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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House resumed at 7 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, second reading of Bill 6.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port, that Bill 6, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It is moved and seconded that Bill 6, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act.” (Bill 6)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an exciting piece of legislation. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to open debate and speak to Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Professional Fish Harvesters Act. We are proposing a number of changes to the act. While these changes are important, they are mostly housekeeping in nature.

Before I speak to the bill, I would like to take an opportunity to provide some background on the

Professional Fish Harvesters Act.

Newfoundland and Labrador was the first province in Canada to recognize fish harvesters as a profession. Beginning in the early 1990s, harvesters expressed an interest in professionalization.

Professionalization recognized the special skills and experience required to become a professional fish harvester. It involved bestowing professional status on fish harvesters who have had a long attachment to fishing and set qualifying standards for new entrants to the industry.

The idea of professionalism in the fishery was the subject of a number of community consultations. Consultations were held in 1991 and 1994 with fish harvesters at the community level to further redefine the professionalization programming.

There was over 90 per cent acceptance of professionalization by fish harvesters at these sessions. From these meetings, a model of certification for fish harvesters was developed and, in 1996, the *Professional Fish Harvesters Act* was enacted, the first of its kind in Canada.

In 1997 the act allowed for the establishment of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board, a non-profit organization created and operating for the benefit of all Newfoundland and Labrador fish harvesters. At present, the board consists of 15 members appointed by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture and members serve for a period of three years. An appeal board consisting of three members appointed by the minister was established to hear appeals of any professional fish harvester whose certification is refused by the board or is dissatisfied with the certification status he or she is given. Members of the appeal board also currently serve a three-year term.

The Certification Board has significantly contributed to the industry by defining standards of professionalism, providing an advisory role for federal and provincial governments and operating and maintaining a fish harvester registration system. The board has also developed education and training activities, a code of ethics, fish harvester designations level

I, II and apprentice, and developed and promoted safety training.

The board estimates that 95 per cent of crew members in the province are registered with the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board. Newfoundland and Labrador is recognized as having the best trained fisheries labour force in the country in terms of the amount and level of training. We are also recognized as being the province most compliant with Transport Canada's Marine Personnel Regulations.

Mr. Speaker, some of the changes to the act, I would like to take some time now to go through the amendments we have put forth before we start into debating this legislation. Once again, these legislative amendments are essentially housekeeping in nature and are intended to clean up the outdated sections of the act; maintain the function of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board and appeal board; allow the minister to defer the establishment of the disciplinary board until such a time as it is required; and clarify references to the powers of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board, the appeal board and the disciplinary board.

The amendments propose change to the composition of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board. Some of these changes have come about as a result of changes in the names of affiliated organizations or have arisen because of changes in responsibility of organizations previously represented. Currently, the legislation calls for one representative from the association of Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries co-operatives, which is no longer active. We are proposing to change this to a representative from a registered fisheries co-op.

The current legislation also calls for a representative of the Department of Education. We are proposing to replace this with a representative from the provincial department responsible for post-secondary education. The provincial government department responsible for post-secondary education is currently the Department of Advanced Education and Skills.

In order to allow some flexibility to have participants from more than one federal

department, the legislation will change such that the current wording calling for two representatives of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada will be changed to say: two representatives from the federal government, at least one of whom shall be the federal government department responsible for fisheries.

For example, there may be benefits in having another federal department represented on the board such as Transport Canada, given its role in regulating vessels and training requirements. A seat on the board for Human Resources Development Canada has been vacant for some time and the responsibility for post-secondary education was transferred from the federal government to the province several years ago.

Since there is already representation from the provincial Department of Advanced Skills and Education, we plan to change a section to allow for a representative appointed to represent Aboriginal fish harvesters in the province. The provincial government has had representation in the past from Aboriginal groups wanting representation on the board and the board is supportive of this change.

We are proposing allowing members to be appointed for up to three years rather than three-year terms in order to maintain the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board schedule of appointment expiries as set out in the act. This will also support the continuation of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification work as members' appointments expire.

We are also proposing to allow members of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board, the appeal board and the disciplinary board to continue to serve after their expiry of their terms until reappointed or replaced. Currently, the act allows for members of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board and the appeal board to be reappointed; however, it does not provide the authority to allow a member to continue to serve beyond their expiry date.

The policy of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board and appeal board has been to allow the members to continue to serve in their current capacities until they are reappointed or replaced. This will be formulized into practice.

This is a standard provision of many government-appointed boards and it will support the continuation of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification work as members' appointments expire. These changes will also want to confirm that a vacant seat in the board does not invalidate the constitution or impair the rights of remaining members to act so long as the membership of the board does not fall below 11 members.

The act currently reads the board shall consist of 15 members appointed by the minister. The Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board currently has 14 members and has, from time to time, due to shifts in federal and provincial government departments, responsibilities that I have spoken of earlier. Inclusion of such sections will allow the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board to continue to work if one or more vacancies exist.

The amendments clarify reference to the powers of the boards. The term "board" is defined in the act as the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board; however, in various sections of the act the term "board" is used when referring to the appeal board or the disciplinary board.

The current wording could potentially lead to confusion. Updating these sections to clarify the references to the powers of the boards is needed. Section 19 of the act is being repealed, as it refers to the appointment of appeals panels for the period of 24 months from which the act became enforced. This provision was intended to be a temporary one and no longer has any effect.

The act currently reads, "The minister shall appoint a disciplinary board which shall hear and determine complaints against professional fish harvesters." To date, a disciplinary board has not been required or established since the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board was established in 1997.

The Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board believes it is important, however, to maintain the ability for it to be established if the need arises. The proposed amendments allow the minister the ability to delay the appointment of the disciplinary board until a compliant has been

received and the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification requests its establishment.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, to quickly recap these amendments: allow members to be appointed for a term less than three years; allow members to continue to serve after the expiry of their terms until reappointed or replaced; update the composition of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board; confirm the vacancy in the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board does not invalidate its constitution or impair the rights of those of the remaining members to act; delay the appoint of a disciplinary board until a complaint has been received; clarify references to the board and repeal the obsolete provisions.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of professionalism in the province's fishing industry and we continue to work and support the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board in maintaining and advancing professional standards for our fish harvesters.

The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has worked very closely with the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board in putting together these amendments. Both the department and the board believe these amendments are prudent and will help ensure the board continues to meet the objectives into the future.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to hearing what others have to say during our debate and I will be pleased to have a few more words as we move forward in closing the debate on these important housekeeping items.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Indeed, it is a privilege to rise here again tonight and talk about professional fish harvesters. Mr.

Speaker, we've come a long way. I know it has been a long while now since '97 since this was first introduced, but our fisher people are professionals. They definitely do a job that I know takes a lot of pride. People have a lot of pride and they're very professional with the work they do.

I know in the past, when you look at fishermen, there were times when safety wasn't a big issue and standards weren't the way that – I think I spoke the other day about growing up and seeing how we were handling our fish. Today, if you look at the example of the crab fishery that's being caught right now, in order to be able to put that to market there have to be certain standards put in place. Our fishermen are doing that because they realize the markets today are what they have to adjust to. Professionalism in the fishery is a very important thing. I'm glad that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians were the first ones to be, in 1997, recognized as professional fish harvesters.

