the athletic ability, but the unique sports these athletes participate in and how they really reflect the culture of Labrador and the heritage of the people there.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, again, we would like to congratulate all of the athletes, the organizers and we look forward to the next Labrador Winter Games.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement. I, too, congratulate everyone involved. I have been to the games and seen first-hand the amazing spirit of the athletes, volunteers and participants. The games are an important cultural event which serves to help keep alive the traditional sports, games and skills of the people of Labrador.

Congratulations to the town of Cartwright who has set a high standard for those hosting this event in the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

**MR. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to highlight Service NL's new online driver licence renewal service, which enables residents to renew their licence from the convenience of their home or office. In addition to this service enhancement, Service NL has also extended the validity of driver's licence photos from five years to 10 years for anyone over the age of 19.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives are designed to simplify the renewal process, and reduce the need for people to find the time to visit a Motor

Registration Division office or a Government Service Centre in their area.

I am proud to say that within the first three days of announcing this new service, we had more than 400 driver licence renewals processed. We want to build on that success, and so I invite all hon. Members to encourage their constituents to take advantage of this simple, convenient service.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the dedicated staff within Service NL and the Office of the Chief Information Officer for their work which made these initiatives possible. Service NL will continue to deliver efficient and effective services to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I look forward to announcing more service improvements in the near future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. We, too, as the Official Opposition realize how good this announcement is. It's a great announcement, actually, anything that makes it more convenient for our residents to be able to do and make services that we offer in government a little bit more effective. To have it from five years to 10 years is in alignment with what is happening with passports, in what the federal government did with passports. It's really more convenient for all the residents.

Personally I just hope that it will decrease a bit of the wait time that we do see at Motor Registration. I know we all have experiences going into the building and having to wait so long. This hopefully will eliminate the periods of time because I know people wait for hours. Some days you can be in there for a couple of hours, so this is great.

I just hope this doesn't result in any reduction of staff at Motor Registration, because again it will reduce the wait times in there. It's a great service, and I thank the minister.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement, which has presented the news of a really good initiative. We look forward to its rollout and seeing if residents continue to take advantage of the new program.

I'd caution the minister that he leave in place the traditional ways of making application for those who either have no Internet access or poor Internet access, or don't have a home computer or access to a computer, or even the skills necessary to apply online. Innovation is a wonderful initiative – we want it – but not at the expense of leaving a portion of the population behind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. TRIMPER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to rise in this House and join with the governments and organizations around the world to recognize United Nations World Water Day.

Mr. Speaker, I remember working on a United Nations project myself in Turkmenistan in 1992 when we had to add chemicals, boil and filter every single sip of water. Jurisdictions such as that one face horrific situations because of contaminated water. It was an important experience for me to realize just how lucky we are in Canada.

Safe and abundant drinking water is something that so many people take for granted and something that so many people around the world do not have available to them. I ask that as Members reach for a glass of water here in the House, they think about this important day and about those hundreds of millions of people around the world that are not so fortunate.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to addressing the challenges we face here in Newfoundland and Labrador in providing safe and sustainable drinking water systems, and ensuring high quality drinking water.

The theme of World Water Day 2016 is water and jobs, and I can't imagine a better theme, as my department holds its annual Clean and Safe Drinking Water Workshop in Gander this week for approximately 300 water system operators and other drinking water professionals. We are also releasing the *Drinking Water Safety in Newfoundland and Labrador* annual report for 2015 and announcing spring 2016 training sessions for operators.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of this House to join me in marking World Water Day 2016.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We on this side of the House, too, wish to join government in recognizing today, March 22, as United Nations World Water Day.

Mr. Speaker, having safe and abundant drinking water is a luxury many of us take for granted. On this day we should be mindful of many parts of the world who struggle to have access to safe drinking water.

As the United Nations does their part in progressing development of access to water around the world, we too must do our part. So we must be mindful of water conservation in our daily lives, and water is not an unlimited resource.

Thanks again.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The minister says safe and abundant drinking water is something so many people take for granted. I'm sure he does not need reminding of the more than 200 boil-order advisories residents of this province have to live with. Those people can take nothing for granted.

Every resident in this province has a right to and should be able to get fresh, clean, safe drinking water from their taps. After all, it is Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is 2016. This must be a goal we reach as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

#### Oral Questions

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Shortly after taking office, the new Liberal government cancelled the collection of pension overpayments, and even went as far to say pensioners would be reimbursed for payments they had already made on the overpayments. At the same time, a 37-year-old single parent who had received overpayments of income support was being forced to pay it back in full. This low-income single parent even appealed to her new MHA, a Liberal MHA for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, for help. The only result she got was notification from CRA that her file had been forwarded to CRA for collection.

I ask the minister to explain: Why is she going against her own policy on overpayments and forcing this low-income, vulnerable, single parent to pay?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the question about the seniors' overpayments, as we know, this was an ongoing overpayment that was made by the previous administration, and really years prior to that, I would say.

In this particular case, what happened, the overpayments were made. The people had made lifestyle decisions on how this money would be spent, because what they thought was this was a part of their pension plan. So what happened there was very little money collected from the seniors. As a matter of fact, we've been reached out to by a number of people. As a matter of fact, one lady herself would have been about 102 years old prior to the overpayments being paid back. So the decision was made by this government to actually stop the collection of those overpayments – there was very little collected – and that was the reason why that decision was made.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, my question was about the 37-year-old single parent who's being forced to repay an overpayment on income support.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that the Liberals one-time and one-off decision not to collect pension overpayments certainly benefited those pensioners who were selected not to have to repay those overpayments. However, Mr. Speaker, I'll give you another example: a 73-year-old resident of Conception Bay South, who is also a public service pensioner and who is also a recipient of pension overpayments from government, but he wasn't part of this particular group. It's a very similar circumstance. He's not part of the group, but circumstances are the same, except he's being forced to pay back those overpayments.

So I ask the minister: Why the double standard?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I'd look forward to the hon. Member giving me the information on his constituent so that I can help him navigate through what I'm sure is a difficult situation for his constituent, and as an MHA I would expect him to provide that information to my office.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister do the same for the 37-year-old single parent?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to look at any issues through the Department of Finance that any Members in this this House, both in Opposition and on the government side, have for us to take a look at. Certainly, we'll take it under advisement once we have the full details.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we receive more inquiries, I'll be glad to forward them to the minister; however, this 37-year old, as I mentioned earlier, had already asked for assistance and was turned down by government.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's decision to forgive pension overpayments is leaving the pension plan with an approximately \$1 million deficit. Government has the responsibility to top-up the plan created by the pension overpayments.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Has government made up the shortfall, and how much exactly are taxpayers on the hook for as a result of your decision?



**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly this government realizes that the pension liability will have to be picked up by government. I guess when I think about the question coming from the former premier and now Leader of the Opposition for his current party, I'm just a little bit surprised that question would even make it to the floor of the House of Assembly because they just did pension reform. He, of all people, should know that any liabilities within those pension funds would have to be picked up by the current government.

In fact, I would say that if the former administration had done their due diligence and had done their job that the pension funds in this province would not be in the considerable mess that they are in right now.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These questions are very serious to the people who have contacted us and asked us to raise these concerns on their behalf. I understand the position of the government opposite. They continue to play the blame game, blame the former government – blame the former government. It wasn't us who decided that a certain group didn't have to make payment returns.

We have a 37-year-old single parent whose family is very vulnerable. She feels she's paying a price because she has to recoup and repay an overpayment. We have a pensioner who wasn't part of that group who has to pay back.

Maybe the Premier can explain: What is your policy today on pension overpayments?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I can remind the people of the province what the former administration's policy was. They became aware

of the pension overpayments in May 2014, and they did nothing to stop the bleed from the pension plan for several months.

Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite likes to link one situation to another. He wants to use individual situations, which are very important. I can imagine how difficult it is for that 37-year-old mom. I would look forward to the Member opposite sharing that information with me so that we can do what we need to do.

I would remind people at home and people in this House that it was the former administration that knew about these pension overpayments. It is their lack of management and their lack of insight that got the pension plan into the situation it is today.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week when questioned in this House about the sale of government assets, the Premier stated there would be a full analysis of assets prior to any sales. Yet in November, the Liberals stated they would achieve \$50 million in revenues by the end of this year.

I ask the Premier: Has this analysis or appraisal already been done?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, we are undergoing quite a comprehensive review of government real estate assets. My understanding, from documents that I have, is that we have assets in the vicinity of some 800 buildings that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador owns throughout the province.

It is our position, as we indicated, that our budget process will include considering our investments, particularly looking for any revenue opportunities, cash opportunities, of redeploying some of that capital that is currently tied up in real estate. We'll look forward to continuing to present those plans to the people

of the province and this House of Assembly. After we gather the facts and we make the plan, we'll certainly share it with this House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Based on your evidence-based analysis, do you still plan on meeting your \$50 million target this year as promised in your red book? As we know, it's 100 days already into this year, so is the plan still for \$50 million for this year?

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

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

Our plan is to do what's in the best interest of the people of the province and we will make sure that the plan that we have not only takes advantage of getting every single cash dollar we can out of any defunct or unused or underutilized real estate, but will also provide an opportunity for us to do that very quickly and very expeditiously so we can continue to close the gap on the deficit that was left by the former administration.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question this time is for the Minister of Transportation and Works; I asked the question the other day, but the Premier took them. So I'll ask him.

When will your administration give the people of the province details of what assets will be sold and when? As we know, most assets within government stand within TW.

Thank you.

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, when we do the analysis of the 800 buildings we own, when we put a plan in place to make sure that we are able to capture the best value for the people of the province, when we're able to make those decisions, we will present that plan to the people of the province and to this House. We will not be bullied into making short-term, knee-jerk decisions, like the former administration made, and make mistakes.

We will analyze, we will make a plan, we will implement a plan and we will make sure the interests of the people of the province are at the forefront of our decisions.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my question this time, I ask the Minister of Natural Resources: Is your administration considering selling some assets of Hydro as part of your revenue plan?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I remind the Members opposite that the assets that we currently have in our real estate portfolio will be looked at through the entire business plan we are creating to make sure that we extract the value from those for the people of the province.

Our province right now has a deficit forecasted for '16, based on the former administration's budget and the results that they have in excess this year of \$2 billion. We have to look at all options, but we have to look at them through the lens of good management, good planning, good programs and good execution to make sure that we extract the best value for the people of the province. I can assure you we intend to take our time but make the decisions in the right way for the people of the province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, 2,300 people were affected by the closure of Wabush Mines by Cliffs Natural Resources: 1,200 lost their jobs when the mine closed; another 1,100 are retirees. We know the Premier and officials met with the retirees in February, but since then we haven't heard of any action.

I ask the minister: What has been done for the 2,300 people affected by the closure, who have their pensions reduced to 75-80 per cent?

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue for the people in Wabush and the Labrador area. We were aware of the pension deficit, and I know the previous government were. To their credit, they went in and forced the department to put in so much money for it, but then they went into receivership.

Since then, myself, personally, with the Member for Labrador West, flew to Labrador with the superintendent of pensions. We met with all the pensioners. We outlined all the details of it.

Mr. Speaker, we are actively looking at now if there's an operator for the mine. It's a very serious issue. All of this government is committed to help in any way possible. I know the Minister of Finance visited the area and met with the workers. I know the Premier went up himself.

This government is engaged. We're trying to help out the workers. It is a sad time for the people in Lab West and Wabush. We are working diligently with the stakeholders, with the town councils, to help the best we can.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, we agree. It's a very serious issue. It would be great if a new owner can come in there and take over, but that doesn't help the pensioners right now.

We have had former employees and retirees contact our government and ask questions. We

know the Liberal government boasts of a close relationship with the federal government.

I ask the minister: Have you asked the federal government to intervene and take any action in protecting these former employees?

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, indeed, it is a serious issue. Any time anybody gets their income decreased by that amount, it is a serious issue.

As we know, this went into court protection. This is out of the hands of federal and provincial legislatures now. There is a move afoot to strengthen the federal legislation so it won't happen again. Yvonne Jones has been in contact and had meetings up in Wabush on many occasions.

We are engaged with our federal counterparts. We are actively looking for someone to take over the mine. We understand that would be the best option. There are no guarantees that will happen, but we are actively seeking a new owner for the mine. Until then, we are working – just up until last week, the Member for Lab West and the superintendent of pensions went up and answered any questions that members did have. We are actively engaged. We will seek solutions for this area.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we realize how important this issue is and how important it is to the people in Wabush and people right across the province actually, Mr. Speaker. There are retirees in my district. There are retirees in every district right across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What action is he taking to assist former workers with their health care benefits?

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, that was raised during the first public meeting when I went up there in December, actually. What was raised at the time, there was a pension plan in Ontario where the government put in \$3 million. What we said at the time was there are enhanced health care benefits for a lot of employees. Some are above the threshold that they would receive benefits from. What we said we would do is the Member for Lab West would deal with any individual.

Right now, the enhanced health care plan that is in place is what – we informed and gave out all of the enhanced health care benefits for the area. Did we put \$3 million in the plan? No, we did not. Once you get into that, Mr. Speaker, then there are other benefits that other employees – so we are working diligently with the union, with the town councils up there and also with all the workers themselves on their health care benefits.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, in 2014 our administration announced a \$68 million federal-provincial investment in affordable housing to assist 10,000 low-income households, many of whom are seniors. These programs provide safety and security to the vulnerable people of our province. These people are very worried, Mr. Speaker, when they hear that everything is under review.

I ask the Minister Responsible for Housing: Will these people see an increase in their rent?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, the financial component is under review with the budget, as the Minister of Finance has said numerous times in this House.

By 2019, we will have 600 units in this province that will help to house seniors. So we are very

aware of the needs of seniors around housing and we are working on it.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. PERRY:** Seniors have a right to live in a safe environment that is accessible. The website indicates that funding for accessibility grants is currently not available.

I ask the minister: Will her government be continuing with this program in 2016?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, the Home Repair Program and the Home Modification Program presently help address the issues of accessibility; 85 per cent of seniors use that program.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, my question was about accessibility grants, but we can come back to that at a later time.

Mr. Speaker, through the previous government's widely acclaimed Poverty Reduction Strategy, we have increased funding to strengthen Family Resource Centres throughout the province, which are widely utilized and extremely important.

I ask the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development: Will these centres see a cut in the upcoming budget?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Family Resource Centres are like everything else: they're under review for the budget process.

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, Family Resource Centres are under review. That's rather concerning to hear.

Mr. Speaker, in the *Open Government Draft Action Plan*, we committed to a sunshine list. We know that the Office of Public Engagement is now working on the 15-month consultation tour and unfortunately little else.

Will the government commit to establishing the sunshine list as an early action item to demonstrate some commitment to Open Government?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. COADY:** I thank the hon. Member for his question. As he's well aware, the Open Government Initiative has 43 points under it, 43 recommendations. This government is reviewing all 43, as well as the information that we gathered through the public consultation sessions around that.

He asked specifically about one particular initiative under that Open Government Initiative and we are considering that, but we have to look at a lens of cost and impact as well as human resources. Unlike the former minister, who was in that department for many years, we'll be very expeditious in getting to the Open Government Initiative.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, the Open Government Action Plan is finalized and the new government is refusing to act on it. When it comes to sunshine lists, there's little cost involved and there's little human resources involved.

Access to information requests filed by local media has proven that the data that would be on a sunshine list is quickly available. It's one of the items in the Open Government Action Plan that should have been done by the end of this month.

Given that this is low-hanging fruit and easy to act on, and rather than having the media or the public build the list through ATIPP requests, why won't government simply publish an official list?