Mr. Speaker, the minister went on with a lot of the stuff the bill has. I'd like to thank the people over in the Department of Fisheries. Being the Fisheries critic, it's the first time I had the opportunity to work with a lot of people over there in the department. If you ever want to see a bunch of professional people, you can mark that one down, I have to say. I'm very impressed with the department, very impressed with the briefing they gave us. In all aspects, I'm fortunate to be on the All-Party Committee that would meet on a regular basis with my colleagues across the way and the Member of the Third Party. I have to say, the staff over there are fantastic and their knowledge of the fishery is unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, we're the first in Canada to recognize fish harvesters. I guess so we should be, because our fishery is such a big part of Newfoundland and Labrador and to recognize the special skills and experience it is to become a fish harvester.

Today, technology, if you look at – I can remember the old 8 Acadia going out across the bay and you'd hear the putt-putt. I know most Members know what I'm talking about. You just look at the technology that is on these ships today, it's unbelievable. I know my brother and

them; they went out the other night. They were gone 200 miles off. You're going out in the fog and everything else. The technology and the professionalism these people do now, it's great that they're recognized.

A lot of what we're doing here today is basically we're making sure that the bill that was introduced in 1997 is brought to today's standards. There are a lot of things after changing, and the composition of the board and what they do has changed. An example is we had the Department of Education that was handling one part of it, and now we're changing it to AES. That's where it should be.

There are other things that are changed there. DFO had two members, but if you look today you'll see that Transport Canada are the people that decide on the standards of the boats and gives accreditation on whether the boat is seaworthy or whatever to go out on the water. So it's important that they're involved.

Mr. Speaker, it consists of 15 members also, and sometimes it's a job to get everybody together when there's a meeting needed. So I think the change on it is they can have quorum now with 11 members. They also had it that every three years there was somebody replaced. Now this year, there'd have to be nine new members replaced. They're changing that so it doesn't necessarily have to be right on the three-year mark, which is a good thing to do.

The other thing that's important to understand, what this board does is it gives recommendations to the Department of Fisheries to set standards and policies that are important to fish harvesters. It's important that they have a word – it's great to see that somebody will listen to a fish harvester.

Then, it's like anything, if we had to listen to the fishermen years ago we probably would never have had the moratorium. It's good that people are listening to harvesters and understanding that – I spoke yesterday on a petition, and the minister agreed with me after when we had a talk about it.

What's happening right now in the fishery is people are not listening to the professional harvesters. When you can see there are boats

that are out at crab, and it depends on the size of the boat with the quota you get, but we've got large vessels tied up at the wharf and they're forced to use smaller vessels.

Too often we've seen in Newfoundland where the fishermen are not listened to and we see tragedy. This is a case of it, because we saw it last year in Arnold's Cove when a larger vessel was tied at the wharf while the fishermen were forced to go out in smaller boats and catch crab because it was an inshore licence.

There are a lot of policies at the Department of Fisheries and people have to listen to them, because there's no one that knows more about the water than our fishermen, because they've been there. I guess it's like any occupation, really.

Mr. Speaker, also, they got a registry. There's a registry – and the minister just mentioned, I think it was – did you say 95 per cent of fishermen are in that registry now? That's important, too, because that lets people know. Then they're just Level I, Level II. Also, you've got to be a certain certification in order to be able to take the size of a vessel out on the water. That's important, because that shows – it's like any job, I guess, you have to have the proper training to be able to do your work.

Again, our fishermen are very professional. If you want to take a 65-footer out 200 miles offshore, I hope you know how to operate it. They do. That's what this is about. This is about having certain standards in place and policies in place. It's about safety. It's about people being able to be on the water knowing that standards and things are in place so that their crew members are safe. It's important to the families who are at home.

I go back to my own family. When the young fellow was fishing last year or the year before last, gone all night long, then coming in, you'd be kind of worried what they're out in. So it's nice to know there are standards and policies in place so that fishermen are as safe as they can be. It's a huge thing that DFO listened to the fishermen and listened to the people who are in the industry because they are very professional and they know what they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, there's a disciplinary board that the minister talked about. There has been no appeals to the board as of yet. It's almost a board that if something comes up – I think, Minister, that's the way it's going to be done – if something does come up, then the board will be put in place so it can hear what the appeal is. That's something we don't need. If there's no need of it, the minister can take care of that.

Mr. Speaker, there's not a whole lot more I'd like to say here. I think it's important that as long as there are 11 members available to meet, that's okay – if there are members who are after going off the board, so 11 should be okay.

Again, I mentioned about the disciplinary – when you look at the term three years. This year, Minister, I think there are nine who need to be replaced. It's important we stagger that because sometimes, as you know and everybody knows, it's a job to get people to serve on some of these boards. So rather than getting nine, get three or four. It's a whole lot easier.

We had one representative from Human Resources Development with the federal government. Now that's going to be changed to an original member. That's huge because it's great that we have everybody on this board that represents all fashions of the fishery. It's so important that everybody is represented. I think that's a real good move.

Like I mentioned earlier, Transport Canada – there are after being tragedies on this Island around the water that sometimes we looked at some boats from Transport Canada that were too high in the water and the buoyancy of the boat was the cause of some of the tragedies. Some of these boats today are 65-feet long, yet they are about 30-feet high. It's important the proper engineering and everything is done. So Transport Canada is great to have there.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go through all the changes here but most of them are to make sure that this committee works well, and that our Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board shows the fishermen really that we respect what they do. The fishery and fisher people are very, very professional people today. It's important that they stay like that.

I go back to my younger days, my first job, I always said, was signing the slips in the fish truck. Then when I got my licence, I could drive the fish truck. I know a little bit about the fishery and I know how far we're after coming. It's so important that we recognize fish harvesters for who they are, very professional people that do a great job for this Island.

I'm very proud to say that I know a lot of them and they do a fantastic job. I think this is a bit of housekeeping, but it's a good bit of housekeeping that needed to be done.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Professional Fish Harvesters Act. Much like my colleague the Minister of Fisheries and the Member opposite, the Member for Cape St. Francis, I'd just like to start by acknowledging the great work of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board and, in addition to that, the staff in Fisheries that have done some work in looking at amending this act.

Generally speaking, we are just doing some housekeeping items today, but it certainly is important. Some of the housekeeping items, in addition to simply wording, we're also looking at some positive changes as well.

I had some brief experiences, actually, with the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board in my role as an employment counsellor. I would help individuals who were seeking retraining to go on and do their MED A1 and their MED A3, as yourself, Madam Speaker, would be familiar with as well as we both served in that capacity. At every opportunity, the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board was a pleasure to deal with, a pleasure to work with and so were the individuals seeking training in that capacity.

As mentioned, the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board, being the first area of its kind in '96 – actually under a Liberal government which is important to note, the act being the first of its kind at the time. That board was really meant to establish and recognizing the professionals in the industry and the great work that they do and really putting a professional standard to the occupation.

In addition to that, they'll be providing an advisory role to the federal government and to the provincial government. They'll be operating the registration system as well. In addition to that, again, the educational opportunities were quite frequent and they continue to be ongoing to this day: designations Level I, Level II, Apprentice, and so on and so forth. Of course, as the Member for Cape St. Francis mentioned, the safety and the promoting of safety training is of paramount importance as well.

The legislative amendments here that we're looking at this evening, we're just updating some wording. One of the key things, I think, that we're really looking at here as well in terms of the compositions of board is very important. No longer do we have the federal department of human resources and development. Outside of that role there, we're looking at an Aboriginal representative. I think that's very important. I think we all recognize the importance of Aboriginals in our society and, particularly, Aboriginals in Newfoundland and those that partake in the fishing industry. To apply an Aboriginal lens as a member to the board, I think that's certainly a great step in the right direction.