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member had 12 years, I believe, in government.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. COADY:** He could have acted on that list if he felt it was so imminently available. As he indicated, the media has, through the access to information, gathered a lot of the information. I think they're making use of that information, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to assess how we can implement the Open Government Initiative, how quickly we can do it. Certainly, we've been preoccupied with cleaning up the financial mess left behind by the former government.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the minister that we did launch the Open Government Initiative and finalized the Open Government Action Plan which they now won't act on.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, from the Fortunate Ones to Hey Rosetta!, from Jillian Keiley to Michael Crummey, we could give dozens of examples of how the arts professions in our

province are generating economic success, attention abroad and economic activity.

Iceland dedicates 5 per cent of its budget to arts and culture. While arts investment has increased considerably over the past decade, will the minister responsible for culture fight to see a similar percentage of the 2016 budget dedicated to arts and culture, recognizing the potential for economic growth?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

**MR. HOLLOWAY:** I thank the Member opposite for the question.

An inaugural moment in this House, Mr. Speaker, a parliamentary secretary to stand and speak in answer to a question in this House, so I'm proud and pleased to be able to do that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HOLLOWAY:** In responding to the Member's question in terms of artists in this province, certainly Minister Mitchelmore, as mandated by the Premier, has been tasked to introduce an act in protection of the artists of this province and we will continue to do that. We will engage stakeholders and we'll draft that legislation, which we'll bring forward later.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** What I'm about to say might surprise you, Mr. Speaker, but I want to commend the Premier for engaging parliamentary secretaries and having them answer questions in this House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** I just hope some of his ministers will start to answer questions in this House as well.

Congratulations to my colleague.

Mr. Speaker, in 2006 we launched a strategic cultural plan to invest in our artists. That strategy has had a positive impact over the past decade.

Will this government produce a brand-new strategic cultural plan to capitalize on opportunities to invest in our artists and the economic activity they generate?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

**MR. HOLLOWAY:** I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, having a second opportunity to stand in this House today.

As I said in my last response, one of the things we're doing as we move forward is to engage the sector to find out what are the challenges and the issues that need to be brought forward in terms of drafting legislation in the protection of artists in this Province. We will do that over the next number of months and we will bring that forward in this House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Liberal government promised increased administrative supports to enhance inclusive learning in the classrooms. Given the possibility of a 30 per cent cut that the department is facing, can students with exceptionalities still expect enhancements in the budget or will this be a sacrifice they must shoulder?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very important question the Member asked. We know that under the previous administration there was an inclusion policy that was foisted upon the school system in Newfoundland and Labrador that was not suitably resourced from the beginning or in the end by the previous administration. This is a

priority for us, and that's why we're very happy to let people know, as I mentioned the other day, that under the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes – the details of which will be announced later this year – inclusion will be one of the areas we will put under the microscope to make sure it's properly resourced.

At the end of collective bargaining with the NLTA, the last round, there was an agreement made to have a joint committee on inclusion with the NLTA, the school district and government. That committee will be reporting at the end of this month.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will your government commit to moving forward with the K-12 Multi-Year Infrastructure Strategy announced in Budget 2015? If not, what does this mean for schools such as Coley's Point and Gander?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are a variety of things the Member just mentioned in the infrastructure strategy. Our infrastructure strategy is going to be very different from the previous administration's infrastructure strategy.

The previous administration's infrastructure strategy involved ignoring population growth on the Northeast Avalon in communities, like in the City of Mount Pearl where there was growth in the area of Southlands that fed into Mount Pearl schools; ignored growth in Paradise allowed schools to become overcrowded there; allowed Beachy Cove Elementary in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's to become overcrowded where children now have to go to school in very, very overcrowded conditions; allowed the same situation to exist in Torbay.

We're not going to do that. We're going to provide sufficient infrastructure so that children can go to school and get a proper education without the overcrowded conditions that the previous administration thought was appropriate.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

In his mandate letter, the Premier urged the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to engage constituents and the general public, yet the minister is allowing the appointed English School District board to run roughshod over parents, students and school councils in the recent proposals to close schools in Conche, Whitbourne and Holy Cross Junior High here in St. John's.

I ask the Premier: Does he not believe his minister is responsible for ensuring that the school board operates under the same principles as he?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased that this question is coming up again for, I believe, the third week in a row now here in the House of Assembly.

The government is not allowing the school district to do anything other than what is laid out in the *Schools Act, 1997*. The school districts, under the legislation, have the authority, legally, to administrate primary education, elementary education and secondary education. That's the law in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think that people are tired of – the previous administration made a hobby of meddling in the affairs of autonomous organizations, boards, committees and agencies that are external to government. We're not going to do that. We're going to allow the school district to do what is laid out in the *Schools Act*: their job, legally, in this province, which is to make decisions

regarding the resources that are provided to them.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I ask the Premier to remind the minister of his responsibilities because he was tasked in the mandate letter to improve educational outcomes.

I ask the Premier: Why are you allowing your minister to hide behind an unelected school board and shirk his duty to ensure a safe and optimal educational environment for the children who are being affected?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for her question. I will allow my ministers to do their jobs. It's the appropriate thing to do. That's the reason why we call this a team on this side of the House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER BALL:** I think the minister has clearly outlined and answered the question from the Member opposite. It's important for us to make sure we do the due diligence that's required and allow people that are in positions to make those decisions to actually do their job. As I will with the Members that we have on this side of the House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier's mandate letter to the Minister of Education instructed the minister to pay special attention to improving educational outcomes.

I ask the Premier: How will closing Holy Cross Junior High that has a student population with 38 per cent exceptionalities and moving them to

another junior high school that also has a high exceptionality rate improve educational outcomes?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, as I've said a number of times, just a minute ago and in previous sessions of the House, the school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador have a responsibility under the legislation, under the *Schools Act*, have statutory responsibility for the administration of schools.

In this instance, which is something that happens every year, annually, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the district is doing its job in reviewing schools. They are doing that. It's not something extraordinary. They are making decisions based on the finite resources given to them by the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, the Member's colleague told CBC recently that no decision should be made with respect to money. I think the taxpayers of the province want the school district and the government to be good stewards of the few dollars they have. That's what the district is trying to do. If the Member has any questions for the district, ask the district.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister also has a duty to make sure we have a duly elected school board of trustees.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. ROGERS:** The school board of trustees has not had an election since 2009, and their role is to be accountable to the people of the community from which they are elected. That is not what we have right now. The minister knows that, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: Will he instruct his Education Minister to do the right thing, stop hiding behind



unelected, appointed school board trustees and stop this school's closure until he has a duly elected board of school trustees in place?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, what government is doing is allowing the school district to do the job that is laid out in the *Schools Act*. That job is to administrate schools in Newfoundland and Labrador with the few dollars we have left over after the spending spree the previous administration was on for some 13 years.

I raised this question about school trustees when we were in Opposition. During the election campaign last fall, we made a commitment to have school district trustee elections within 12 months. I've met with the CEOs and chairs of both the English and the French districts. I've met with the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils. I sat down with the Chief Electoral Officer to talk about the process for doing that. We're now in the process of drafting legislation for a legislative change to harmonize the process for electing English and French trustees. We will have the election within 12 months.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### Tabling of Documents

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

**MS. COADY:** Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the *Energy Corporation Act* and the *Hydro Corporation Act*, I am tabling the 2015 business and financial report for Nalcor Energy, as well as the 2015 consolidated financial statements of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on tabling of documents.

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday in my discourse on Bill 1, I referenced a document called *Meeting the Expectations of Canadians: Review of the Governance Framework for Canada's Crown Corporations*. I'd like to table that document, as I indicated at the time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

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

WHEREAS the federal government promised to provide \$280 million for CETA innovation fund to build our province's fishery into the future;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to be vigilant and vocal in demanding that the federal government live up to its commitment of \$280 million for the fisheries innovation fund.

Mr. Speaker, we realize today is the federal government's budget day. We, on this side of the House, are hoping that this will be part of their budget today that they will announce that

\$280 million that will help our fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We all realize the importance of the fishery to this province. Right now we can see in the province that the shell fishery, our shrimp and our crab, are on a little bit of a decline and our groundfish is coming back. Mr. Speaker, this fund is set up so that it can help our industry, help our harvesters, help people out there get into the new of type fishery like we had to do when the ground fishery went down.

It's very important that the federal government live up to its commitment of the \$280 million. We put pressure on them to make it so that rural Newfoundland can survive because that's the gist of all of this, is making sure that our fishery survives.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the government to work with their counterparts in Ottawa and make sure we get this fund.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for the District of Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the federal government should be reducing, not increasing, Marine Atlantic ferry rates to drive tourism growth and stimulate the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to press the province's federal Members of Parliament and the federal government to reduce Marine Atlantic ferry rates.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This is the second time I've presented that petition because there are a couple of things that brings it up. I know when we were in government and I was part of that government – I wasn't an elected official, but I was in the department actually where Marine Atlantic resided.

The governing party now gave us a lot of grief any time anything happened with Marine Atlantic – especially rate increases and whatnot, and fair game. We have Members over there that have made a career out of bashing Marine Atlantic every opportunity they got, anything they've done.

On this issue, I just have to say their silence is deafening. There's not been a murmur; there's not been a word of any sort. You're raising rates for tourism. I mean, it's our lifeline; it's our grocery store shelves. I'm surprised that there's no one up over there who actually took it upon themselves to ask their federal cousins why these rates are increased and why not reduce them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS firefighters, both career and volunteer, are exposed to many hazards in their line of duty; and

WHEREAS firefighters, both career and volunteer, risk their lives and well-being to serve our communities;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to bring forward workers' compensation legislation

containing a presumptive cancer and cardiac clause for firefighters, both career and volunteer.

Mr. Speaker, this issue has been talked about for many years. I recall debating this issue during my time in local government. As part of the past administration, there was quite a bit of dialogue about this issue as well. During the recent election campaign, our party committed to enacting the legislation that I'm speaking about here today had we been elected and successful in forming government.

We have to acknowledge that our fire and emergency services professions – their health is impacted, no doubt, by the work they do. There was a report in 2013 by the Statutory Review Committee on Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation. It recommended that our province should enact legislation containing a presumptive cancer clause for firefighters. Most provinces already have it, Mr. Speaker.

A full-time career firefighter who serves for a specified period of time and develops a specific form of cancer is presumed to have developed that cancer as a result of having served as a firefighter. Many provinces also have a presumptive clause with respect to a heart injury that a full-time firefighter suffers within 24 hours of attending a fire scene in the performance of his or her duties. The firefighter is presumed to have suffered a work-related injury.

This recognition impacts the firefighter's ability to receive compensation. Enacting such legislation is the right thing to do. We were committed to doing it and we're calling upon the new government to do the same.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the English School Board trustees proposed to close down Holy Cross Junior High School and send students to a distant school; and

WHEREAS the board has arbitrarily and without consultation reduced the Holy Cross Junior High School catchment area and students will have to be bused to a far more distant school; and

WHEREAS Holy Cross Junior High School is an important neighbourhood school with programs, community partnerships and extracurricular activities designed to meet the particular needs of the intercity students who attend it; and

WHEREAS the English School Board trustees are an appointed body and no longer accountable to the people who elected them;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure that Holy Cross Junior High School remains open and to immediately arrange for a democratically elected English School Board.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I believe what's been happening during Question Period in this House is the Minister of Education is really splitting hairs. He knows the moral implications of what we have here now in the form of a board of trustees. He knows there hasn't been elected trustees since 2009.

As a matter of fact, he railed and ranted and roared in this House of Assembly against that very fact. Now, Mr. Speaker, he's turning around on his own words. I don't know how he can sleep at night. He knows what the right thing is to do here. He ranted, he roared, he rallied here in this House saying how wrong this was. How wrong it was to not have an elected school board of trustees to make these kinds of decisions; yet, now he's hiding behind that.

Why is he hiding behind that, Mr. Speaker? Because he knows the closure of Holy Cross Junior High is not in the best interest of the students. He knows that with every fibre of his

being. He also knows with every fibre of his being that to allow this unelected, appointed school board is wrong. He knows that. He has told us that himself; yet, he continues – he will hide behind the trustees – to hide behind it. Let them make their vote which is secret and they are no longer accountable to the people of their communities.

That is what this minister is doing. He's not taking the leadership role that he knows he must do, that he should do, morally. He knows that, Mr. Speaker. He's deciding to just hide and relegate his responsibility to someone else. I find it absolutely reprehensible.

Right now, what's going to happen is the children and the families of Holy Cross Junior High will be punished for the sins of the Tories by the Liberals. They know this is not the right decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further petitions?

Orders of the Day.

#### Orders of the Day

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, Bill 9.

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means to consider certain resolutions and a bill relating to the raising of loans by the province.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is that the Speaker now leave the Chair to allow the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to Consider a Resolution Relating to the Raising of Loans by the Province, Bill 9.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

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

#### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Lane):** Order, please!

We are now debating the resolution and Bill 9.

#### Resolution

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province, in addition to the sum of money already voted, a sum of money not exceeding \$400,000,000."

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to rise in this hon. House today and speak to Bill 9, which is an amendment to the *Loan Act, 2015*.

This government recognizes that we have increased borrowing requirements for this fiscal year. As well, we know we will have significant borrowing needs in the next fiscal year. We currently have the authority to borrow \$2 billion and we know now, based on updated information that we presented to the people of the province back in December, that we will need the authority to borrow \$2.4 billion.

In order to continue to be active in the bond markets, the province requires a \$400 million increase to the borrowing limit that was set out as a result of the *Loan Act, 2015*. That is why we have introduced Bill 9, to amend the *Loan Act, 2015*.

The \$400 million additional authority stays in place and will be supplemented by a request for

additional authority. The government has had success in the long-term market, in spite of the challenges that have been facing this province and many other provinces as well in the long-term bond market.

We are having success now in the market because of the information that we have shared with our investors through the fall update and the recent information that we've shared with the bond rating agencies as well as our banks. Up until we issued the mid-year update in December of 2015, there was a real void of information and investors did not want to invest in Newfoundland and Labrador. Quite frankly, we are changing that.

Under the previous administration, borrowing was slow in April to December with only \$400 million being able to be secured. Since January of this year, this government has been able to secure five market issues totalling \$1.985 billion.

It is clear that this government's commitment to action to deal with the fiscal situation is allowing Newfoundland and Labrador to secure long-term borrowing in the market domestically. As I mentioned, under the previous administration's watch from April 2015 to December of 2015, they only managed to get one successful market issue.

The previous administration may not have anticipated the sharp decline in the price of oil, but they should have been well aware of the rest of the factors impacting borrowing, especially since they were the ones that delayed the mid-year update, causing more uncertainty in the market.

They themselves had said in their budget document of last year that they anticipated borrowing to be \$4.85 billion. The previous administration should have known that the borrowing would be an issue in the domestic market. The signs were there, but they chose not to act, not to have a plan and not to have an investor relations strategy and they projected deficits for three years. The previous administration had no plan in place as to how it would successfully borrow the required \$4.85 billion over four years and didn't develop an investor relations strategy.

Our government is looking to the future and are evolving our investor relations strategy. As I have indicated, we know we will have to borrow in '16-'17. In order to continue to avail of market opportunities, we need to begin to establish our borrowing authority for next year. That is why in addition to amendments to the *Loan Act, 2015* which we are debating right now, we have also introduced Bill 10, the *Loan Act, 2016* which I look forward to debating in this House in the coming weeks.

The *Loan Act, 2016* will give us the authority to borrow \$1.6 billion to begin our borrowing program for 2016-17. Our total borrowing requirements for 2016-17 will be confirmed by budget 2016. Our government is working very hard to continue to have good relationships with the rating agencies and our investors in the face of a tremendously difficult fiscal situation. We intend to present them and the people of the province with a credible plan forward. Part of that plan is how we approach our borrowing needs. The province borrows money for a number of different reasons.