In addition to that, we're looking at allowing some members to serve after the expiry of their dates until they're reappointed or replaced. This is just to ensure the ongoing operation and efficiency of the board. We don't want to be in a position where the board drops to a certain level of members and they're no longer able to continue with their ongoing daily operations. So it's just essentially about efficiency there.

We're also going to delay the appointments of a disciplinary board until a complaint is received. I think that's just a common sense kind of amendment here really. There's really no need to have a disciplinary board unless a complaint

is received when you look at another board getting together.

Speaking of the word “board” actually, that was the one that really stuck out at me the most in reviewing some of this legislation. It was kind of really around the wording. The wording of the act is where it’s going to change in three or four different sections. Unless you’re really paying close attention, you wouldn’t notice it.

Basically throughout the act, it refers to board and you can appeal to the board. We don’t know what board that’s actually referring to in the act. So the act is kind of referring it to now so you can appeal to the appeal board as opposed to appeal to the board. You don’t know what board you’re appealing to. Under the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board there is an appeal board and a disciplinary board as well, so some minor tweaking there just essentially around wording.

In addition to that, some changes around the representatives from the federal government. The current legislation states that we’ll have two representatives from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We’re going to replace that now with two representatives from the federal government.

As the Minister of Fisheries had acknowledged, I think that’s important because we all understand that it’s more than just the Department of Fisheries and Oceans that plays a role in looking at fisheries in the province. The transportation and safety department from the federal government could play a role around the size of the boats; it could be a department of environment official if need be. So it really just allows for a more open and flexible opportunity to allow members from the federal government to play a role. In addition to that, we are just looking at ensuring that the number of the board does not fall below 11 members; again, to ensure the ongoing operation of the board. Just some minor stuff there as well.

Then, as well, when the term of a member of an appeal board expires, he or she will continue to be a member until the member is reappointed or replaced. This is something we kind of just have to do right now because as Members are aware, and Members opposite are aware as well, we’re

still in the process of putting through legislation around the Independent Appointments Commission. So until that time, we need to ensure the ongoing operation of this board is still intact and its integrity still remains as well.

Other than that, again, it’s simply just a housekeeping item, some minor cleanup. I would like to think that we’d have the co-operation from all Members on our side, as well as Members opposite, Members of the Third Party, in ensuring that the minor amendments to Bill 6 here will pass with ease.

There’s really not much more up for debate than that. This is not a controversial bill. Again, this is a bill just simply to ensure that some of these housekeeping items are cleaned up. I think the last time the bill had any minor amendments was 2004. There may have been some other amendments in ’96-97 when it was first introduced, but outside of that, today we’re essentially just doing some good housekeeping items.

In concluding, I’d like to thank the members of the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board, as well as the Minister of Fisheries and his staff for the great work they have done in ensuring that we recognize the professionalism of those involved of fish harvesters and of individuals and fisherpersons all across our province.

With that, I’ll take my time to just again extend my thanks. I would hope that the Members opposite would agree in participating, in agreeing that these are good amendments to Bill 6.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I’m glad to be able to stand tonight and add my voice to those who have spoken to Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Professional Fish Harvesters Act.

I thank the speaker for outlining all the details really of the bill that we're facing here tonight and also for arranging for a briefing that we had with regard to this bill. As the minister said, it's basically a housekeeping bill, and others have repeated that. I'm not going to go through the bill in detail. The minister has done it and the other speakers have made references to the main points.

I think, basically, just like in 1997, the fish harvesters in the province grew up with the recognition of the need for a professional body. They formed the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board. The act that was started then, and which has had some revisions, is growing up again with this bill tonight because there are some things in it in particular.

One that has been referred to, for example, is having a representative appointed to the board representing Aboriginal fish harvesters in the province. This is something which is so important. Right now, for example, on the All-Party Committee dealing with the shrimp fishery, even yesterday when we met with the Ministerial Advisory Panel, the concern of making sure the Aboriginal harvesters were part of the whole process. So we are doing something extremely important in the province when we naturally recognize the role of the Aboriginal people of this province in the issues that concern the province. Certainly, they have been part of the fishery, and having their voice is extremely important.

The board has been extremely important with regard to the modernization of our fishery. Certainly, the Member for Cape St. Francis has spoken to that modernization. It's something to be proud of actually, proud of our fishery. Sometimes I get concerned when you don't see departments like DFO recognizing the knowledge and the expertise of our harvesters. They certainly recognize their expertise, and that's what the board is all about, is making sure that people who call themselves commercial harvesters are certified to maintain the professionalism they have attained. It's important for us then to give them the framework they need to continue doing their work.

The board, of course, the whole formation of the board was spearheaded by the union, the Fish, Food and Allied Workers, and supported by fisheries co-operatives, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and other government agencies and educational institutions. The board is an excellent example of how the province's fishing industry can be approved when all parties work together, and that's what this board is about.

When the act was passed originally, there was over 90 per cent acceptance of professionalization by fish harvesters. They recognized what this would mean for them. Since then, the board has pursued its vision of promoting a commercial fishery sustained by independent professional fish harvesters.

It's so important for us to support this board and to support all the efforts to maintain our fishery in this province. I'd like to use this bill, which is a housekeeping bill, but to make that point of how much we – and I know the other two parties in the House, and as we're working together on the All-Party Committee, I recognize how much we believe in maintaining the fishery.

The fishery still, I believe, is the core of our economy. We have to keep strengthening our rural communities because that's where the fishery lives is in our rural communities. We have to recognize that they are the core of our economy. So I'm happy to have the opportunity, because of this bill tonight, to be able to make that point here in the House.

We have to do everything we can to make sure that our harvesters and our plant workers are maintained and that the industry itself is maintained. Our fishery is a renewable resource and we have to make sure that we do everything in our power to maintain that resource and the industry, especially important now with the resurgence of the Northern cod and the commitment of all in the industry to a quality-based sustainable resource.

This board is going to have a really vital role to play as we redevelop our traditional resource that's going to be so important. Preparing for the cod's resurgence is going to require investing millions of dollars, but it's also going to require

investing and training for a new professional harvester sector. In some places it's almost going to be like starting from scratch, because with the resurgence of the cod, it's going to be a different fishery. You have new technologies. There's so much that is new that wasn't there in 1992. So this board will be extremely important when it comes to the whole issue of the resurgence of the Northern cod.

That's all I'm going to say, Madam Speaker. I don't want to beat this to death. I think we're all in agreement that we need this bill and we'll be happy to vote for it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: Madam Speaker, it gives me great privilege to stand in this hon. House today and talk about Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Professional Fish Harvesters Act. I represent a district where most of the people in my district, I would think, are either fishers or families of fishers. So the development of this board was very important. It started in 1997 with some objectives to make the fish harvesters look more as a professional group. I think they've come a long way since '97.

They operate and maintain the registration system of fish harvesters, which is very important, because no one really knew who bought part of the fishery, who had what licences. They have been evaluating and recommending some training courses.

For anybody who is around the fishery, they should know it's very important to have training in the fishery. Too many times it's been unsafe. I can remember back years ago one of the logos of the Department of Fisheries was: Don't let your greatest catch be your last reward. We have seen so much change in the style of the boats, the safety of the boats, and it is much to the credit of the professional fish harvesters for it and their certification.

Everyone else has had their say – the minister went in great detail of the changes in the act. It is like any act, this was done in 1997, it has been reviewed and now it's being reviewed again. It is basically cleaning up the act to deal with things that are pertinent and up to date for today.