Yesterday, in Question Period, Members opposite asked questions about the *Financial Administration Act* and also asked a question about special warrants. In the context of borrowing, special warrants are not relevant. Special warrants are actually for expenditures that come outside of the budget envelope. Unfortunately there was confusion yesterday. Hopefully, we've been able to clear that up over the last 24 hours.

The *Financial Administration Act*, which is separate from the *Loan Act*, allows for borrowing activities to support activity related to long-term debt renewal, pensions and sinking funds. I would remind the people in this House as well as the people at home that at the beginning of this fiscal year, the remainder or the total of the borrowing – debt that was on the books for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – is \$5.5 billion. Part of the plan now is how we will be approaching our borrowing needs.

The unprecedented fiscal situation, left to us by the former administration, demands we have a loan bill in place as early as possible in 2016-17.

We cannot miss an opportunity to borrow funds in the first quarter of 2016-17.

The *Financial Administration Act* also allows for temporary borrowing to provide cash management flexibility. That specifically relates to T-bills. Historically, the authority there has been \$1.5 billion and the cash management program normally has been held at a cap of about \$780 million.

The former administration, just before the election, increased the temporary borrowing and T-bills by a billion dollars, and on January 16 we had to do the same and increased it to a total of \$3.5 billion. The reason for that was that the province was unable to borrow long-term money and was using short-term T-bills to be able to cover the lack of long-term debt being in place.

As I said earlier, this all leads into the reason why in addition to amendments to the *Loan Act, 2015*, which we're debating right now, we've also introduced Bill 10, the *Loan Act, 2016*, which I really look forward to debating in this House. The *Loan Act, 2016* will give us the authority to borrow \$1.6 billion to begin our borrowing program for the 2016-17 fiscal year, and our total borrowing requirements for '16-'17 will be confirmed as part of budget 2016.

The unprecedented fiscal situation left to us by the former administration demands we have this loan bill in place as early as possible because, as I said earlier, we cannot miss the opportunity to borrow long-term money.

Earlier I mentioned the \$3.5 billion that is in place for temporary borrowing. Currently, \$1.6 billion of that is related to the lack of long-term borrowing that was in effect when we came into office. We intend, as is the normal practice, to table all the information around temporary borrowing in this House at the end of the fiscal year and certainly within the compliance of the 15 days that is required, specifically related to temporary borrowings under the *Financial Administration Act*.

But I want to be clear that the *Financial Administration Act* covers certain borrowings and the loan acts cover different borrowings. The loan acts cover the borrowings related to new or incremental borrowing that the province

must take on. Any administration who believes that they are going to run a deficit needs to come into this House of Assembly and present a loan act that allows them the borrowing authority to be able to meet their financial commitments in their budget.

This success this government has seen in the long-term market in the last couple of months, quite frankly, is a testament to the fact that the Premier has been having many conversations over the last month, as I have, over the last several months, with our financial advisors. I personally have spoken with our bond-rating agencies and the major banks, and will continue to do so as we need to ensure very transparent relationships with those organizations in conjunction with the people of the province.

We are certainly giving them the confidence that we are doing all the due diligence and all the evidence-based analysis we need to present a plan as part of budget 2016 that is going to be very credible. And we believe the markets are reacting. Quite frankly, I believe the success we are seeing in the long-term markets, as I've said earlier, is a part and parcel result of the conversations we are having with our investors. And it's also because of the void of information that was in the market prior to the election.

There was no major fiscal update. The bond-rating agencies in the market had no measure of how the province was performing financially. And as I've said previously, that is something we continue to work on and are continuing to change.

Mr. Chair, I will take my seat and I look forward now to continuing to discuss this government's financial plan on how we will reshape Newfoundland and Labrador's fiscal future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Opposition Leader.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for a chance to get up in Committee to discuss Bill 9, An Act to Amend

the Loan Act, 2015, which is last year's. There are two bills before the House today – not today, but there are two bills in the House. Bill 9 has been tabled, notice has been given on Bill 10, but we haven't seen that. It hasn't been tabled yet. Bill 9 was tabled yesterday.

Bill 9 is to amend the *Loan Act, 2015*. The *Loan Act* is a normal process for governments to seek borrowing, to seek loans, and is usually done following a budget process. The *Loan Act, 2015* did follow the budget of 2015; however, the government of the day is seeking to amend that act to increase the borrowing by \$400 million. That's what this bill is about today. It's about amending the budget from last year to increase borrowing from \$2 billion to \$2.4 billion.

Mr. Chair, those will be my comments today. I know I get to speak this afternoon for 15 minutes; I've already used up a minute and I get to speak now for 15 minutes. For those people who are not aware what happens in Committee and what happens with these bills, it's that once I use my 15 minutes, following that, Members can rise alternatively, one after another, for 10 minutes and continue to debate the bill. So in all likelihood if I don't get all of my points made in the 13 minutes I have left, then I will get to them later this afternoon. I'm sure I'll be using my time to get to them.

The first thing I'd like to do is thank officials for the briefing this morning. We had requested for a briefing; I thank the minister for arranging that. We came early this morning and we had a briefing from officials. Mr. Chair, to be honest with you and to be quite –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** My first notice of our briefing this morning was quite refreshing actually because I believe we had a good exchange and we had a number of people that attended the briefing with officials. We received answers, direct answers to several questions and discussion that we had. It was informative for us. It helped enlighten us as to their thinking, their rationale, the process they're following, why they were where they were and so on. I thank the officials for providing that, Mr. Chair,

because it is in contrast to what we've been receiving here in the House of Assembly.

The minister yesterday during Question Period said: Oh, 16 times the Member opposite – referring to me – has asked the same question. She said: I don't know how many more times I can tell him. We'll tell him in the budget is essentially what happened. Well, Mr. Chair, the reason why we continue to ask it is because the Minister of Finance had offered the information. She had offered the information. That information is relative to this bill because it's about spending.

Now they're asking to borrow more for 2015, \$400 million worth of additional borrowing, and I think it's very relevant for us as an Opposition to stand in the House and stand in our place during Question Period and ask the government how that spending has occurred. How that particular discussion about savings came about was in Question Period early in this sitting of the House, probably about three weeks ago, I had asked the minister if she could outline savings she has created because, when they did their fiscal update in December, she referenced that they were going to stop discretionary spending and reduce travel and do a bunch of other things.

I asked her what savings have been created and she jumped out of her chair and very proudly said: Oh, we've saved, I'm so proud to say, \$100 million. And the gallery opposite over on government side erupted in applause, Mr. Chair, and saying wonderful, what a great job they've done, they've saved. The minister said, in fairness to her, in the vicinity of \$100 million. As I said, they erupted in applause and pleasure that they had saved \$100 million.

So of course the next question would be: Can you break down that \$100 million for us? The minister once again said: I'd be delighted to give you the details on the \$100 million. I'd be delighted to provide it – I'm just looking for a copy of it here; I don't think I have it with me. She said I'd be delighted, and a day or two later she tabled a document that had three numbers, Mr. Chair – three numbers. One of them indicated – it had three different titles on them, but they were very high-level numbers.

I asked the minister, you said you were going to table the numbers. You're so pleased you've saved \$100 million. From December to the middle of March, government had saved in the vicinity of \$100 million in discretionary spending.

What's also interesting is after the first day of questions the hon. Member went outside to talk to the media. I wasn't there. I can only go by media reports – and what I saw through the media, what I heard through the media and people who were there – that she had indicated it was annualized. She's indicating now it wasn't actually \$100 million saved.

So I would fully expect that if the minister erred, made a mistake and wasn't clear in her information, that she would have come back the next day to clarify the information. She didn't do that. She took the position of I'll give it to you when the budget comes, I'll give it to you when the budget comes, I'll give it to you when the budget comes. Yes, there were 16 times we asked. It might have been more than for all I know, Mr. Chair. That's essentially been her answer.

Now we're here today with a bill to look for borrowing. I would think the minister is probably not going to change her position; you're going to have to wait for the budget to see what we spent in 2015. You wait until the Estimate books come out which show you what the budget was for 2015, what the actual spending was for 2015 and then what their budget is for 2016. That's contained in Estimate books that come out with the 2016 budget.

She's saying to the House and to people of the province we want \$400 million additional borrowing, but we're not going to tell you where the savings are that I stood up and boasted about here in the House in the vicinity of \$100 million. I just think that's unfair, Mr. Chair. I really do.

We ask questions on behalf of the people of the province. I know she's a little bit frustrated with it and I appreciate that. I have full respect for Members opposite, Mr. Chair, I have to say. I have full respect for them, full respect for the fact that the people elected a new government. I have full respect for the decisions that the people

made. I mean that in all sincerity, but we have a responsibility to ask questions.

We're hearing all the time – we hear a beginning of an answer and we just heard it in the minister's comments, the previous administration, the former administration were the words she used a few minutes ago. We hear it quite often: the previous administration. We hear it in answers in Question Period.

Well, let me tell you what they did, and we're asking them about what are you going to do. You see, Mr. Chair, we have to remind them, sometimes, they were elected to govern; and what's important to people right now is not so much the history lesson, but what are they going to do about it. What are they going to do about the circumstances they face today? They are today the government. What are they going to do about it?

We asked a number of questions today to various ministers. The Minister of Finance continued to get up and answer for them, which is interesting. A lot of the questions were related to financial matters. We did hear from the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services. She was asked some questions about housing and didn't say no to the questions when we asked are people likely to see an increase in rates for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing tenants. Didn't answer no, and gave an answer that kind of danced around it; did answer that the Family Resource Centres are on the table.

The indication we got over here from those answers were, yeah, all that is really being considered. Could there be a rental increase for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing tenants? There could be. But she did answer the questions, and credit to her for doing so. We respect that. When someone stands in their place and tries to provide the information, then we're thankful for that and we appreciate that. Instead of standing up and saying well, let me tell you what you did. We know what we did, we know what happened, we know why we're here, we know how we're here, we know what the people decided and we respect that decision.

I would say, Mr. Chair, and it's no exaggeration, and I tell you I couldn't be more honest with you when I tell you that the most frequent



conversation I believe I have with citizens as they contact me, if I see them at a coffee shop or in a store or on the street, or they phone me in the office or they send me a message, the most frequent comment I receive is people saying I'm some tired of government saying, oh, it's your fault, this is what you did and giving the history lesson.

I know the Minister of Natural Resources doesn't like to hear that, but I'm just telling you – I couldn't be more honest in saying that's what I hear most frequently from people, is they're tired of listening to the blame game from government.

As a matter of fact, speaking of the blame game, Mr. Chair, even back in December – the minister mentioned the fiscal update in December and it was during the fiscal update the Premier actually pointed out that day that we're not blaming the previous government. The fall in oil prices got us in a bad spot. He made those comments. Then again in January when they were announcing their LEAP tour – no, the LEAP tour was back in 2015 when they were going to travel the province and consult with everybody, but we never heard that report. What was it called?

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** They leaped all over the place.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** They leaped all over the place.

No, it was when they did their tour, their financial tour, which they're going to plan next year's budget, when they announced that one in January. The Premier is on the record again and said this is not about blame. This is not about the Opposition. This is about consulting with the people of the province.

I think they have forgotten that because very quickly in the House we've come to – it seems like the standard answer, the precursor to any answer in the House: well, let me tell you what the Members opposite did. That's how they start. We've heard the former administration, the former government's record and history and so on. I remind him, the people have spoken. You're elected. You're in control today. You are now responsible. You asked to be. As a matter of fact, while doing so you repeatedly went to

the people of the province and said: we have a plan.

Even back to 2014, the Premier told a group of people, he was talking about health care, he said we have a plan and you're going to like it. It appears now to everyone in the province, Mr. Chair, that the government doesn't have a plan; the Members opposite didn't have a plan. We heard today they're creating the plan. They're consulting with people. They don't have a plan, even though they went to the people and said they had a plan.

We did have a plan, Mr. Chair, and the people rejected our plan. That's the truth of it. We had a plan that included increasing the HST. We said we'd increase the HST, which would have realized \$200 million this year in revenue to the government. That's half of what they're asking us for additional borrowing today. That's \$200 million. It's half of what they're asking for today for additional borrowing.

They said – with no concern about the needs of revenue, very quickly after being elected, without even taking time to settle in and have a good, hard look and study at the books – we're doing away with the HST increase. They did away with the HST increase; \$200 million gone, Mr. Chair.

Now I see the Minister of Finance is eager to get back up again, and in three minutes and 30 seconds she can.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** But I intend to use all my time, Mr. Chair, here today.

Mr. Chair, we also had a plan on attrition. We had a plan for long-term care, which they've cancelled. They've cancelled long-term care. They've cancelled a lot. They cancelled the Green Bay hospital as well, which comes to mind when I talk about long-term care. They don't have a plan; they're going to reconsider. They felt we didn't do it right and they have a better way forward.

Mr. Chair, that's going to take a long time to do and that doesn't solve the problem of people lying on stretchers in emergency rooms because

–

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** – there's no room available for them in an acute care hospital, because a high percentage of acute care hospital beds are occupied by long-term care patients waiting for a long-term care bed to go to.

Mr. Chair, they came to the people, they said we have the way forward. We now know they have to borrow more to get through 2015. We respect that. I think the Premier used the words –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** I can't remember, I think it was

–

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

The Chair has asked for order several times. I would ask all hon. Members to respect the order of the House.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, I can't remember, I think it was early January, and I stand to be corrected, when the Premier said that since December, since they took office, they lost \$400 million in annual revenue because of the drop in the price of oil. I think the minister maybe when she gets up again she can talk about – I think they predicted the price at around \$37. It's up about that now the last week or 10 days, or maybe a little bit longer but for most of that period from December and into January and February it was well below that, so she knows how hard it is to predict that.

This bill is about increasing borrowing. It's about paying the bills for government. Of course we respect that, but I can tell the minister and Members opposite, we're going to ask questions

about this today. They are probably not going to answer them, but we'll ask questions about this today. We're going to talk about it. We're going to have a debate on it because that's what we're expected to do and that's what the people expect us to do, nothing less. We're going to try not to engage in the blame game. We're going to ask people and ask the government how they are going to deal with the circumstances that impact us.

We know the budget is not tabled yet. We don't expect it now until after the Easter break. I know they'll be working hard in their offices every day. I know the Premier and ministers will be in their offices working through the budget to get it done as quickly as they can through the Easter break. I've been there myself. I've done that in the past and I know it's a lot of work. It's very stressful work and difficult decisions to make, and we respect the circumstances they're in because these are hard times. These are difficult times in the province with such a loss in revenue because of the fall in oil prices. They really have hard and difficult circumstances and decisions to make, and we respect that.

We look forward to further debate this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Well, I certainly hope the Members opposite start to participate in the accountability game because when we came into office back in December officials met with us and in our briefings it was very clear to us that we had a significant problem when it came to borrowing.

I would like to just remind the Member opposite – who felt it was appropriate to, I guess, not listen – I hope he is watching outside, part of this debate.

Under the *Financial Accountability Act*, there is an allowance for temporary borrowing to

provide for cash management flexibility. The former administration brought in their budget in June and did not bring in a loan act for some 14 days to actually exercise the activity related to the borrowing. They knew they had presented a deficit in excess of \$1.1 billion and that there would be a cash shortfall. They took several weeks to bring in a loan act.

Then, throughout the course of the summer, as the activity related to securing debt under long-term facilities became evident that wasn't happening, they chose in October to increase the T-bill capacity, which they did. They increased it by a billion dollars. They borrowed short-term money, even though back in June they knew they needed long-term debt.

Mr. Chair, I listened to the Member opposite talk about his respect for the situation that we are faced with as a government. He admitted – as he perceives it – that this situation is a revenue situation. Well, that revenue situation has exacerbated an already in place spending problem of the former administration, not of this administration.

In our budget, we will clearly lay out to the people of the province where we feel we have been able to restrain spending and begin to create a culture that is based on making sure that the best interests of the people of the province are reflected in our expenditures.