I am just looking through it right there – the association of Newfoundland fisheries co-operative no longer exists, so there's no point in keeping that in the act. So those are some of things they did. The representative from the Department of Education: It was fine to say education, but now they are saying from a provincial department responsible for post-secondary education. It is just cleaning up the act in all ways, shapes and forms.

The composition of the board: It used to say two representatives from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; now it is two representatives from the federal government. It is all things that make it more easily flow. A representative from human resources, the seat has been vacant and the responsibility of post-secondary education is transferred to the provincial government. That is going to go now over to the Aboriginal fish harvesters in this province which were never represented on this.

The three-year term of the board had to be looked at. There was a time when it went on, so it is up to three years. Now everybody knows, once they get there, it is a three-year term and how it flows over into the board. To deal with the vacancy so it never goes below 11, so the board can always flow and keep going.

The appeal: You would appeal to the board, so now you would appeal to an appeal board. These are all things to make it better, to make it flow, so that the professional fish harvesters when they sit down now, when they go to their meetings, they have somewhere to go, they have some good guidance for it.

I'm not going to say much more, only I think this is great and it should see everybody's support in this House. I haven't heard anyone speak against it. I look forward to supporting this bill in the upcoming motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture speaks now, he will close debate.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

First of all, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the Members this evening for taking part: the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port, the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels, the Member for Cape St. Francis and the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi. I also have the opportunity to serve with three of these Members, the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and the Member for Cape St. Francis on the All-Party Committee on Northern Shrimp.

Madam Speaker, lots of times in this House we don't all agree and we have some heated debates; but, other times, when there are issues like the fishery, we often find agreement. We've worked very hard in the past number of months on the LIFO policy and the position of the All-Party Committee and we'll move forward. As the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi mentioned in her remarks, just this week we met with the ministers advisory panel. We'll be putting forward a position to that panel in the coming weeks.

These are important changes when it comes to the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board. We will continue to evolve this board as we move forward, again, back to some of the remarks in the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi about the importance of this board as we move forward into a revitalized ground fishery, one that we hope – not only hope, Madam Speaker, it's a very important board as we move forward in a new ground fishery.

The Member for Cape St. Francis talks about safety. He and I have conversations on a regular basis. One of the things we talked about yesterday was vessel safety. We've made representation to our colleagues in Ottawa to make sure that as we move forward in our fishery that it's important we look at vessel size and vessel safety to make sure that the people that harvest one of our greatest resources are safe in doing so.

Also, one of the things in debate tonight was the importance of professionalism of our harvesters. One of the things that helps maintain the integrity of the fishing industry is fleet separation. The Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board plays a very important role when it comes to fleet separation.

It's also interesting to note that in 1997, the disciplinary board was enacted in this piece of legislation. Since that time, almost 20 years, the disciplinary board never had to be used. I think that speaks to one thing. I think that speaks to the true professionalism of our harvesters and the industry this board represents. To think of a board that can go almost 20 years without having to bestow or involve disciplinary action on one of its members, I think, certainly shows the professionalism of our harvesters.

The Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi recognized in her remarks the other very important component of our industry, and that's our plant workers and our processors. They play a very important part in this. It's all of these groups that come together to build this \$1.2 billion, and event today, employing over 18,000 people in our province.

So again, Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure this evening to speak to this bill. It's great to see that this bill will receive unanimous consent. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will close debate on this portion of Bill 6.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Is it the pleasure of the House that the said bill be now read a second time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK (Ms. Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act. (Bill 6)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 6 has now been read a second time.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole presently, by leave. (Bill 6)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 6.

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

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 (Dempster): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 6, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act.” (Bill 6)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 8 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 8 inclusive carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 8 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 6, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act carried without amendment?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, I move, Madam Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 6.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 6.

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): Order, please!

The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have asked me to report Bill 6 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters referred to them and have directed her to report Bill 6, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act, without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

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

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

I'm very pleased tonight to stand as we continue the budget debate. Of course we are now on the main motion which presents the budget to the House and the motion of government looking for approval of this budget. I have to say this being the last chance to speak specifically to the budget, we'll certainly have the opportunity to speak to issues in the budget as we continue in the House all spring because we have a number of legislative bills which will be enabling changes that the government is causing, a number of legislative bills that we will have to speak to. At that time, I'll certainly be able to speak to a lot of the issues that are of concern.

Tonight is the last time for me to speak to the actual budget and the approval of the budget. So I'm going to be taking a bigger picture, I think, than I have been taking so far in the debate. It's no secret that on this side of the House in our party – and I'll speak for myself – we find this an extremely disturbing and disappointing budget. There's nothing else that I can say. I would like to be cheerful, but the budget itself gives no hope to people, and so I feel no hope because we have a budget without any hope.

My colleague, the representative for St. John's Centre made reference, when she spoke last

night, to the Alberta budget. The reason for doing that is that Alberta is in a similar position to us; they have had a major hit in Alberta because of the cut in revenues from the oil industry, as we have had. While they are a larger province, population wise, and while they have a larger budget and a larger economy than we have, at the same time the dynamic is the same.

They, in actual fact, besides losing revenue, have lost 60,000 jobs from the oil industry in that province. Some of those people are people from our province, but the majority are not. They, too, could have put their head in the sands and say we can't do anything. Instead of that – and I've mentioned this already in debate – even though we know per capita their deficit is not equal to ours, in real terms their deficit is over \$10 billion. They chose to double their deficit in order to give hope to the people. As my colleague for St. John's Centre mentioned last night, the name of their budget was *Alberta Jobs Plan*. Well, I'd like to suggest that the name of our budget should have been the Newfoundland and Labrador cuts plan because that's what it's all about. It's all about nothing else but cutting.

The government itself showed that when, in January, it put together what they call the Government Renewal Initiative. That was a laugh and a half – the Government Renewal Initiative. When people went into the room – and if you go on the website, it's still there – to take part in the consultations and the discussions, some of which I know were very, very good, people really did take part, what was the focus they were given?

The first question they had to answer was: "Thinking of all of the things government spends your money on to provide residents of the province with services, what are the three things that could be stopped in order to save money?" Wouldn't it have been nice if government had said: What is it that government does for the people of the province in offering services that we have to keep and we have to build up? Then, the second question: How do we do that?

No, right from the beginning the notion was there, we've got to get rid of, we've got to cut. So cut, cut, cut is the theme of the budget. Over and over again the Minister of Finance has said

that. Over and over again the Premier has said it. What really is concerning is that the line by line that we've heard referred to so often and the Government Renewal Initiative, in talking only about cuts, totally ignored the fact that we need to look at not what to cut, but what to keep because of our concern for people.

What is it that we have to be concerned about? That is what is lacking in this budget. Cut, cut, cut without looking at what does the loss of that service mean. Cut, cut, cut without looking at what does the loss of those jobs mean. Cut, cut, cut without thinking what does it mean to the communities to do what we're doing. As far as I can see, Mr. Speaker, there was absolutely no analysis done by this government of the impact of all the cuts they anticipated doing.

This document in my hand is 9¼ pages. I've had this document in my hand before during this debate. A lot of people out there probably have never seen it, people who may be watching us tonight. I want to tell them about this document, because what this document is – it's a document which has almost 10 pages of the cuts without any analysis of what the impacts of those cuts are. I'm certainly not going to go through the dozens and dozens and dozens of cuts that are here, but I'm going to go through some key ones and ask significant questions, questions that weren't asked by this government.

The very first department that's outlined here is Advanced Education and Skills. We have quite a number of cuts in the Advanced Education and Skills budget. One of the things, Mr. Speaker, is: "Implement full student loans for NL students studying outside the province in programs available in NL." It says: "Program will be modified and brought in line with similar programming in other jurisdictions" and it saves \$563.

What is the impact of that on the students from our province who are studying outside the province? It doesn't matter why they're outside the province; they are our students, they are our young people. And here we are punishing them because the programs they're doing are also available here without any analysis of why they may be doing that. There are all kinds of reasons why they may be studying outside the province. So is there any analysis of the impact on keeping

young people here? No analysis of that. No analysis of the impact of what we're doing to our young people.

Let's look at another one, the closure of eight AES offices, the Advanced Education and Skills offices; offices which are so important in the communities where they existed. I'd like to point out that two of those are on the North Coast of Labrador – unbelievable. Two on the North Coast of Labrador where they are isolated, I mean, it's unfathomable. Again, it says: "This decision reflects low uptake for services/low demand for programming." I've spoken to a couple of those places and I've spoken to the former president of Nunatsiavut.

As a matter of fact, we probably should notice here in the House that as of today there is a new president of Nunatsiavut, and I wish Johannes Lampe well. I did speak to the former president, and she told me the numbers in Nain in the AES office there. Do you know what? It was a good uptake. So who put this together, who decided that it was a poor uptake?

The bottom line is these are isolated communities where you either have to fly in and out of, or go by boat in and out of, or go by all-terrain vehicles, go by Ski-Doos in the winter. We've shut the offices there, without looking at the impact on young people and other people as well, of those offices, the need.

Then let's look at travel: "Implement limits on access to non-life sustaining medical transportation benefits (i.e. reduce the availability of medical transportation benefits to clients living in an area serviced by a public bus system; encourage private vehicle usage" – I love that one – "and, implement an annual benefit limit of \$3000, with some exceptions)." Saving \$750,000, how is that impacting people? How is that impacting people here in the city where perhaps there's a bus system? But if they're going to the hospital because they're sick, is it a bus that is the best thing for them to go on?

I've seen people in the hospital; we've all seen them. People go there very often in a very, very sick state. I know of circumstances – one in particular quite recently, I can't give any personal details – where what happened to the

individual who had a bus ticket, rather than a taxi to get into, had a terrible result. That's what this is looking at, putting people, probably who are very sick, on buses, instead, for example, of letting them use a taxi. This is unbelievable. It just goes on and on.

I'm going to take another one from AES: "Eliminate the apprenticeship scholarships" saving a whole \$25,000. The reason for doing it is that it's "duplication between provincial programming and programs offered by the Federal Government, private sector or community sector." No, it wasn't that it's duplicated; it's that there was more money there to help people get a scholarship. I mean I can't believe it. That's not duplication; that's having extra money so that more of our young people – in some cases not always young people – can get scholarships as apprentices. That was increasing potential in the province. The lack of analysis of these cuts is just unbelievable.

I'm going to stop for a moment doing what I'm doing because I want to hit another point and I only have seven minutes left. I'm going to be able to raise a lot more of this when we talk in the bills. I want to point out how cowardly this government was with what they did in this budget. What they did was they cut money to significant bodies who then had to make the hard decisions and the dirty decisions.

They cut money to the health authorities. What did the health authorities have to do? They had to deal with the cuts to their operational grants. Mr. Speaker, we have the Central regional health authority, their cut for this year is \$420,500; the cut to Eastern regional health authority, \$12,954,700; to Grenfell, \$785,000; and to Western, \$127,000. So they cut hundreds of thousands of dollars from our health authorities and then left them holding the bag, left them with the ones – who had to announce the cuts they were going to have to make.

The cuts at Eastern Health are immense. The things they've had to do in Eastern Health are just unbelievable. I don't have time to go through every single thing here tonight, but I want to mention some of it. We've heard some of it and we haven't heard all of it. For example, "where utilization is low" – I love this – "some Mental Health and Addictions programs and

services will be either eliminated or be consolidated with other more comprehensive and targeted Mental Health and Addictions programming.”

It goes on. This was the news release from Eastern Health: “closure of a 10-bed residential unit (N2B) at the Waterford Hospital” Was there an analysis done of what the impact of that was going to be on the individuals? They talk about the fact that there are beds available in a long-term care facility, we know that’s Pleasant View I think it’s called now. Yet we know that the beds there – there aren’t enough beds to handle all of the patients or the residents who are in the Waterford.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: No rational explanation, except Eastern Health had to cut money. They had to cut over \$12 million. So they went scrambling and looking, and were forced to find things to do to save that money.

Would they have decided, for example, to close the 40 beds in Masonic Park without being forced by the government? No, they would not have. I’m convinced they would not have. Would they, for example, have done what they’re going to be doing now with the food? Food that can be prepared a couple of days ahead of time and using microwave technology to heat it and trying to convince people this is going to be fresher and it’s going to be better to eat and they’re going to enjoy it more.

The things they have been forced to do – the loss, for example, of the positions in the breast screening clinics. Under Eastern Health alone there are four positions that are affected – just in Eastern Health, four positions that are affected. Those positions, yes, they’re filled by nurses. They probably will not lose their jobs but somebody’s going to, because bumping will take place or finding a new position for them someplace else. It won’t be new people who will be hired if there’s an opening. I think there are two in Western as well. Six positions are affected because of the money that government took away from our health authorities. It’s absolutely unbelievable.

They make it sound so fancy, the whole thing of making our system more modern they almost say. When what they’re talking about, for example, is having to say to people in Bonavista: If you need an X-ray at 3 o’clock in the morning because of an emergency, you’re not going to be able to get it in Bonavista. You’re going to have to go to Clarendville. That is unbelievable. It really is unbelievable. Bonavista is not exactly around the corner from Clarendville. Some of the changes they’ve made around that are not as hard on people, not as hard for people in some other areas, but certainly the one in Bonavista is unbelievable.

What this government has done, they downloaded onto the school board as well and the school board has closed five schools. This government took no responsibility for those closures, just like they’ve taken no responsibility for the Eastern Health decisions. No responsibility at all. They’ve downloaded, they’ve made them make the decisions. The school board closed five schools because this government told them to do it. They told them to do it.

No matter how much the parents and the communities of the schools that were closing, no matter how much and how well they presented their case for the schools not to close, it was completely – they may have been speaking to a blank wall because they got nothing back from the school board but the closures, and no responsibility taken by this government. Letting them do the dirty work for them while they say that was their decision. Just like they’re saying the library board made the decisions about the 54 schools. That’s nonsense. They were told those 54 libraries were closing and they went along with it because they had no choice. This is absolutely unacceptable.

So here we have these boards, these bodies, money taken away from them, directions given to them and them with no choice but to do it. They’re the ones taking the fall while this government goes around trying to convince people that they don’t know what they’re talking about, trying to convince people that you added up two and two and got four. No, my darling, that’s five. Don’t you understand? Two and two is not four, two and two is five. Let me show you how it’s five. They think people are stupid.

Well, people are seeing through what they've done. This budget doesn't even deserve to be called a budget. A bookkeeping operation this was, line by line, cut, cut, cut. No vision, no plan for the future. Continuing to say in this budget that our future is oil and gas, that's what I can't believe. The one bright spot in that budget, the one thing they say, oh, but things are going to get better because things are going to pick up in the offshore.