The problem we are faced with today, the \$2.4 billion we believe we need to borrow as a result of the '15-'16 fiscal plan, \$1.1 billion was evident when they presented their budget. Over the course of the summer it became evident that the revenue they had forecasted wasn't going to be achieved. We were very open and honest with the people of the province in December when we shared with them the numbers.

Mr. Chair, when officials came to us when we were sworn in as a Cabinet, and, certainly, the Premier in his initial briefings, and they spoke to us about their concern about our inability to secure long-term borrowing, we undertook significant action, speaking with lenders, speaking with bond-rating agencies, providing information first and foremost to the people of the province in a fiscal update that the former administration refused to provide when our

Premier, then Opposition leader, asked for that information. The letter went ignored. I don't know if they had the information. I don't know if they didn't have visibility into it, but, certainly, that information wasn't made transparent to the people of the province until December.

Since December, we have been able to, under the *Loan Act* – the former administration had secured \$400 million. We've been able to secure \$1.485 billion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** So the \$400 million that they did and the \$1.485 billion that we've been able to do is a total of \$1.885 billion. There's \$115 million left and this *Loan Act* is asking for another \$400 million so that we can get the borrowing in place, so that we can provide financial stability and assurances to the people of the province that we can get the money to pay for the services that we have to have in place.

Mr. Chair, I listened to the Member opposite continue to talk about the money that we've been able to save. I appreciate the fact that he continues to give us credit for being able to do things that they were unable to do. I look forward to being able to present the budget that displays and shows all of the things we've been able to do in a very short period of time.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** What we've been able to do to present a budget to the people of the province that is more responsible than the former administration. I look forward to continuing through the debate in this particular *Loan Act* and the *Loan Act* that's coming up related to the 2016-17 fiscal year. I look forward to debating that and I'll be very pleased when the debate for the budget for '16-'17 starts.

This financial situation that we find ourselves in today is unprecedented. It is the highest deficit we have had in our province. It is the most amount of debt we've had in our province, at a time when the former administration had access to a tremendous amount of revenue. They knew they hit peak oil production in 2007. They knew they reached peak oil price in 2008 at over \$140

and that number was forecasted to decline. The former administration made decisions based on short-term thinking. This administration will not do that. We are going to make decisions based on what is in the best interests of the people of the province and not what is in the best interests of a political party, Mr. Chair.

Yesterday in this House the Member opposite, in a question, asked about special warrants related to borrowing. As I mentioned in my comments earlier, special warrants are not related to borrowing. Special warrants are related to expenditures that take you outside of the budgeting envelope. I would have thought as a former premier, as he had indicated, spending many hours at a Cabinet table talking about a budget, that would be something I'm sure he understands. I can't imagine that he wouldn't.

Mr. Chair, as a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, as a mom, I can tell you I am not pleased to have to stand here in this House and ask to add \$400 million in incremental borrowing to our already exploding debt load as a province. I am not happy with that. That is not the Newfoundland and Labrador I want to be a part of. That is one of the reasons why I offered myself to serve in public service, because we cannot pass on the debt loads that the former administration had started to forecast on to our children and on to future generations, while at the same time not being able to provide the services to those people in our province that critically need them today.

Mr. Chair, I'll look forward to listening to the rest of this debate, and providing closing commentary when the debate concludes. I would ask the Members of this hon. House to support the request through the *Loan Act* amendment to increase the borrowing to \$400 million so that we can secure long-term debt and provide assurance and confidence to the people of the province – something that, quite frankly, wasn't there under the previous administration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to respond to the Member opposite. As I said earlier, I expect this is going to be going back and forth all day. I had to step out of the House for a few minutes so I never caught all of her comments, but I did hear her comment on fiscal update.

Mr. Chair, we had to make a choice and a decision, which you have to make when you're in government sometimes. Every day you make decisions and choices. You sometimes make hard and difficult decisions. How are you going to deal with the fact that the deficit is rising and the debt is increasing? How do you make those decisions? What are you going to do about it?

The Minister of Finance has, on numerous occasions – more than 16 – talked about a \$5,000 credit card being run up every hour and \$300,000 – sorry, a \$5,000 credit card being run up every minute and \$300,000 every hour. I'm not sure if that's 24 hours a day or eight hours a day. Maybe the minister can –

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Maybe you could use a calculator.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Now, there's a good answer, Mr. Chair. She said maybe I can use a calculator. That's the kind of arrogance sometimes we hear opposite but I'm not going to – I'll move on from that, but we hear it a lot.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** We hear it a lot, Mr. Chair.

The Member opposite referred to the fiscal update.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** So here's where we were, and I just pulled up on the Internet here where the price of oil was last year. If you go back and look at Bloomberg, which will show you I'm sure –

**MR. KIRBY:** Are you allowed to use (inaudible) in the House of Assembly, Mr. Chair?

**MR. P. DAVIS:** What's that, I say to the Minister of Education? Did you want to get up?

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Did the Minister of Education want to rise?

**CHAIR:** I ask the hon. Member to address the Chair, and I ask for order in this House.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Bloomberg will show you where the price of oil was in the last year. If you were to look at it, you'll see that from around the end of August oil started to balance out, up and down, above and below the \$50 mark. It went from there. It started to shoot up and down. There was a bit of a down in August. It straightened out towards the end of August. It stayed around that \$50 mark right on through until early November.

The reason why that's important, Mr. Chair, is because that's when the writ was dropped. That's when a government becomes in what they refer to as caretaker government or caretaker mode while you're going through an election process. Even in the days leading up to that we were reminded constantly by officials in government we had to be very, very careful knowing we're going into a writ period and going into an election, and decisions we make and conclusions we reach based on data and information and those decisions we make.

One of the decisions you make when doing an update is you have to have a prediction of where oil is going to be from then until the end of the year. The new Minister of Finance actually talked about that during her update in December. She talked about she had predicted the price of oil for the rest of the year. It was off and that's not her fault. It was off because there's such volatility in oil prices, Mr. Chair.

If you look at what happened from November right through until December, we'll see there was a big dip, continuously. There was consistency from August right through to

November. Then there was a significant drop in the price of oil right on through until January and continued to fall right into January.

Mr. Chair, the point being, if we had done a fiscal update in October, which is when we would have to have done it before the writ period, before we moved into a caretaker mode, before we moved into the election period or perceived election period even before the writ – so we would have to have done that in October before the writ, before that period of time, we would have based it on \$50 oil, based on what the price of oil was for several weeks before the writ period.

Today, the Members opposite – with all due respect – would have been saying something terrible and nasty about us very differently.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Oh, yes, they would've. Absolutely, they would've because they would have said –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible).

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Yes, absolutely you would because you would have said look how far off you were. You couldn't predict oil from November until after the writ period because there was a \$22, \$23, \$24, \$25, in that range, drop from the writ period to the end of the fiscal year to the first of January.

Now, I remind Members opposite, and for people at home who are watching, we know over the period of a year a dollar decrease in a barrel of oil is equivalent to about \$29 million. Let's make the math easy because I don't have a calculator in front of me. According to the Minister of Education, I probably wouldn't be allowed to use it anyway. It's about \$30 for every dollar. You start to add that up; you're in a lot of money.

The Premier himself said \$400 million was what they lost. From the time they took office until early January they lost \$400 million in oil. So if we had to have done a fiscal update, we would have been way off, Mr. Chair. What I suggest to Members opposite is that they would have been standing today saying: Why did you give us the

wrong information? Why did you mislead the people of the province?

They wouldn't have called us anything worse than that because that's unparliamentary. I'm sure the Members opposite wouldn't do that in the House. They wouldn't be unparliamentary in the House. Of course not, but, Mr. Chair, they would be saying bad things about us. They'd be saying you misled the people of the province; why did you not tell them the truth? Why did you not tell them the way it was? Why did you make up some kind of fairy tale for the people of the province? That's what they would have done.

We knew that OPEC meets on the 1st of December. When OPEC meets, it always has an impact on the price of oil. If OPEC decides to lower production, the price of oil goes up. It's very simple. If OPEC increases production or stays the same, where they've been, the price of oil is going to stay where it is or it's going to drop.

What happened in December was OPEC had a negative impact on the price of oil, which had a big impact on our province and the government. It made the circumstances much, much worse. So we made the decision not to go out on the predictions that we knew were not reliable prior to OPEC. We decided not to do that. The right thing to do was to wait until OPEC met and that was the decision we made.

Mr. Chair, I don't apologize for that. At the end of it, the government of the day, if it was us at the time or the new government now after that, has to deal with – you have to deal with it. That's it – you have to deal with it. You have to make hard and difficult decisions in how you're going to do that.

We were criticized heavily by Members opposite for our budget last year – heavily criticized. I remember budget day when the Member, who's now the Minister of Finance, sat out in the lobby with the media and talked about we don't know what part of government we're going to eliminate until we get in there. She raised the flag; she told the people of the province we're going to eliminate parts of government.

So we don't know, and to this day we still don't know what programs and services are going to be eliminated in the budget. We have to wait for the budget process to take place and for the Minister of Finance to deliver the budget. That's the process that we're here and that's the process we do.

We can also ask questions about circumstances that exist today. We can also ask questions about spending and savings, and steps they've taken to reduce costs and spending, what success they've had to do with it, but we can't get that information. We're here today on a \$400 million bill to amend the *Loan Act, 2015*, but we can't get the information from the government.

We got a lot of good information this morning from officials, and I mentioned this earlier, how appreciative I am. I know, as the minister has said several times, you've been in Cabinet, you've had lots of Cabinet meetings, you must know what it's like. Yes, well, I do know what it's like and I know how hard officials work as well. They provide advice and they provide information. Then it becomes the government's place to make those decisions and to steer the ship and decide which direction the ship is going to go in.

We're waiting for this government to do that. I know the people of the province are waiting. Even today when we asked questions about housing, the Member behind me here didn't ask questions about housing just for the sake of asking a question. We asked questions about housing. Are housing rates liable to change or go up? Will Family Resource Centres be impacted? We're asking these questions because people are calling us and writing us and asking us to ask those questions. That's why we ask them because people are saying to us, ask those questions.

Now, we're learning this process, too. They have to learn how to be government and what to do in government. Ministers are still learning their departments and their portfolios. That's a process that's going to go on for some time. With all due respect to Members opposite, the budget process is one of the best processes to learn your departments, line by line.

I was speaking to a minister a couple of days ago who told me they have learned a lot about their department because they've been going through the operations of their department line by line. The budget process is really good for that. It really forces a minister to dig down deep into the weeds of their department and the actual functions of the department, how things operate and how things function – and so they should. The budget process gives them the opportunity to do that. I'm glad they're going through it and we look forward to the budget.

The fiscal update, as I wanted to refer to it during my time, at this point in time – we made that choice. I don't have any regrets on it. We also made a choice to increase the HST because we knew a year ago we were in tough times and we were headed for tough times. Members opposite wiped it out and erased it. Mr. Chair, \$200 million in revenue gone from the government while we're here today talking about borrowing an additional \$400 million. That's the important discussion we have to have today.

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to echo what the Member opposite said about the budget process. Undoubtedly, having the opportunity to review with officials, as Ministers of the Crown, as a government, provides a very unique and important opportunity to get a tremendous amount of visibility into government expenditures. That has been our experience as we've done the line-by-line activity that we've undertaken. It's one of the many activities that we have undertaken to build our budget.

I look forward to having some of those discussions, as part of the budget debate, on some of the insights that we were able to gain from that activity. I'm sure Members opposite who had the pleasure of being able to sit in Cabinet, as some of us do on this side, also had the opportunity to do the same due diligence and attention to detail that we would have been privileged to have in the last number of weeks.

I would remind the Member opposite though, that the budget process, which is designed to take place over a large number of months – usually according to officials can start as early as September or August – now requires work to be done in advance. The officials have been working very hard to prepare briefing binders to bring ministers up to speed so that we can have the conversations about the expenditures that we need to have.

I do want to share for the Member opposite, though, that the total loss of revenue since the adoption of the 2015 budget has been \$615 million. Mr. Chair, \$615 million in lost revenue, and as the *Loan Act* request is – we are requesting \$400 million, in addition to the already \$2 billion that was in place from last year.

Mr. Chair, I want to address what the Member opposite said about the fiscal update. Seven months would have transpired in a fiscal year in October. Before the election happened in November, seven out of the 12 months for the fiscal '15-'16 would have transpired. I would present that had the former administration provided transparency – not only to the people of the province and to our leader, now Premier, when he was asked to in September – that the bond-rating agencies and the credit-rating agencies, the banks would have had more visibility into the financial performance of the province.

In the absence of that, what ended up happening is officials who were unable to borrow long-term money ended up using temporary borrowings. I think the people of the province would be very eager to know that we had, at peak, \$2.7 billion to \$2.8 billion in temporary T-bills. A temporary T-bill, for those listening at home and for those in this hon. House who may not know, actually is, at max, 91-day money. So a T-bill, Treasury bill –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible).

**MS. C. BENNETT:** I thank the Member opposite for asking me to say the full term. I'm happy to do that. A Treasury bill certainly would – a \$2.7 billion, \$2.8 billion peak is what the government was carrying before we came in, which was one of the reasons why we

expeditiously moved to put a long-term loan program in place, so that we could get more stability in our borrowing.

I think if anybody at home was thinking about having a significant portion of your debt – imagine having your mortgage in a loan that had to be renewed after 90 days. I'm not sure any of us at home would like to have our mortgages being renewed every 90 days. It would put us in a very uncomfortable and difficult position. Certainly, that was one of the reasons why we wanted to more confidently and assertively address the long-term borrowing needs of the province.

It's also one of the reasons why I was very pleased to stand in the House yesterday and speak to the just over \$1.9 billion that we've able to secure, \$1.485 billion of that related to the *Loan Act, 2015*. The remaining portion of that was related to renegotiating existing long-term debt that was already on the books when the budget came in last year.

As a province, we carry a tremendous amount of debt. It's something that we all, I think, collectively in our province want to address. I don't think anybody in our province wants to leave the legacy of that kind of debt to future generations to bear. I don't believe that's irresponsible. The irresponsible thing for us to do is to pass that debt onto future generations. That's why we need to continue to look for ways of containing that debt.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to listening to the rest of the debate. I would remind the Member opposite, as I said, just for clarity it's \$650 million in total revenue lost since the 2015 budget. In October, had he chosen to release a fiscal update – and I would concur that oil prices continued to be volatile in November and December, but the markets would have had at least some visibility – the people of the province would have had some visibility into the financial performance up to that point of October, which would have included 7/12ths of the entire fiscal year.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I'm pleased to get up this afternoon and speak to Bill 9, the loan guarantee act.

First of all, thanks to the minister for arranging for us to have a briefing this morning. We met with officials from the Department of Finance just to make sure we all had a clear understanding of what the bill was all about, what a loan guarantee bill is. I have to say, I was really impressed with the tremendous expertise of the people in our Department of Finance. I think government needs to recognize them for the great work they do in managing.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. MICHAEL:** It's not government who does it. It's these people inside. We've got the expertise. It's good we have it. We need to recognize we have people with really good expertise inside of our Department of Finance. I'm sure the minister has found that out already.

They know well how to manage and how to do the housekeeping, as it were, for the people of the province. They know how the system works. They know how to keep cash flow going. They know how the borrowing and lending that goes on works so money keeps flowing, so government always has money.

That's what we're doing here today. We're ensuring government always has money to take care of the programs. It's not rocket science. These people are trained to do that. So I find it deplorable, really, that the Premier, over the last months, and the government in general, has been terrifying people around money. I'm not saying we don't have a problem with the fact that we've lost so much revenue because of the low price of oil. I recognize that, but there's a system in place. That system has been working. That system is continuing to work.