We're where we are because we're depending totally on the offshore. That's the only hope they offered in this budget. We will be voting against it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get up and have a few minutes to speak about the budget. I wanted to respond to a few things that were said in Question Period today and a few things that have been said in debate. I realize I only have a few minutes to speak, so I'll try to get everything in.

I just wanted to tell people that I had the pleasure of going up to the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair in the winter to visit – I don't know how many schools it was. It was quite a number of schools I visited up there. We visited a number of multigraded classrooms.

In the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair's District, I went to one multigrade classroom that had students in five grades in that classroom, Mr. Speaker. Multigraded classrooms have been a feature of Newfoundland and Labrador education since we've had Newfoundland and Labrador, since the very beginning, the very inception of education in this province.

I thought it was really interesting today when the critic for the Official Opposition – so I assume the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island represents the view of the Official Opposition of the PC Party when he got up in the House of Assembly today and said: Will you put a stop to multigrade classrooms. I thought that was rather interesting.

I went back to the department after the House of Assembly went into a recess, for the break there before we met tonight, just to do a bit of a calculation on what the Official Opposition is now asking of government. In September, there are going to be 170 classes of multigrade students. These are not the combined-grade classes that we're talking about having for September, these are the same multigrade classes that we have had in Newfoundland and Labrador for decades and decades, if not several hundred years of our history.

Assuming that the average in a multigrade class is four grades – and we've asked Members from rural districts. I know there aren't any other than Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune across in the Opposition, so maybe that's why they don't understand this. But we asked Members, we polled them about – to talk to schools this evening and find out how many multigrade classrooms.

So assuming there are four grades in a multigrade classroom, then what the Official Opposition is asking for, for September, is 500 more classrooms thereabouts, approximately, and 500 additional teachers – 500 new classrooms and 500 new teachers. Because sometimes there's only one student in a grade, and that's why we have multigrade classrooms, some of those classes, a whole large number of them, would just have one student. That's what the Official Opposition wants us to move now, to that system.

Five hundred new teachers and 500 new classrooms, approximately, so that we can have classes of one student; the teacher cost alone is approximately \$45.6 million – approximately \$45.6 million just for teachers. That is to say nothing of where we are getting the money for 500 additional classrooms.

The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the Opposition critic, can laugh and smile. He thinks it's funny over there, but I don't think it's funny at all; \$46 million ask just so that we can move away from multigraded classrooms.

He thinks it's funny. He's laughing away with his colleagues over there. I don't think it's funny at all, Mr. Speaker. We have a serious fiscal problem in Newfoundland and Labrador today, and this is the kind of foolishness the Official Opposition is consuming the time of the House of Assembly with. Get rid of multigrade classrooms he said.

The other thing that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KIRBY: There's something going on over there, Mr. Speaker. What a racket.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the other thing I wanted to say is that in addition to asking for \$46 million to get rid of multigrade classrooms for September – it has nothing to do with the combined-grades initiative that we've been discussing, that's entirely another matter. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island said according to the president of the NLTA, schools are being asked and I quote: Place good kids in multigrade classrooms and kids with needs in other classes – place good kids in multigrade classes and kids with needs in other classes. And he said that's insulting and disgraceful. Mr. Speaker, that is pretty disgraceful.

For the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island to stand in this House of Assembly today – and as I said, we have over 100 classrooms in Newfoundland and Labrador today that are multigrade classrooms. In his perspective there are good kids in multigrade classes and kids with other needs. I assume he means children with disabilities are in other classes. That is, indeed, insulting and disgraceful language to be used in the House of Assembly about children with special education needs, Mr. Speaker. I have never heard anything like that in the 4½ years that I've been in here – absolutely rotten.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: I'll take it a little bit further, Mr. Speaker. He quotes the president of the NLTA. The president of the NLTA has been out in the media talking about leftover students going to combined-grade classrooms.

There are no leftover students in this province! None of our students are leftover students in this province!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: I am a father. Many of us have children in this province. None of us would ever want our children, however able they are, to be called leftovers.

There are no leftover children in Newfoundland and Labrador today. That language is not acceptable. We won't accept that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: We want an inclusive education in this province where children, regardless of all of their abilities, are accepted; they are included. There are no leftovers in this province and there are no good students. There is no separation, there is no segregation.

If that Member wants to go back to the days of Exon House, then he can go back. But we are not going back there under this government, Mr. Speaker, I assure you.

I think that language is unbecoming of the teaching profession. It is absolutely rotten. We should never ever use that language to refer to children. I would never want any child of mine referred to in that way. I say to the Members opposite, you would never want your children to be referred to in such a disgraceful and despicable way.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. This subject makes me very angry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about another thing that came up here in Question Period today. The Members are all concerned about libraries now. They're all concerned about libraries. They all stood up and said, oh, the

Liberals are doing this. Well, how many libraries could you keep open for that? The Liberals are doing that. How many libraries can you keep open for that?

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you a tale that I've learned, since I've become the Minister of Education, on the libraries in this province. Some libraries located in municipal buildings in this province – do you know what the municipalities charge those libraries in municipal buildings? Zero, and some municipalities charge libraries a dollar.

Do you know the sweetheart deals the previous administration was entering into with municipalities? Well, I'll tell you very much now – and I hope the media pays just as much attention to these details as they have of the others. The previous administration got the Corner Brook Library – they cajoled, as far as I'm concerned. The Member over there for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi talks about how the government is controlling the libraries board. In this instance, as far as I'm concerned, the last government cajoled the libraries board into entering into a 20-year lease with the City of Corner Brook for their library. Do you know what the amount of the lease was?

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. KIRBY: It was \$201,000 a year. For how many years? Twenty years at \$200,000 a year.

I'm telling you some municipalities in this province charge zero and some charge a dollar, and this crowd got us into a situation where the libraries board assigned a 20-year lease to the tune of \$201,000 a year for one library of the 95. How many libraries can you keep open for that?

I heard one of the Members over there say, oh, well, it only cost about \$23,000 for operating. This does not even include operating. This is just a lease for 20 years; \$201,000 a year. You have to add on the snow clearing. You have to add on the Internet. You have to add on the operations. You've got to add on the IT. You've got to add on the staff.

We're talking one library in Newfoundland and Labrador, this crowd in their time, it wasn't very long ago, over a quarter-million dollars. You

could have 10 libraries in this province in rural areas for that price. That was the deal they negotiated. So don't ever stand there and talk to me about how many libraries you could buy for that.

It gets better. This gets a lot better, I'll tell you that much. It's really rich, because the last person to speak was the Member for Conception Bay South. He got up in a sanctimonious tone and he lectured all the Members across here, all the ones from rural areas, oh, stand up – stand up.

Well, I'll tell you, the next time he stands up I'll let him know the lease for the CBS library, the previous administration in their absolute ignorance of what was going on with the system, they also – this is on top of the quarter-million-dollar operation for the pet project in Corner Brook effectively paying a mortgage for a new municipal building. On top of that, they got the province into a 25-year lease in CBS. Do you know how much that is? It's \$230,000 a year just for the lease. That does not include staff. That does not include Internet. That does not include IT. That does not include snow clearing.

We're up to over a half a million dollars now for two libraries. Guess how many of them are in rural Newfoundland? In Corner Brook and Conception Bay South, that's what this crowd did.

In Conception Bay South this deal is to pay not for the existing municipal building for which the provincial government provided funding, this is to build an entirely new building; a 25-year lease, \$230,000 a year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: You calculate the operating on this and we're talking \$300,000 a year for one library.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: How many libraries in rural Newfoundland – if you're calculating them at

\$23,000 a pop, how many could that provide? So don't ever stand there and tell me we're neglecting rural Newfoundland. You should look around because –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: – it's the crowd that sits around you that negotiated this rotten arrangement for the library system in this province. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you right here and right today, if there's any way to get out of these two leases, I am going to see that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador gets out of it. I am going to see that that happens.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: And every cent of the savings, that half a million dollars, will go into the preservation of rural libraries in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: That's what I'm going to do, and you will never stand there again and lecture us about your failure, your misgivings – absolutely ridiculous.

So Mr. Speaker, just to recap what happened here today, we had the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island stand here and tell us the new policy of the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is to basically go to one grade per classroom instead of multigrade classrooms; to hire an additional 500 teachers, approximately, 500 new classes, to the tune of \$46 million a year; to absolutely do nothing in terms of any of the research, anything that makes any sense in this world when it comes to improving student achievement in classrooms. That was the new policy thrown on the House of Assembly today.

We also heard him talking about placing good kids in those multigrade classrooms with kids with special needs in other classes. So basically endorsing a system of segregation that decades ago Newfoundland and Labrador decided to leave in the scrap heap of history, because we care more about our children than to use language like that about them, I say. As a father, I would never stand for anyone calling my child a leftover and I will never stand for anyone – as

Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, no one is going to stand there and call children with special needs in this province leftovers. It's never going to happen on my watch, I assure you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: The other thing that I want to say – and I apologize for being animated about this because it's difficult to sit there. I have no problem listening to reasoned arguments from the Opposition. It's a difficult job to sit over there and watch decisions being made that you may have issues with, to watch decisions being made that affect your district, to watch decisions being made that affect to children.

I say to the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, if you think it's funny that people over there are making comments about children with special education needs, the way that it's been made over there today, I don't think it's funny at all. I think you should lower your head in shame over there; it's not at all funny.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: I tell you, Mr. Speaker, again I go back to what I said before. The previous government got us into two leases for two libraries in highly populated, I would argue, urban areas of the province. They've sat there and they've decried the closures of rural libraries. They've basically tried to shame Members on this side of the House of Assembly saying that they weren't doing their job. Well, whose job were they doing when they negotiated a 20-year lease with the City of Corner Brook to the tune of \$201,000 per year? That does not take into account anything, any snow clearing, any other work, any IT, any books, nothing. That's just for the lease.

Then, on top of that, their closing salvo as they left here, as they left this side, was to lock this province into a 25-year agreement with the Town of Conception Bay South for \$230,000 a year and that also does not include anything else. I assure you here today, Mr. Speaker, as true as the days are long, I am getting us out of those leases and we will not be in that business at all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Those towns, they will give us the same arrangements as those rural libraries, a dollar or nothing, or we are having nothing else to do with it. I'm fed up with listening to this nonsense from the other side. It makes no sense. They do one thing and they say another. They went in and created the biggest fiscal mess that we have seen in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, built up a deficit just in one year of \$2.7 billion and they say we don't know. They sit there and say: Oh, how many libraries could you buy for that?

Mr. Speaker, I sat here earlier, that crowd had a \$500,000 Population Growth Strategy advertising campaign only directed to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It cost \$100,000 to produce and \$400,000 to put on the air, and it never went anywhere other than Newfoundland and Labrador. How many libraries could you buy for that \$500,000?

On top of that, they had another previous Population Growth Strategy. They spent \$2 million on an advertising campaign and not a single commercial ever went to air because they didn't like the commercials.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KIRBY: That's true.

They spent \$2 million on advertising for a Population Growth Strategy that went nowhere because when they went up and looked at the ads, they said we don't like these. That's \$2.5 million on advertising for population growth and most of it was never utilized. It goes on and on and on and on.

So I'm willing to sit here and listen to reason. But there are two kinds of ignorance in this world. There's true ignorance and there's wilful ignorance, Mr. Speaker. One of those is people don't know the difference; the other one is when you know the difference and you lead people down another garden path.

I'm sick and tired of listening to this. I'm sick and tired of listening to this despicable and unreasonable language about children with special needs and multigrade classrooms that makes absolutely no sense. We will not stand here and have that sort of thing said here in the

House of Assembly. It is unacceptable in the education system in the 21st century, and those people should know better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I address the comments by the hon. Minister of Education, I want to acknowledge to this House –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: I want to acknowledge to this House our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Fort McMurray, with the evacuation there, and we all know how many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are there, so our thoughts are with those people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Hopefully they'll all be safe.

I now have to respond to the diatribe that I just heard from the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker. What he's just done is added to another approach here to hurt the library system in our province. He's guaranteed he's going to close down a regional library; going against what he stood for, what he said was going to be their philosophy in addressing literacy in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Going to close down the CBS library, a regional library, and the Corner Brook library. So all of a sudden now, all those feeder communities that are around there will no longer have it. That's a threat. He just threatened two municipalities and probably 10 or 15 feeder communities here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: I know what it comes from. He's right; he's sick and tired of hearing from the thousands of people in this province who said he's doing an incompetent job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: The decisions made in this budget are hurting people. They have no vision here. The minister has no concept of what needs to be done. He doesn't understand the school system, doesn't understand the literacy system, has no concept of the library system.

He talks about the library boards. His department and that administration forced the library boards into a corner, gave them five scenarios. Do you know what they had to pick? This was the best of the ones that they were forced to pick, on their forcing, their telling them how they had to cut it, how they had to base it on a formula that was based on clinics in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Not based on the need for literacy, or the impact it had on communities.

That's the vision this minister gave to people. This is about controlling people. It's about making sure people did what he wanted done, not what was in the best interests of the people. We talk about dialogue and inclusion; never happened on his watch, I guarantee you that now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: That's coming out with the hundreds and thousands of emails that he's receiving. There's no doubt he's upset, as he calls it nonsense. You know it's nonsense if it's not in line with his thought process. Maybe the Ph.D. is having a little hindrance on his thought process, of what's right from wrong. That's becoming the issue here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: That's becoming the issue. The time he got back – and I've got a number of letters here and emails we'll talk about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: That's right. We've heard that. He knows what's best. It's time he walked into some schools and saw exactly what blended classrooms are going to do, what the teaching process, what the allocations – talk to your teachers. Come to some of the public meetings and explain to them it's not going to have an impact on the students here.

He talks about all the good things that are going to go on. He hasn't done any of them yet. As a matter of fact, he's done a hindrance here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I want to address the issues that were just brought up by the minister. There's no vision here about how we address education in this province. There's no vision about how we support young people. There's definitely no vision about how we support our education system, our teachers and our administrators.

All the decisions here are around closing schools, about not moving forward with schools, about caps on teaching, about blending classrooms. It's an embarrassment to think we're going to be able to move this province forward. This is about a stronger tomorrow? It's an embarrassment to the people of this province. As a matter of fact, it's an outrage. That's what we're hearing from people, from administrators, from school councils, from the NLTA, from the general citizens.

People who don't even have a connection with the school system feel that this direction is going in the wrong direction. It's because there's no thought process here. There's no inclusion, there's no vision, and there's definitely been no consultation. That's reflective in the letters we receive from teachers, the letters we've received from the NLTA, the notes and that we're receiving from students.

I'm getting notes from seven- and eight-year-old students saying they don't want their education to be hindered. They don't want to be separated from their friends. They don't want to not have access to programs and services, in French programs, recreation programs and all the things relevant within their school system. It shows about not having any vision.