There was no need for all the fear mongering that has been done by the Premier, putting things out there that were unnecessarily making people frightened, frightened we wouldn't be able to borrow money. It's nonsense. That was explained to us so clearly this morning, that once the credit raters made their decisions and



adjustments were made, the investors were happy to make sure loans happened. That's what the system is all about. You always have money. The money is always there. Unless a government goes bankrupt, and this government is nowhere near – we're not near going bankrupt as a province. That's what they're always leading people to believe. The system is working and things are under control. That's what this loan is about.

I could not stand up here today without making that point, so people understand we have a well-oiled machine – even though the oil may be cheaper right now. I didn't mean that pun, but it was a good one. A well-oiled machine and things are going okay. The system is working. Will we have a greater loan? Yes, we will. Might we owe more money in another year's time? We very well might. That's part of what has to happen. We have to make sure that people continue to be taken care of and that our programs and services go on.

I think in this context, then, I want to talk about some of the things that have to go on and that have to improve. The first one I wanted to talk about today is the whole issue of the situation of people in our province, children and adults, who have ASD, autism spectrum disorder.

I don't know right off the bat right now – I should because I've had this number – the overall number in the province. I have to say, I was really shocked when I was campaigning in the general election last summer and fall – because we were knocking on doors for a long time before the writ was dropped. One day in particular when I was out knocking on doors, in just two hours I knocked on the doors of three homes that had children with ASD. Just in my own district, in actual fact, around the corner from where I live. Besides those people, I then, as time went on, met quite a few others living in my own district, going to schools in my district. We have a really high number of children and adults with ASD in this province, relatively speaking, when you look at the population that we have. It's a high percentage.

Recently, the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador – the autism spectrum disorder society of Newfoundland and Labrador – had a needs assessment done. They released that report

last week. The report shows how much we are not meeting the needs of the individuals themselves who have ASD, of their families who are there supporting them and the institutions like schools that are also there supporting them.

We have tremendous needs. One of the biggest things – well, all the recommendations are serious. They're all heavy. They all are going to require money to make them happen. One of the ones that I'd like to point out first today has to do with training. It's quite a detailed recommendation. The training that the report looks at, and the study considered, was training on all levels. There is such a lack of understanding of ASD in our community, even with people who are regularly dealing with children and adults with ASD. It's also linked to the lack of understanding of mental conditions in our province as well.

We're not the only ones. This is an issue everywhere, but this is where we are. This is our province and we have to deal with it. The training that's talked about is training for medical professionals who have to deal with people with ASD, everything from general practitioners right through. They need to be trained as to what it means, what that spectrum involves and how to work with people who have ASD.

It talks about training of the people in the school systems. It's not enough for the one individual who may be dealing with a student with ASD – because it's never just one individual – everybody from the administrator through to the support staff in the office, support staff within the school itself through to teachers in the classroom all need training when it comes to ASD.

We all need to become more cognizant of what it means and what's required in working with people who have ASD. It's so nuanced, the difference in individuals. There's no one person who is identical to another. The differences really require real intention on the part of people dealing with them.

I notice in the mandate letter to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, he is to ensure that schools receive the support

they need for inclusive education, including teacher training and administrative support. That's one sentence that means an awful lot because that teacher training – the training for teachers and others in the system – could take up to three years, to have adequate training that would really make them knowledgeable and professional in the way they deal with ASD.

This is something the minister is going to have to look at very seriously. We can't ignore these reports. Children with ASD and adults with ASD are suffering, and every year that we don't do what's needed, things worsen for them. So we have to be looking at how we maintain our programs and improve our programs that will be needed for the betterment of the health of our society.

I notice in the mandate letter, though, the Premier did not mention the need for more teachers and teaching assistants in the school system. The inclusion that is going on is not working. It's not working because a policy and practice was put in place without the adequate resources to make it work.

I only have a few seconds left. There are several things in our province where a program has been put in place and then the resources not put in place to make it work. The next time I get a chance to stand, Mr. Chair, I'll address that.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. TRIMPER:** Thank you very much. I'm still getting used to being called honourable.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on this today. First of all, I'm going to follow up on the Member who just spoke. I agree that in the last few weeks I've been nothing but struck by the calibre, quality and devotion of the folks at the Department of Finance. There have been a lot of late nights and unfortunately I see a few more late nights

coming. It is tremendous dedication and a tremendous capability.

As somebody who has worked in the private sector the last 30 years, to come into government and see the calibre of the folks who are at the top of the game in this government, it's very impressive and very refreshing. So I echo her compliments as to the calibre of the folks at Finance.

To me, when I think about \$400 million, I think just about the scale of that number. I caught my colleague, the Minister of Finance's reaction in somewhat a mixed emotion in terms of, while it's great that we've been able to access long-term funding, the scale of it that we had to go after to the lenders truly is overwhelming.

I just thought I would talk about that for a few minutes in terms of what exactly this \$400 million means. For a guy who has been in the private sector and who spent the better part of three decades building up a company along with 1,700 other people, \$400 million is a phenomenal amount of money.

I worked in consulting. I jumped into a company that started in 1972. I started in 1987. My three months slowly but surely ran into almost 30 years. When we recently sold out our firm, and before I moved into a different realm, those 1,700 people and what we had accumulated after 3½ decades of effort – my gosh, we could have bought three of these companies for \$400 million. It's a number that we just throw around in this House and we throw around in our day-to-day reality when we're dealing with the budget and the deficit, a challenge that we have before us.

Some other examples in terms of scale of what \$400 million means, if I just think about where I am in Lake Melville – and I mentioned this the other day when I spoke about the Interim Supply bill. In terms of 5 Wing Goose Bay, there's an operation that generates a tremendous amount of money for this economy, the province, certainly for Lake Melville and certainly for the community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Operations at 5 Wing are probably in the vicinity of some \$60 million, \$70 million. I am just thinking how \$400 million could give so

much guarantee and certainty to that operation for the next several years into the future. What a difference that would make for our own economy. The fact that we have to go borrow that kind of money and support just the essential services that we provide in government is a very frustrating situation, as someone new to government.

Then on the other side, in terms of my own district, we have situations like the little bridge at Mud Lake and the fact that it needs surfacing. It's a very dangerous situation. The scale of what \$400 million could mean for small projects and large projects: the paving of the Trans-Labrador Highway; the paving of the road to North West River; and the Paddon Home, a seniors' complex which has been left, as some folks know, unfortunately, empty for the last five, six years. It's under review right now, but it will need more money before it can become operational. It's unfortunate because seniors could really avail of this type of opportunity. We also have a little wellness centre that the community has been working on for a long time. For \$400 million, we could put up a lot of wellness centres in this whole province.

I appreciate the Premier's comments earlier on the Labrador Winter Games. I think the provincial government's contribution is in the vicinity of half a million dollars. Boy, with \$400 million, I was calculating, it could probably run for the next 800 events. That's a lot of certainty for a lot of athletes in Labrador. It's probably going to outlive my time on this earth, but again, \$400 million is a huge amount of money.

I thought I'd also speak for a second just on what's pending. In the next few minutes we should hear with some certainty at least what's coming out of the budget in Ottawa. There are a lot of departments, a lot of folks. I know myself, in my own role as Minister Responsible for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, we are hoping that some of the comments and some of the promises that the federal government has made will actually come to fruition.

I thought I would mention a few of those. As the federal government moves towards its own greenhouse gas target for 2030, we've got our own targets set up for 2020. There will be a national framework that will be used to combat

climate change. We're looking to federal support for that. Again, \$400 million would go a long way towards helping us achieve a lot of our wishes as we strike that balance between the economy and the environment.

As I said, the budget should be out in a couple of hours. I do note in the federal platform there was an indication that there would be something in the vicinity of a \$2 billion low-carbon trust fund. There would also be in the vicinity of a \$6 billion Canadian infrastructure bank that would issue green bonds to fund climate-friendly infrastructure.

Again, \$400 million would really get us to that table because I'm sure there will be some cost sharing that will be required. We'd be in quite a position if we were able to access that kind of funding. Unfortunately, now we have to go borrow just to meet the current activities that we're dealing with.

The prime minister – and in March there was the big GLOBE conference. Our Premier was there. He had climate change talks and meetings with other – that's the First Ministers meeting. There was a further announcement of another \$75 million to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance climate resiliency. Further, there was an additional \$50 million to improve climate resilience and building infrastructure codes, so just some examples of what \$400 million can do for you.

We're three months and a week into this mandate and I'm still finding myself amazed by the numbers that are being pushed around. I enjoy and I'm very appreciative of the honour to be sitting at Cabinet and discussing, debating these issues, but I also feel the pressure of what we need to and how we need to find clarity in finding a way forward.

With that, I think I'll wrap up my remarks, just reflecting on what \$400 million can mean. I'm glad to have an opportunity to speak to the bill. I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR (Dempster):** The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's indeed a pleasure to get up here again today. Look at that. See that? That's what you get by getting a Member a couple of tickets to go see the Herder on Friday night. That's where you get applause from him then.

Madam Chair, it's a pleasure to get up here today and get involved in this debate. As I always say, I want to thank the people of Cape St. Francis for giving me the opportunity to get up here today to do this debate. I really want to thank the officials in the department this morning and thank the minister for arranging the briefing that we did have this morning. It was very informative. I have to say, it was a great briefing that they gave us this morning.

The Member just got up that time and he talked about \$400 million. I agree. Listen, it's an awful lot of money. That's a lot of money, \$400 million. There are a lot of things you can do with \$400 million, and a lot of things have been done with \$400 million.

Madam Chair, this is 100 days into this government's mandate, and 100 days they've been in – I think it's around 100 days you've been there. It's time for us to be able to look back. When you see most governments get in power, they look back on their first 100 days and talk about all their accomplishments and everything. I don't see a lot of them anyway – I can't draw up a list of what they have done.

Madam Chair, we're here talking today about the difference between \$400 million. I look at what this government's done in its first turnaround. The very first thing it did when it got in government was say, okay, the HST increase is gone; we're not going to do that anymore. I know it was an election promise and I know from day one last year when the budget came down, it was the very first thing the Leader of the Opposition at the time went out and said, listen, that HST is going to be gone, and it was a promise.

Things change, and sometimes when you look at what changes, maybe you've got to look back and say, listen, we can't do that; it's too important. Maybe if they didn't do it, we wouldn't be here debating this bill today. That's huge. Because if you look at the HST not only this year, it's about \$180 million – it's \$180 million this year, but over five years it's \$1.2 billion. It adds up; it goes a little bit higher every year. It's \$1.2 billion over five years' revenue. I don't know what you're going to do in your budget; I'm not sure. I know the budget's coming.

I am looking forward to the budget. I'm not sure if you're going to do what the rest of Atlantic Canada did and all the other governments in Atlantic Canada now are gone to 15 per cent. They needed to do it, but I think the haste of just saying, listen, we made a promise and that's it. I think of the one promise you made that maybe had the biggest effect here on government is reversing the decision on the HST. And right now again today we're here and we're talking about an increase of \$400 million.

Madam Chair, there are a lot of things that have changed, and I understand you have the right to govern. I listened to the Minister of Health yesterday and he said for the next four years, it'll be our decisions. We're the ones going to make the decisions. I understand that, but I hope you listen to the debate we have and listen to what we've got to say here in the House of Assembly.

Now, Madam Chair, I really want to talk a little bit about long-term care. This is something that really strikes home. I had the opportunity – I pride myself in my district if there's a need there, senior needs or whatever, I go to people's houses and I sit down with people. And I'm sure most of the Members do. It's a good thing to do. People really like to see you come to their house. It's not just a phone call or someone from your office calling; the personal touch really means something.

This weekend I went to a house and there was a lady there and she was a little over 90 years old. She's waiting to get in a long-term care bed. To see what agony she was going through, what the family is going through and everything else, I really believe we have to do something about it.

She was at the Health Sciences and she went home. Perhaps some people go to the Health Sciences or go to different hospitals in the region that they are from and they stay there until a bed becomes available. That's what a lot of people are doing. It's sad because we don't have the room in our long-term care facilities to be able to take care of them. Madam Chair, I watched the family and I spoke to the family again today. They're still waiting for that bed.

Just look at another thing that they cancelled. I know probably you might say we have a better way of doing things, but I haven't heard it yet. We gave up 360 long-term care beds in this province that we had a plan for. We had a plan to make 360 beds available to people who are home in their houses, people who are in emergency rooms, people who are in beds in hospitals, family members, loved ones, our seniors.

We know today that seniors are living longer. I know my two parents lived to their mid-80s and our seniors are living longer today, but it's so important that we have to have a plan. That's the one thing – we've been harping on a plan since we started and we need a plan for our seniors. We need a plan for our long-term care. We can't have family members trying to take care of loved ones and moving a bed downstairs so that they don't have to walk over the stairs.

We're so fortunate I think to be living in Newfoundland and Labrador because I believe one thing we are as a people, we take care of each other, especially when it comes to families. I really do believe we take care of our families. I know when I went through a few things in my family everybody stepped up and did their part. We really do, but after a while it gets pretty hard on the families, the stress and everything else. We have home care that comes in. An average home care person will come in for 35 hours a week. But there are a lot of hours in a week and there is a lot of time.

Today, it's difficult. We've got both members of families working and our children are working. We had a plan put in place for 360 beds. How much relief would that have given the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are trying to take care of their loved ones? I'd say everyone in this House have people in their districts – just

like I explained a little while ago about this lady waiting for long-term care. I'd say everyone here and every one of us will get phone calls. We'll visit houses. We'll go down and visit the person or see what we can do. We'll make the phone calls. We'll talk to the social workers. We'll talk to people that are down there, but the beds are not available. Like I said earlier, they're waiting in long-term care, they're waiting in hospitals and they're waiting at home. Their families are just so stressed about it; it's unbelievable.

Again, I hope when your budget comes down you do have a plan that can take care of this because we are an aging society. Our seniors, they did so much for us and it's time for us to do stuff for them. That's what we have to do. There are so many things we can do, but the one thing we can do is to make sure we take care of our seniors; take care of the people who made us to be able to stand here in the House of Assembly today and gave us the rights that we have today. We need to take care of them. Our seniors are living a lot longer. We have seniors today who do so much.

I'll always remember going down to a lady's house one time and she had a leaky roof. Her grandson walked in, he was looking for something. The next thing I see her slipping him \$20. It was nothing about the roof, it was as long as that grandson was taken care of, he needed something. That's what they're all about. They're not asking for anything. They're not out there asking for us to do this. We need to do it for them because they'd rather take care of their grandchildren and their children than themselves, and that's the way most of them are. That's just how they grew up. That's how we grew up, I suppose. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that's who we are as people and it's important.

Today, when we talk about this budget and \$400 million and the deficit and everything else, we have to remember about the people who put us here in the House of Assembly. We have to remember about the people who stood up and did so much for us over the years, and that's our seniors. I really believe we have to take care of our seniors.

There are other little things that we do with seniors grants. I know the Department of Health had a wellness thing out there last year where we had seniors more active. Again, I spoke about this the other day. It's a small grant. It's a small grant of \$1,000 or \$500, whatever it is. I'm sure the Minister of Health would agree with me, the more active a senior is the healthier a senior will be. That's another part, the small investments that we make.

I just hope that the government, when you come down with your budget, that you do focus on our seniors. Focus on the people who did so much for us, now we need to take care of them. We have a lot of people out there, like I said earlier, who are waiting to get in these long-term beds. There are 300 or 400 people on a wait-list I'm sure. It's really unfortunate that we can't do what we need to do, and we should be doing it. We had a plan in place to make up 360 beds. I'm hoping that come this budget, you'll have a plan to take care of those 360 beds, and make sure it gets done sooner rather than later.

Madam Chair, I see my time is gone, and I hope to get up a couple more times during this debate because there are lots of other things I'd like to talk about. I'd like to talk about the fishery and a few other little things.

Again, Madam Chair, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak. I thank all the seniors for giving me the opportunity to be here in the House of Assembly.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Thanks, Madam Chairperson.

It's a pleasure for me to rise, although I have to say I wish it was under different circumstances. We're here looking for another \$400 million in borrowing due to the financial mess the province finds itself in.

It's good. It's great. It's refreshing to have a Minister of Finance, at long last, who is actually good at math. Unlike the previous Finance

minister who was obviously, by his own admission, bad at math. If you look at the books, you can tell he was bad at math. Actually, I wouldn't say he was the only person who was bad at math because, obviously, a lot of people in the previous administration were bad at math or we wouldn't be in the situation we're in.

Just to respond to a few things that have been said. You have to ask why we're in this situation. Of course, it's a product of poor planning. The previous administration was on a spending spree that we haven't seen before in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. As a result, we now are facing the largest deficit that we've ever had and the largest mountain of debt that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians ever had taken out in their name by their government.

The Premier wrote the current Leader of the Official Opposition back in September to ask about the fiscal update, to ask about the fiscal situation of the province to get a sense of the true nature of the financial situation of the province. I don't know why he didn't respond. You could speculate. Somebody said to me, it's either incompetence or deception. You choose which one it is, but I'll let people make up their own minds. He never responded.

The Members over there are talking about: Why didn't you increase the HST or why did you cancel the increase in the HST? Well, as the Minister of Finance has just said, the total loss in revenue, the total revenue loss to the province since the previous administration introduced the budget in 2015 is some \$615 million, and \$52 million of that \$615 million is since the current administration, since the Liberal Party won the election on November 30. So there was \$563 million in additional debt that was racked up by the previous administration between the budget in 2015 and election day on November 30.

Now, if the previous premier had to have been open and transparent and released the fiscal update in September, maybe we would have made different decisions. Maybe we would have made different commitments around revenue generation, if we knew the true nature of the half-a-billion-dollar additional hole that they had dug the province into. But we didn't, because they didn't see fit to be open and transparent, to

be frank with the people of the province, to tell them exactly what it was they were doing.

The Member is over there talking about long-term care. I think everybody here is concerned about seniors and long-term care, but that's the first time I heard the Member mention that in the House of Assembly. He sat over here for four years, I sat over there, I never heard him mention it before. So I'm glad he's concerned about it now. Certainly, it's better late than never to come to the table and speak to your concern about it. After a number of years in Opposition saying very little, I never heard him talk about it before.

One of the things that we've been doing as part of Treasury Board, a committee of Cabinet, is to do a line-by-line review of the budgets of the various agencies, boards, commissions and departments of government. I have to say, I completely agree with one of the previous speakers who spoke about the talent and the depth of knowledge, the skill that the senior bureaucracy has in this province. I've been amazed, as well, at their level of insight into our situation. It's been very helpful to have them at the table.

When agencies, boards and commissions came in to discuss the financial situation with Treasury Board, almost to a person, they talked about never being invited in to have that sort of discussion before. Never in their remembrance in the roles and positions that they hold – significant ones, ones that oversee the spending of millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions of the province's money – never, ever under the previous administration were they ever invited in to have a frank discussion to go through their budget line by line to see how they spend the people's money to see if it can be done differently. Can it be done better? Can it be done more openly? Can it be done more transparently? Can it be done more reasonably for the future?

There's a limit to borrowing. I know the co-leader of the Third Party was up there saying we're not going to go bankrupt. One of the first things that those same senior officials that she praised up said to the government when we took office was that we needed to be more open and transparent about the nature of the province's

fiscal situation if we were going to continue to be able to make ends meet in the province. That's what they told us.

So what did the Minister of Finance and the Premier do? They released the fiscal update that the previous administration had neglected to release to the province and to basically lay bare the fiscal situation that had been kept secret since Budget 2015, the deteriorating situation the province was in. That's why the fiscal update was released.

Contrary to the other Member's notion, there is a limit to the amount the province can borrow. Nobody over here is trying to be deceptive or to frighten anybody. It is frightening to me, as somebody who is a father of a small child, that the previous administration saw no problem, just rack up and rack up and rack up more debt; a \$5,000 credit card every minute of every day, a \$300,000 mortgage every hour of every day. Just go put that on all of our sons' and daughters' and grandchildren's credit card. Just go rack it up and don't care about what the outcome is because somebody else can come in and clean up the mess.

If that doesn't frighten the Members on the other side, then it should, because it certainly frightens me. That's what keeps me awake at night.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KIRBY:** What's going to happen to the next generation who the previous administration had so little concern for?

We ought to be concerned about the borrowing situation because there is a limit to the amount of money we can borrow. If you had a \$50,000 a year income and you went into a bank and said I'm going to get a \$2.5 million mortgage on a house, they'd laugh you out of there, and so they should. That's basically the situation we're in because the international lenders are not going to continue to let us borrow and borrow and borrow. That's not the way it works. It's certainly a frightening circumstance, but that's the circumstance we're in.

Another part of the whole process we've been engaged in to try and repair the financial situation of the province has been looking into

patterns of spending in the previous administration. There are some shocking details in it. I assure the people of the province that over the next few months a lot of that is going to become publicly known. People will find out the true nature of what was going on behind the curtain.

It's absolutely astounding. Agencies, boards and commissions came in and said: You know, ministers, we brought these proposals to save the province money here to ministers before. We raised this in the budget last year. We could have saved tens of millions of dollars on health care spending, but there was no acknowledgement of the fact that we had this plan. We just were simply not listened to. We have learned there were lots of ideas presented that were never listened to.

Then there were lots of things done that made absolutely no sense. To be honest, I don't even know if the people who were responsible for heading it up really believed it made any sense either. I'll give you one example. The previous administration in its ingenuity – and I don't mean that in any sincerity – decided to spend \$500,000, a half a million dollars, on an advertising campaign under the guise of population growth. A half a million dollars on an advertising campaign, on TV ads, basically telling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that you should continue to be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

That was the Population Growth Strategy. It was called grow where you are, or grow in place, or whatever it was. Absolutely shameful to basically take \$500,000 of Newfoundlanders' and Labradorians' hard-earned dollars, throw it into a burn barrel, throw a bit of kerosene on it and catch it on fire because that is more or less the same impact of that. It made absolutely no sense, no sense to the people who are carrying it out at all – \$500,000 just absolutely wasted.

As we went through the agencies, boards, commissions and departments of government line by line – about 65 hours that we met over the course of about a week – this came up over and over and over again. They could not waste the money as fast as they could charge it, \$5,000 a minute of every hour, every day of the week while they were in office. They could not waste

the public's money fast enough. That was the nature of their fiscal administration.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm very happy to stand and speak to Bill 9. As it's a money bill, I'm assuming that what we are facing here in the potential closure of Holy Cross Junior High is about money. If it is, in fact, about money, which it appears to be, then I believe we have a problem. I'm not so sure that closing Holy Cross Junior High will save us any money.

We have a school that is populated by children from communities that face perhaps some of the most severe and challenging socio-economic challenges in the whole province. Of the school population, 38 per cent of the students have exceptionalities.

If children are not able to get the help they need in order to succeed academically, then what happens is that for the most part they're not able to attain post-secondary education, and for the most part they're not able to attain well-paying, stable jobs. Then, oftentimes, they have to rely on the state in order to help them get through life.

So in the long run I am not so sure that we are saving money. As a matter of fact, we may be creating more problems. We may be creating, in fact, further costs and greater costs down the road. I don't believe that's government's intention, but I believe that might be an unintended consequence.

One of the things about Holy Cross Junior High is that they have incredible community partnerships. Again, we have to keep in mind a number of children come from families that face really strong socio-economic challenges. These are families that don't have a whole lot of money. If their children aren't doing really well in school, these are families who cannot pay for



tutoring. There are great community supports and community partnerships for Holy Cross Junior High. This didn't just happen; this is a result of years and years of working together, of building relationships in the community.

For instance, one of the really strong community partners to Holy Cross Junior High is the Froude Avenue Community Centre. The Froude Avenue Community Centre has an after-school program every day and sometimes even at lunchtime. They have teachers who volunteer. They have one staff member who coordinates it all. Kids go after school. They can walk to school because the school is in their community. After school, they can walk to the Froude Avenue Community Centre where they get tutoring.

It's amazing the number of kids from Holy Cross Junior High who ended up going on to high school and then won Fry Family scholarships. They were among – the school, the alumni from Holy Cross Junior High – the schools that won the most scholarships that enabled these kids to do post-secondary education. That's a success story. That didn't happen out of the blue; it happened because of the years of dedication and partnerships. That enabled it to happen.

There was a time when we had Holy Cross Elementary School. When the kids graduated from Holy Cross Elementary School – it was closed a year and a half ago. When they graduated they would be fed into Holy Cross Junior High. As well, there's another elementary but that was closed. So now they are fed to St. Teresa's Elementary School.

Those children, after finishing St. Teresa's at grade six, should be streamlined back into Holy Cross Junior High, but that's not happening. There was no big announcement. There was no big policy decision that the parents were informed of or that the community had input in. What has happened is that those kids who used to go to Holy Cross Elementary, which was almost adjacent to Holy Cross Junior High, go to St. Teresa's. From St. Teresa's they're told they have to go to Brother Rice.

This is one of the reasons that the population has dropped in Holy Cross Junior High. As well, the kids from Bishop Abraham elementary are fed

into Holy Cross Junior High, but that's now a smaller population. What we have is we've had a purposeful design of shrinking the population going into Holy Cross Junior High.

The other thing about Holy Cross Junior High is they have a very strong inclusive policy for all of their sports. Anybody who wants to be on the basketball team can be on the basketball team. They don't have to audition. It's a wonderful thing to watch. They have a band. They have cheerleading. They have a number of after-school activities.

All these kids walk to school. Many of the kids can see the school from their kitchen windows. What's going to happen now? All of these kids will have to get on a bus earlier than when they walk to school, and then they're bused to school. They're going to be bused to a school whose population right now is expanding already. A lot of the immigrant children and refugee children are now going into Brother Rice. They're also going into Bishop Feild Elementary School.

We have a school, Brother Rice Junior High, that has a large number of children with exceptionalities as well. Holy Cross has 38 per cent. Mr. Chair, 38 per cent of the children going to Holy Cross Junior High have exceptionalities. That means that 38 per cent of the kids who are going there need extra help, who aren't able to get through the regular school system without some support and some extra help.

There's a high percentage as well, when we see the inner-city kids going to Brother Rice Junior High, kids who are coming from Bishop Feild Elementary, kids who are from refugee families, from immigrant families where English is not their first language. That, as well, is going to create extra exceptionalities. In fact, what might be happening here is that this is not an advantage to the children. As a matter of fact, it will make it more difficult for these kids.

I don't think that's what government wants to see happen. I don't think that's what the Premier had in mind with his mandate letter. There was a commitment to neighbourhood schools and community schools because they're the heartbeat of their communities. That's what we are losing here.

We're going to have kids who come from families with strong socio-economic challenges. If they miss the bus, because many of them will miss the bus, because a lot of kids get to school because of the challenges they face. If they miss the bus, they don't have parents who can drive them to school. It means they will miss the whole day of school. So the rate of absenteeism or truancy is a big concern.

The good teachers at Holy Cross Junior High are on top of that. They call home and say: Where's Johnny? They call home and say: Where's Susie? They say: I know they're late. Tell them to come on in. We can just slip them right in to class. That's not possible. It's not going to happen when they get to Brother Rice Junior High.

This is not progressive. This is not progress. To close a school that is working for children who are so disadvantaged, to close a school that actually works for them, is not progress. It is not progress. As a matter of fact, it's a step backwards. It is a loss.

Now, one of the problems – I have asked again and again and again for the Minister of Education to do his job and to intercede and to hold off any of these decisions until a duly elected school board of trustees is elected. One that comes from the community, that's answerable to the community and reflects the needs of the community.

The other thing is the Minister of Education, his background; he knows the difference this will make in the lives of the children. He knows how important community schools are. He knows how important it is to make sure children who have certain disadvantages, who have exceptionalities, how important it is they do not fall between the cracks.

There's a wonderful book out called *Boston Against Busing* who looked again at the whole issue of busing our children to schools that are further away and what it means. Our kids, the kids from Holy Cross Junior High, will not be able to take part in drama, like they do in their own school. They'll not be able to be involved in sports teams, like they do in their own school. This is impoverishing the lives of these children.

This is so not progress. It's such a step backwards.

Now, the other thing is I would just like to offer a few quotes –

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

I remind the Member her time is expired.

**MS. ROGERS:** Okay, thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I look forward to getting up and speaking again on this issue.

Thank you.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm happy to stand here today and have an opportunity to speak to Bill 9, which is the *Loan Act*. It's one of these pieces of legislation that you see from time to time where we need to raise money. In order to do that, obviously, we have to come through the House of Assembly. I think the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has done a very good job, as she always does, in getting up and talking about the need for this piece of legislation and how she goes about arranging for this. Certainly, I will get back to that.

One of the things I want to talk about, actually, is there was some confusion in this House of Assembly yesterday when it came to this bill. It was brought up especially in Question Period and then after. I think some of it came down to procedure on how this works. Again, this is more of an explanation for anybody who happens to be watching now that may have been watching yesterday. The question the Opposition was raising was: Why wasn't Bill 9 tabled?

The explanation is yesterday followed the same procedure as is standard, which is that when the bill is given notice on Thursday, we'll say in this case, the next day is the day that you actually distribute it prior to first reading. That has been the norm. That's absolutely the norm and, certainly, was what we were treated to when we

were on the other side. I think it's a case of the same treatment being applied here.

Although, yesterday, it was hard to be looking at it and figuring out, my God, there was a major crime committed yesterday, coming from the tone of the questions of various Members opposite, primarily the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Deputy House Leader. In fact, the deputy referenced it in one of his questions. He said: Why isn't it tabled? So this is an education right now as to why it was not tabled because it was standard procedure, is what I would say to the Deputy House Leader of the Official Opposition.

I took offence to it in many ways because it implied that perhaps some of the House staff weren't doing their job. In this case, they were. They were doing everything as per normal. The other thing, I think, is interesting, because some of the implications here were, well, we haven't had an opportunity to look at this. We haven't had an opportunity to deal with it.

Do you know what? That's fair. That's why the Department of Finance provided a briefing today. Again, there's no rush here. We have to get this done, no doubt. We need to get this borrowing done for reasons that have been outlined by every Member who has spoken, which is when you come in and you have to clean up a mess, well, you have to get certain things done on time.

So, again, the briefing was done. I've heard some Members say thank you for the briefing. It was well done. I'm glad to hear that all went well, but what's interesting is when you go back and look at – and the Minister of Finance can correct me if I'm wrong here. I believe there was a loan act done last year in June.

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Yes, there was.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** So I went back and looked at the progress of bills last year. It says that the *Loan Act, 2015* – first reading was June 23, then second reading was June 23, then Committee was June 23, then third reading was June 23 and then Royal Assent was June 23. Last year, you came in and put the whole thing through from start to finish in one day, and you have the

audacity to get here less than a year later and say: Hey, how come you're not treating us fair?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. A. PARSONS:** That, Madam Chair, is in black and white as opposed to the red that this government inherited.

I had to put that out there because there was some miscommunication there. The main thing, I think, the point we need to get back to here is that this is a necessity. It's one of those things where you stand up – and certainly, I'm obviously very proud of our Minister of Finance, our Premier and all the staff here. I think everybody on each side knows the value of the people doing the work.

Those aren't the people that you see here in the House of Assembly talking about it, but people in these departments, especially Finance now going through a budget; it's a tremendous, tremendous amount of work. The work that they do – and Members opposite know this because they've gone through this process, too – is extremely time consuming. It's filled with pressure.

In this case, the workers that are out there – and they know who they are. All those in the Department of Finance, especially those people that have been dealing with us in going through this, I say thank you for all the work that you're doing, the long hours you're putting in. You're coming in on one day, and a lot of times you don't leave and actually go back to your home until the following day. That's hard work done by these civil servants and I appreciate it.

At the same time, though, it's hard to stand up and be proud of it. I mean, it's not something that anybody wants to do. It wasn't that long ago when I was sitting on the other side and I heard a former – I don't know if he was premier then. It was Premier Marshall. I'm allowed to say the name now that he's not in the House. He may have been minister of Finance and he may have been premier. I can't remember what he was at the time.

I'll never forget this, and I remember it right now. It's engraved in my brain as we go through this process now. He stood up in the House, I'm

pretty sure, and said: Mr. Speaker, we are flush with cash. Flush with cash were the actual words. When we stand here today and we have to bring in a bill to increase our borrowing to levels that are in many ways – are they unprecedented?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** They're unprecedented.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** They are unprecedented. It's hard not to look back to this financial guru who said we are flush with cash.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. A. PARSONS:** You were.

So then the question I say to the Deputy Opposition House Leader: What happened? What happened? You're over there saying you were flush with cash. We're here trying to raise more money than ever has to be done. Again, you don't have to answer me now; you can get up now in a second and explain. What happened? What happened?

When you stand there and you have it said to you, we're flush with cash, we're going to do this, we're going to do that and then what we see in the very short period of time that we've been here, we've been given the privilege and the opportunity to govern, is that it ain't flush with cash. I believe that might have been – somebody correct me if I'm wrong. Was that two years ago? Two years ago.

The constant refrain we hear is, boy, it's all due to oil. It's all due to oil. Now, I disagreed with that the first time I heard about it. But then when you get into the nuts and bolts of it and you start going through this, again under the leadership of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and the officials, then you start getting into it and saying: Do you know what? No, there was a bigger problem there.

Now, don't get me wrong; the price of oil has had a traumatic effect on this province and many others. We all see that, but there were aspects of the previous government's managerial style that left something to be desired.

I don't want to get into this thing either where we – the leader opposite said earlier today: I

don't want to get in the blame game. That's fine. I don't want to get in the blame game, but I will say that this time last year when I was sitting on the other side, I was hearing about all the stuff you guys did back in 2003. My God, how could they do that back in 1949? You Liberals, how could you do this?

It's funny when you hear about in 2003, because 2003 I was actually in university. Well, God forbid, the blame game go on. I just say I don't want to get into that and I think as we move forward and get into this, we'll get out of this whole thing. But don't stand there, please, and talk about the blame game when you just spent at least the last four years I was sat over there doing it. Many Members on the other side took that opportunity – not all, but many took it. I tell you what, many that aren't here right now took the opportunity to lay blame on the other side for stuff done 10 years before.

Now, that being said, we have to move on. We have to move on and that is our plan. We were elected to govern, and we appreciate the opportunity to do so. That is why we're here to speak to Bill 9, which gives us the room for borrowing – borrowing which was done by our Minister of Finance. A borrowing plan that was put in place, that requires work, it requires skill, it requires planning, and I appreciate what the Minister of Finance and her team has done.

I look forward to getting to speak to this and the budget and other financial matters as we move forward, but I look forward to this being done so that we can continue on and make sure we get the borrowing done that we need to get done.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CLERK:** The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for recognizing me today. I'm going to rise to speak for another 10 minutes on this bill, probably my last time to speak on this bill. I think we're going to wind up the debate on this shortly, is what I expect is going to happen.

I just want to recognize the Government House Leader and Minister of Justice for his comments he just raised now. It's interesting, because he spent the first eight minutes talking about blame game, and then –

**MR. A. PARSONS:** We can stay here all night, all night.

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

He spent the first eight minutes about blame game, and then the last two minutes saying he's not going to play the –

**MR. A. PARSONS:** (Inaudible) the last two minutes was blame game.

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess he doesn't like the comments I'm making. He spent the first eight minutes playing the blame game, talking about the former premier, and the time when we were in government in the last two minutes. He said I don't want to get into the blame game, is what he said. He said he's not going to go there. Those were his words, I just copied it down. He doesn't want to get into the blame game.

Anyway, I appreciate his comments, and of course in this type of debate we're welcome to speak and continue to speak.

I want to address the Minister of Education, because he got up in quite an animated display there a short time ago and talked about a lot of things in a short period of time. I'm going to help him out with his math, because he talked about simple math. I'm going to help him out with his math.

We had predicted and budgeted a \$1.2 billion deficit. Now, the fall in the price of oil – this is not difficult. The fall in the price of oil I anticipate was about \$600 million. The Premier himself is on the record as saying that since they took office, until about January, they lost about \$400 million. I think from budget time to today, it's probably a little bit more than \$600 million.

So \$600 million and \$1.2 billion, that's \$1.8 billion. They took the HST off, that's \$200 million in a year. Now you're up to \$2 billion. Now that's quick and rough math, and I know the \$200 million for HST is over the full year and so on, but there's \$2 billion right there.

So for the Member opposite to say that we couldn't do math, when we were in government we couldn't do math, I just gave him some very easy math that he can –

**MR. A. PARSONS:** That's not what I said.

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** I guess I'm striking a nerve again, Madam Chair, because we sat quietly –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible).

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

This is the fourth time the Chair has called order since the Member stood. If I have to do it again I will name Members in the House.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess I'm striking a nerve because we sat quietly and listened to the Members opposite. We tried not to interrupt. We tried to allow them to make their points and I only ask that we get the same courtesy.

The Minister of Education also talked about he's going to pull the curtain back. Well, you know there are a lot of things we should pull the curtain back on. We absolutely should, and while my time in government, we did that a number of times when we went in and dug down and looked at operations. We looked at ABCs and we looked at what government was doing.

The Minister of Education should have a look too in his department. I know government is going to look at – they should look at Memorial University and pull the curtain back over there. Maybe they should look at salaries. Maybe the Minister of Education wants to look at salaries over there. Have a look at salaries that are obtained by professors who also have jobs in government. Maybe they are Members of the House sometimes and they're getting salaries

from both, government-funded university, our provincial university and they're getting salaries as MHAs. Maybe the Minister of Education wants to pull the curtain back on that.

Maybe he wants to pull the curtain back on MUNSU or CSU. Maybe he wants to do that. Because he wants to sit in his place and talk about, oh, I'm so righteous and I'm so wonderful and I'm so perfect. We're going to go after other folks. Well, it's a long road with no turns, I was always taught. I was always taught that he who is without sin cast the first stone. That was always taught by my father.

The Minister of Education likes to get personal sometimes. He likes to say nasty things. He was a little bit upset here in the House earlier, and he's going at it again today, Madam Chair – he's going at it again today. But I can tell you I won't be intimidated by him, I can assure you that.

Our caucus over here will not be intimidated by the Minister of Education and the things he says and the things sometimes he whispers in your ear. I remind the Minister of Education, like the comment you made to me when I attended the public consultation session in Conception Bay South when I was walking out through the door. Do you remember that? I can remind you if you want. I won't do it here on the floor, but I can remind you if you want, the comments you made to me.

That's the kind of stuff that really causes heat to rise right here in the House, when we're all supposed to be here working together and finding a better way forward. The very first day in the House, they said, oh, we should work together. We said, yes, we're willing to do that. We're going to do our jobs. We'll ask questions, we'll do those kinds of things.

I've said this before and I'll say it again, we're all here because we want what's in the best interest of the people; but if the Member opposite wants to go down that road, we'll go down that road, but it's certainly not one that we want to go down. I know the Government House Leader, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General made a similar comment a few minutes ago when he finished up his speech, that's not productive and that's not going to benefit, and I agree.

If the Minister of Education is going to continue to get on with those kinds of things and hiding behind curtains – if you want to talk about hiding behind curtains, what's behind the curtains, he hides behind the school board. He still has a responsibility. We just discussed this in Bill 1 yesterday, that ministers and legislation – over and over and over again you'll see legislation that says the minister still has responsibilities.

Madam Chair, this is a bill about borrowing because of the circumstances that the government of the province finds itself in today. We support the need to borrow. We have to borrow. You have to borrow; you have to pay the bills. You have to pay the bills, you have to run government. We agree with that. We agree with what they have to do.

We look forward to the budget. We'll look forward to seeing what the Members are doing in the budget, what they're going to present to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I've said already today, I know they're all working hard on it. We've been there.

I remember back in 2012, we had a really tough budget trying to roll back spending and trying to make adjustments. I tell you, it was a tough time in the House after we introduced our budget. I remember some of the Members opposite, who are ministers today, who sat in Opposition back then, I tell you they held our feet to the fire. They gave it to us pretty hard.

The Minister of Service NL knows what I'm talking about. He's a long-standing Member of the House, knows his job, does it well, can stand and ask questions. He came in and asked us questions. He asked hard questions of us and I'm sure the same will happen after this budget.

In 2012, I remember specifically, it was a really tough year. Last year was a tough year. Don't worry, we're looking at Hansard to see what they asked us after we were taking steps to reduce public service and reduce expenditures. We're looking at, what did they ask us to do? What did they come to the House and ask for from us as a government? What did they support in the initiatives we were doing? What suggestions did they make? What did they say when we decided we were going to take a step to

reduce an expenditure? How were they critical to us? How did they stand and say, no, you shouldn't do that, don't do that?

Yes, we're looking at all that because we're interested to see what they're going to do as well. That's their responsibility today. As I said earlier, we respect the fact that they have a responsibility to do that. They have a responsibility to the people of the province, which they were elected to do. We respect the decision of the people and respect their role. I would urge them to respect our role as well.

Madam Chair, I'm going to conclude my remarks, at least for now. It will probably be my last time speaking on Bill 9, which is a law to amend the *Loan Act, 2015* to increase borrowing by government from \$2 billion to \$2.4 billion. We'll be supporting the bill because government needs to do the work and do the business. We also look forward to a budget soon after the Easter break.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure for me to stand again. I wanted to respond to the former premier's comments. I know he's not paying attention again now, like he was when I was speaking before. Maybe if he'll pay attention, I could correct the mathematics.

In any case, Madam Chair, if I'm intimidating to the former premier, I really apologize. I didn't intend to intimidate the Member at all. I was just trying to debate, and sometimes debate gets colourful in here. Sometimes people are passionate about the situation the province is in or policies or whatever. That's just the way it is. If the Member is not interested in that sort of

debate, I apologize, but at no point in time did I try to intimidate the Member.

As for pulling back the curtain on professors at Memorial University who are Members of the House of Assembly, I made the same declaration that all the other Members of the House of Assembly made to the Commissioner of Members' Interests, and that's publicly available. In fact, I met with the Chief Electoral Officer, who is the Commissioner of Members' Interests, very recently. If you want to go have a conversation with him, he can share every word that he shared with me and everything is laid bare. So that's fine.

As I said before, it's good to have a Minister of Finance who's good at math. It's pretty obvious to me now that the former premier is actually not good at math, or he wasn't paying attention when I was speaking before. What I said when I got up, Madam Chair, was the following: Since the 2015 budget, there has been \$615 million worth of lost revenue. That's revenue that's lost to the province – \$615 million. I'll say it more slowly just to make sure I'm not confusing him: \$52 million of that \$615 million of revenue that's been lost to the province since Budget 2015 has been lost since this government took office on –

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Since our fiscal update.

**MR. KIRBY:** Since the fiscal update. So that leaves \$563 million in revenue that was lost under the previous administration. There was no acknowledgement. Basically, it was not made known to the public.

The Leader of the Opposition at the time, the current Premier, wrote to the Leader of the Official Opposition and asked for the fiscal update. Had he seen fit to provide the fiscal update, that information would've been shared, that it was about \$563 million, more than half a billion dollars that the previous government was out in terms of revenue.

What I said was maybe we would have made different decisions. Maybe all political parties would have made different decisions around what they were promising had they known the full extent of the deep, deep hole that the previous administration decided to dig for the

next generation of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the next generation after that and the next generation after that, because somebody's got to pay for the mess now. I know that really the former premier is very sensitive to this issue that they created a big mess, they walked away from it and now somebody else has to clean up the mess.

That somebody else is not just this government. It's not just this government because that record debt from the spending spree that they were on, that record debt that they racked up, that \$5,000 a minute that they decided to put on the credit card of the next generation, that they just rang in and rang in and rang in and rang in without a care in the world, our children are going to have to pay to clean up that mess. It's not a mess that can be cleaned up in one budget.

If you kept on going the way that the previous administration was operating financially, we would have something closing in on \$15 billion worth of additional debt racked up due to deficits, building and building deficits, as a result of that way of operating. Just spending and spending and spending without a care in the world, that the lenders would just continue to hand it out.

What I said was when this government took office one of the first things that senior Finance officials said was we need to be transparent about the true financial situation of the province. That financial situation that the current Premier inquired about to the Leader of the Official Opposition he is now in September – and we don't know why he didn't bother to update the people of the province on the true financial situation that we were facing. Only he knows that.

What we know is that senior officials said we can't continue to operate this way. If we continue to operate this way, we're more or less going to run out of borrowing. We're going to face higher and higher and higher interest rates for borrowing. It is just going to be a compounded effect. We'll have millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions of dollars of more debt that just comes from borrowing. So that's what was said.

The other thing I was saying is – and I'm sure that's why the Member is so insulted and he feels that I'm intimidating him somehow – when we had agencies, boards, commissions and departments come and present to Treasury Board they told us two things. One, they never had such an invitation before. No one ever invited them in before. Almost to a person they said that – we were never in before to present to Treasury Board like this, never to sit in front of ministers and talk about the true nature of the financial situation of the province – never, ever. So that's one thing.

The other thing they said was they had tried to tell their ministers. Many of them had tried to tell their ministers – if they could get a hold of them, if they weren't on Twitter or whatever it was they spent their time at, because a lot of them didn't know. They told their ministers we have ways to save money that won't impact services, that won't impact the quality of service delivery, that won't adversely impact the people of the province, and here's how.

In some cases, they told us, ministers cut funding to those departments, to the agencies, boards and commissions, cut their funding, and then after they produced the budget with their funding reduced, well, they said, no, you can't make those changes. So it purposely drove them into the ditch, drove them into deficit and so on and so forth.

Now, the former premier, he stands there and he pontificates and he alleges and he makes all sorts of accusations, and I'd encourage him to try to back it up. He makes all sorts of accusations. He talks about the difficult budget, he said the other day, they introduced. The difficult budget they produced last year. Yes, a difficult budget, Madam Chair. It was so difficult that they couldn't help themselves. The difficult budget increased spending somewhere close to 15 per cent of overall spending in the province. It was 12 per cent, I believe it was. That was the difficult budget.

I really wouldn't want to see a great one that they'd produce, a pleasant one. If a hard budget is one where you over spend the Treasury by 12 per cent, then God help us. Again, like I said, if this is all intimidating to the Member, then I apologize. I think it should be fairly frightening



to the people of the province. There's no question; it's frightening. It's frightening as well, it's surprising, that the Member thinks this is all acceptable and he somehow should be proud of all of this, that basically they've just loaded an incredible, a tremendous amount of debt and borrowing onto the next generation. Children who cannot understand today what it is they've done.

He's like a teenager, basically, who's messed up his room. He's gone in there, he's torn the place apart and he's turned it bottom up. He's turned everything bottom up. Every toy he had he's thrown around his room, and now his mother is coming in and saying, clean it up. He said, no, that's not my job; that's your job. You clean up the mess. I might have made it, but you clean it up because I'm accepting no responsibility.

We talk about the blame game. For the four years that I sat in Opposition, the former premier talked about stuff going back to well before 1971 when I was born. Liberals did this and Liberals did that. He invoked the name of every Liberal premier in my lifetime, I believe, and blamed everything that was going wrong with the previous administration on them.

It's quite hypocritical to stand there and say that somehow we're not allowed to point out the obvious fact that you did not care at all. You just spent, with abandon, every cent you could get to put on the credit card of the next several generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. You just spent and spent and spent and spent and you said I'm not cleaning it up. Mom, I'll leave it to somebody else to clean it up. That's not my job. I'm not accepting any responsibility. That's hypocritical.

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** That's unacceptable and completely unreasonable.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** I remind the Member his time is expired.

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I stand to speak about the issue that we've all become aware of today, and that's the flying and the raising of the so-called Christian flag here at Confederation Building. I was approached this morning by constituents who were really concerned about the raising of this flag.

Some may say this is a Christian flag. What is the problem? I do believe the problem that many people have had – and I've received many letters. I do understand that people have also contacted the Premier about this. I, myself, spoke to the Premier today and raised my concerns.

Initially, the Premier was going to be meeting with the crowd who wanted to raise this flag. He was also going to be part of raising the flag with them. Once I indicated some of my concerns about the flag, I believe that government decided to not be involved in the raising of the flag.

The flag itself has become a symbol of division, bigotry and homophobia. It has become a symbol of anti-choice. I do believe that is not government's intention. It was not government's intention to support the raising of this flag. I believe that government has decided to reconsider and look at the protocols for raising flags on the courtesy pole beside the House of Assembly.

It's very interesting, some of the letters that I've received today, either written directly to me or to the Premier. People have talked about how shocked and saddened and disappointed they are that a religious symbol that has come to represent division, intolerance, has been raised on our property, on the grounds of the House of Assembly, on the grounds of the House of the people.

I would ask if government, if the Premier, would reconsider the fact that because of what the flag symbolizes – I'm convinced that it's not government's intention to enforce or to support what this flag has come to symbolize, because we do know that a number of Christian religions are not at all in support of this flag. It is my hope that government will reconsider and have the flag taken down at the end of the day. Then we

can come together to talk about what the protocol is for using the courtesy flagpole.

We do know that the courtesy flagpole, the raising of flags that support government, aligns with government policy, also aligns with our Human Rights Code or with our *Human Rights Act*, those flags are welcome and those flags are raised in support.

I would suggest, again, Madam Chair – I ask if government may, at the end of the day, remove the flag and not raise it again. There's been a commitment that it will be up for a week, but in respect for people who feel this has been a flag that has, again, promoted division, promoted intolerance, that the flag be removed and our discussion about what in fact we can raise on the grounds of our House of Assembly.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm pleased to participate in the debate this afternoon. Certainly, it's been lively and educational and passionate, would be a word I'd use. I certainly thank all the Members in the House who have participated in the debate and also thank those Members who very dutifully listened and paid attention.

It was, I think, very unanimous in this House this afternoon. I thank you on behalf of the Members opposite, as well as the Members on this side – to the officials in Finance, not only for the work they've done today with the briefing for the Opposition, but also for the work they've been doing in advance and preparation for the budget. I think all of us in this House would certainly echo that. That's what I'm taking away from this discussion this afternoon.

I would like to just clarify something one of the Members opposite said earlier in the debate that's with reference to the officials. Undoubtedly, we have very talented officials in

the Department of Finance. I'm very lucky as a minister to be working with some very committed public sector employees who are very passionate about serving the public the way they do. But when it comes to borrowing, there is a limit to what officials are able to do.

They are able to passionately pursue their work; however, they do need a government that is able to be transparent about the financial status of the province. Also, they need leadership to support those relationships with the investors and the banks. Certainly, that's something our government will continue to provide going forward.

As has been mentioned previously in this debate, there is a capacity to the amount of borrowing that we, as a province, can do. It's not infinite. There is a capacity we are able to do on borrowing. That capacity is directly related to the credibility of the plans we will be able to present as a government going forward. It's our intention to present a very credible plan, first and foremost, to the people of the province.

The facts need to be presented. People need to understand what government's priorities are and what our investments are going to be. Also, our fiscal policy and how we're going to make decisions as a government, and how we're going to take into account the impact on the economy when it comes to decisions that the province makes.

It was interesting, as the Member spoke earlier – as we were going through the line-by-line review as part of our Treasury Board activity, we had many departments, agencies, boards and commissions share with us how the process was very different that they went through this year. As President of Treasury Board, I've certainly indicated to them it will continue to be different as we continue to look for the efficiencies and savings that we can find together, so we can make sure we have the resources for the quality public services we need for the people of the province.

I would also like to remind those Members in the House that when we talk about the debt the province currently has, the administration that the people of the province chose to replace in November had increased the total debt in the

province by 69 per cent since 2003. I think that harsh reality is settling in for many of us on this side of the House as we go through the exercises to prepare for the budget.

There's been a lot of challenging work to do to get to a place where we'll have a budget that we can present. We certainly think, as parents, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, as neighbours, how incredibly challenging it is for a province of just over half a million people to carry the size of the debt that we carry. We need to continue to keep focused on that.

Madam Chair, I would like to thank those that have spoken to the bill. I've heard the Leader of the Official Opposition say that he is in support of the additional borrowing that we're asking. I believe I also heard that as well from the Member of the Third Party. So I look forward to the vote happening in short order.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Seeing no more speakers to Bill 9, shall the resolution carry?

On motion, resolution carried.

A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan Act, 2015. (Bill 9)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

Aye?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** An Act To Amend The Loan Act, 2015.

**CHAIR:** Shall the long title carry?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report Bill 9 carried without amendment?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the resolution and a bill consequent thereto, carried.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Madam Chair, I move that the Committee rise, report the resolution and Bill 9 carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise, report the resolution and Bill 9 carried without amendment.

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

All those in favour?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against?

Carried.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** The hon. Deputy Speaker.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Chair of Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again? Now?

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Harbour Main, that the resolution be now read a first time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved that this resolution be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Against?

Carried.

**CLERK:** Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows: "That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province, in addition to the sum of money already voted, a sum of money not exceeding \$400,000,000."

On motion, resolution read a first time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate, that the resolution be now read a second time. That it

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that this resolution be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

**CLERK:** "That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province, in addition to the sum of money already voted, a sum of money not exceeding \$400,000,000."

On motion, resolution read a second time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that the bill be now read a first time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded by the hon. Government House Leader and the Minister of Municipal Affairs that the bill be read a first time.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against?

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Loan Act, 2015," carried. (Bill 9)

**CLERK:** A bill, An To Amend The Loan Act, 2015. (Bill 9)

On motion, Bill 9 read a first time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, that Bill 9 be now read the second time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against?

Carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An To Amend The Loan Act, 2015. (Bill 9)

On motion, Bill 9 read a second time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that Bill 9 be now read a third time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that Bill 9 be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against?

Carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An To Amend The Loan Act, 2015. (Bill 9)

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Address in Reply.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I apologize to the House; I missed a step.

The bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and the title be as on the Order Paper.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against?

Carried.

On motion, a bill, "An To Amend The Loan Act, 2015," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 9)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Again, the hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I now call from Orders of the Day, Address in Reply.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour for me today to stand in this great House to give my maiden speech. It was a long time coming. I'm a senior. It's been a dream that has come true for me to be representing the great people of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today a very proud person, proud of my roots, growing up in Twillingate and enjoying the simpler things of life in those days. We were an island, served by a ferry, believe it or not. So I can appreciate some of the

frustrations that those people today, who are served with ferries, are dealing with.

Then we were fortunate enough, after several years, to get a fixed link by a causeway. I got the experience to look at many of the advantages the connection brought to my town. It's somewhat ironic, Mr. Speaker, that I'm now the Transportation and Works Minister, and the Premier has mandated me to be a better management of our ferries, and to look at possible fixed links. So we go full circle.

As I reflect today upon my past, I would be remiss if I didn't reference my parents. I can only imagine how proud they would be today, and proud of this moment. My parents believed in hard work, and they believed in long days. My father was a fisherman for most of his life before getting into the construction business. He worked many summers on the Labrador Coast building wharves and lighthouses.

I'm looking forward to joining my colleague for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair to take me to some of the places I haven't been yet, such as Battle Harbour, Mary's Harbour during the summer, and I'd like to be able to get an opportunity to see some of the places my father frequented during the summer. My father would leave on the first coastal boat in the spring, and he would come home on the last coastal boat in the fall.

While my father was away, my mother made sure the work was done around the House. In those days, Mr. Speaker, we lived off the land, like a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians did. We had our own sheep, we had our own cows, we had our own pigs, we had our own goats, we had our own ducks – we even had our own chicken. I know it's a controversy these days, having your own chicken.

So you can imagine how hard my mom worked to make sure all the animals were fed and care for all the other chores that had to happen. In addition to that she was also responsible, because we had our horses and cows we had to look after for the winter, it was her responsibility to make sure the grass was cut and the hay was made and put away. We all took part in that.

If that wasn't enough, as a mother, as a woman, she also had to make sure that we kept our garden because we grew our own vegetables. So we had to go through all of that. She was a farmer. She was a house maker. She did all those things. In addition to that, she had to make sure that I kept on the straight and narrow and did my work. That was a challenge in itself. My parents never shied away from hard work and, Mr. Speaker, I have some of that same drive and commitment.

I felt it important today to pay tribute to my parents because they instilled in me a concern for others. They treated people with respect and they helped out wherever they could. Both of my parents have now since passed away. I actually lost my father about a year before his actual physical death to the dreaded disease of Alzheimer's. It was a devastating blow to me, especially the day that I picked him up to take him for a ride and he had no idea who I was. I had to quickly adjust to the fact that this physically strong man, who I had looked up to all my life, had no idea who I was.

Mr. Speaker, there are over 8,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Their families and caregivers are impacted on a daily basis. This disease is growing in alarming rates and we really are faced with a challenge. As we age, more and more people will become dependent on our health care services. This disease will have a huge impact on budgets, both provincially and federally, in the coming years. We must find a cure. We need both a provincial and federal plan in place quickly to deal with the pressures about this disease.

I salute all the caregivers that are providing countless hours of support to their loved ones. The pressure and the strain sometimes can be unbearable, but you need to realize there is help in our communities. It was for that reason I volunteered for many years with both the Newfoundland and Labrador Alzheimer Society, where I served as president, and the national Alzheimer Society where I served on the board of directors.

I want to thank many of my colleagues in this House who have supported us in the past through our coffee breaks. I look at our Chair of

our Committees – Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Chair, and our Walk for Memories. I want to salute the staff at our provincial office on Topsail Road, especially our executive director Shirley Lucas, who works above and beyond what is expected as an employee to help those who are in need. Truly, it's help for today and it's hope for tomorrow.

I ask all of my hon. colleagues to reach out to someone that you know who's affected by this disease and give them an encouraging word. My mom carried the heaviest load as a caregiver. She was the one who insisted we keep our father at home when he should have been in a long-term care facility. She was a dedicated and committed wife who spent many years by my father's side. She was fortunate to have a few good years after he had passed away. She lived until 95.

After completing my university training, I started my career in Central Newfoundland. I moved to Windsor and accepted a principal's position in Badger and worked there for nine great years before moving on to Grand Falls Academy. Working with young people was probably the most rewarding career I could have wished to have.

Knowing at the end of a career that you have helped young people to become outstanding citizens cannot be measured in words. This was truly fulfilling to me.

In 1991, an historic event occurred. The Towns of Grand Falls and Windsor amalgamated. This year, Mr. Speaker, the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor is celebrating 25 years of amalgamation. This amalgamation is truly a success model that other communities in this province could certainly learn from. Trust me; it wasn't that painful, in spite of what a lot of people would have said. It just made sense. Thankfully, someone had the foresight and was there to make it happen. The many benefits using economies of scale are evident in the community today.

I would like to offer my congratulations to the present Mayor Barry Manuel, and all of the council. I had the honour of serving eight years as councillor and six years as mayor. I thoroughly enjoyed it and found it very rewarding.

I would like to offer my congratulations to the two newest councillors, Peggy Bartlett and Mike Browne, on their recent election. There is no deeper commitment than the giving of your time to serve in this capacity. The rewards will far outweigh the frustrations.

In November last year, Mr. Speaker, the people of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans gave me a mandate, to represent them in this House. I am truly honoured and indebted to the wonderful people in my district who have put their trust in me. I want to thank the many campaign workers who worked tirelessly on my campaign, and especially the three gentlemen who went door to door with me every day starting in September until the election in November. That's the type of commitment I will treasure as long as I'm in this House, because that truly was above and beyond. I know some of my colleagues on this side and on the other side experienced that type of support and commitment when we decided to run.

I met many wonderful people while campaigning door to door during the election. I met people for the first time, making lasting friendships. I met many of my former students in Badger – I don't know if that was a good thing or not. There were certainly some times when it slowed my door to door, but it was great to be able to see students I had as very young people, now outstanding citizens and adults. I certainly cherish that moment. I got a fair amount of support, by the way, in Badger, in spite of the fact that I spent nine years there. I'm sure some of those children at that time had some other thoughts in their mind when I talked to them, but it was great to see them.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working hard during these difficult times on behalf of the people of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, Millertown, Buchans Junction and Buchans to improve the conditions and challenges we are facing. Our communities, my district, have gone through many difficult times over the last number of years.

The downturn in the paper industry impacted Central Newfoundland with some 700 people losing their jobs with the closure of the mill in March of 2009. Again, this year, we have been

impacted by the closure of Duck Pond Mines with another 350 people losing their jobs.

Mr. Speaker, that is devastating to any community and to any region. We have been through these difficult times, but one of the things I want to assure this House is that we will rise above that. It is imperative for us to find ways to stimulate this suppressed economy. This unfortunately happens when communities are dependent on natural resources; however, Mr. Speaker, the people in my district have been resilient in the past and I have the confidence that we will find a way to diversify our economy.

I ask our people to be innovative and to work in partnership with agencies for a stronger tomorrow and a more sustainable future for my district and for this province. We must work together to build stronger partnerships, to look for other opportunities for all of us and I commit to do my part and to work hard to ensure that we all have a better future.

Mr. Speaker, none of this would have been possible if it was not for the support of so many people. I stand here today because of the support I have received from my family, my church and my community. I have to especially recognize my wife, Joan, who has given me 100 per cent support over the years, whether it has been my professional career or my political career. She has stood by me and has encouraged me to fulfill my dreams. Being in politics requires a huge commitment from all family members.

We are so proud of our four children and our six grandchildren. I'm blessed to have at least two of my grandchildren living in the province, in Gander; my good friend's hometown. The oldest of my grandchildren, believe or not – I know if you look at me it probably is surprising to see that, but my oldest will be attending MUN this coming September. I'm looking forward to that. I joke with her, I said now that your pop is here in St. John's maybe you should stay with me; but I think she's got other plans. She was sort of like, I'm not too sure about that pop, maybe I should stay at residence. So I'm going to give her that choice. She'll visit, I'm sure she will.

My other four grandchildren, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, are living in Ontario. I would love

to have them here in the province, however, we all know that having four children – I have two now living in Newfoundland and Labrador and, of course, my other two are in Toronto. All are gainfully employed and are professionals in the City of Toronto. I know it's always great to visit, but I would love to have my other four grandchildren in Newfoundland and Labrador; but I don't, and that's the way we have it.

Having grandchildren motivates me to help build a better tomorrow. A stronger tomorrow will be for my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. I want a future that is environmentally friendly. I want a future that is safe. I want sustainable communities. I want safe communities. I want a strong economy and a future that is affordable. It is for this reason that I pledge to work hard to position this province where it should be, a province that is not strapped with debt and no hope, but a province that is rich in resources, is inclusive and giving hope to our youth.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon all Members of this House to help build that future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, certainly a very wonderful maiden speech by my colleague.

Given the time of the day, I would move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Works, that the House do now adjourn to the call of the Chair.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the House adjourn to the call of the Chair.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.



This House now stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned to the call of the Chair.