The only thing that the administration on the other side is worried about is the bottom line. Unfortunately, they don't have enough vision to understand if the bottom line is not supported by the proper programs and services, the bottom line gets worse. That's what we're seeing. The economists are saying it. The bond-rating agencies are saying it. The general public is saying it. Their calculator, as they look at it – maybe they're not smart enough to catch on because God forbid, we know we're not smart enough over here the way it's been explained to us. But we know the people in this province are the ones who are going to be affected by exactly what's being offered over there.

We talk about the education system. Let's get back to it. Let's talk about our libraries here. This is the same minister who said closing 54 libraries that are based on the principle of offering programs and services that improve literacy in this province will not have an effect on literacy.

Based on what principle, based on what experiences? Based on what he's seen in this world because nobody in the library world has seen it. Nobody in the education work has seen it. I can't find any reports that show that. But he has the definition and he has the vision to be able to say: We can cut them. It won't have an impact. They can travel 30 minutes one way and 30 minutes back another way, that's if they don't live on an island.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Now, if they live on an island, don't forget it's a lot different. If they live on an island they have to find another way to get somewhere.

We have e-books. Don't worry about e-books because we don't have broadband.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: People don't have computers. They can't afford it, but don't worry about it. They'll come up with another way to read. Don't worry about it, they'll go to a bookstore and buy them somewhere if they can get off their island, get out of their community and pay their extra 10 or 15 per cent. That's if the bookstores are still open because the added levies and all the added taxes imposed on them, they're going to say maybe it's not even viable to even have a neighbourhood bookstore.

I went to the protest last week by the publishers and the book owners. A lot of these work on very small margins. A lot of these are in small hideaway closets where they can provide a service, where people can come in and read, purchase their books and then exchange books along the way. That will be eliminated too.

So we've eliminated 54 libraries. We're going to put tax on books that people can't afford. We haven't invested anything in broadband or any other access for those rural communities that don't have the e-book access that's going to save our literacy process. They eliminated all of that. Some of these small businesses now are going to have to close. So we don't have that ability to do it.

We've got a number of our own cultural writers who are saying this will kill their business. The publishing business is saying it's going to kill them. They're not going to be able to put out things. They put out things at cost, at times, for agencies that are at a loss to ensure that our information gets out there and that people have books and they have journals and these types of things to read so that the information is shared. We're going to get rid of all that and that's still going to improve literacy.

That's the vision we have of this minister and this administration over here. That's how we're going to improve literacy. That's how we're going to make sure the next generation has more access to education and have a better ability to

move technology forward because we're going to cut all these things.

We haven't got to the mainstream school system. We're going to bring in all-day kindergarten, even though everybody – every parent, every school council – says delay it. It's a great concept, we like it, but it's not the right time. We cannot afford to do it now at the expense of the mainstream school system, the one to 12.

The vision would be to say you're right, let's hold back on it. Let's do what's in the best interests of the existing students we have there. We can still work within the kindergarten process to ensure there's a better way for them to get play-based learning and other ways to be able to engage better literacy for them.

But, no, let's not do that. Let's put up cap sizes. Let's add additional work on teachers. Let's do blended classrooms. Let's change our busing system so kids can't get to school on their right time. Parents can't figure how they're going to do it. Their after-school programs won't exist. Senior kids in one school, because they are going to be an hour later, will not be able to mentor kids in another school.

All these things are going to enhance our literacy. With all those positive things I can't wait to see what the next generation is going to be like when it comes to their literacy abilities and their ability to move this province forward. We're in trouble now; it's frightening what it will be like in a generation or two if we let this administration move forward on the blunders they're making around the education system.

It's lost on people who understand the system how a minister can get up and scream and bawl, and try to shake with one hand and punch with another hand on groups because they didn't engage, they didn't ask the best way to do it. They didn't say how can we best save money here to improve our system over there. They didn't bother. They didn't bother to engage. They didn't engage the NLTA. They didn't engage the library boards. They came in and said here. Here are five scenarios; you pick the best of the worst ones because that's what you are going to have to do as part of it. No engagement

there, no process and no thought process about it.

They talked about here's our vision. Our vision is going to be about improving the province. Not one program, not one initiative improves this province. There is no doubt in the budget there are a few status quos. A great testament there, keep doing those things. But the cuts that are coming to the other programs are going to be more detrimental to the ones that they're supporting now. That's where there is no vision here, no concept of where this is going to move as we move forward.

I want to talk about – I've said this a number of times, this is an attack on young people, particularly around education. It's also an attack on young people when it comes to inclusion and their cost for things down the road.

Just talk about a few things here that we're cutting out as an administration. They're cutting out the Jumpstart program; \$350,000. People may not realize – in some cases that seems like a lot of money, some it doesn't. In this case, it's a lot of money for the return you're getting on the investment; \$350,000 going to young people. Five thousand young people are availing of that, to be active in social, recreation and sports programs. It leverages three times as much money into that program. That's money that goes back into those communities. It goes back into your local arena. It goes back into your minor hockey and figure skating. It goes back into actually creating jobs.

For \$350,000 you're getting a million-plus in direct revenue. You're getting 5,000 to 6,000 young people active, after-school programs, engaged in sports, engaged in being a good active citizen, being mentors, being volunteers. There is the vision here. This was an exercise with a calculator, let's start cutting where we need to cut.

Let's talk about some of the other things that they've talked about when it comes to youth: implementing full student loans. The hon. Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi mentioned it earlier. We know what the students' unions have said about this. It makes absolutely no sense.

We fought so hard to get to a point where now we have access for students to minimize their debt and actually be able to be more engaged in their education system. We've moved that backwards again. We're progressively, as I read all these, going backwards. We've just seen the vision from the Minister of Education. It's all about going backwards in the education system.

"Reduce number of placements in the Linkages Program." For those who don't understand the importance of the Linkages Program, it's about those young people who have had some challenges in their life, be it academic, be it social, be it physical, be it mental health issues, an opportunity to get back in a workplace with some extra supports to get an understanding of what kind of careers they'd like to choose and how they'd like to go, with the supports of mentors and, in a lot of cases, community and community organizations. We've cut that, a small group of people, the most vulnerable group.

The minister talks about the vulnerable group. These are the ones they're cutting. There's no vision here to help people. We won't even get into levies and that stuff because that's in a big general context. That's going to affect everybody. We're talking direct hits on people here.

Who sat down and made these decisions and said, look, there are 25 young people from all over this province – it could be from the Englees of the world, it could be from Twillingate, it could be from Bell Island – who are not going to have access to these programs and services. Even though we know they could be productive citizens if we gave them an opportunity. It's not good enough; don't see it as a good investment.

"Discontinue the www.JobsinNL.ca website." We'll read a letter there later from the library board that talks about it. Even with that jobs site gone, they were offsetting some of that. That was going to be a hindrance because people were using it. It was a benefit to people. It was a benefit to people who were looking for jobs. It was a benefit to employers making that connection. So the libraries board was going to connect it. That's gone again now.

Again, it's about being regressive, not progressive. That's what this whole budget is about, it's a regressive budget. It's by no stretch a progress of one. It does more damage to every part of society than anybody can even imagine. We haven't even seen the tip of the iceberg. Tell you what's coming in the next three to four months, then we'll really see what state we're in here.

"Reduce and then eliminate funding for post-secondary scholarships." Minimum amounts of money, but it was good incentives for people. It gave people an opportunity to be able to further their education.

"Eliminate apprenticeship scholarships." There was no vision there around what that meant to the people in this province and the young people.

"Reduce funding for youth and student services." The federation of students, these are things they provide with their supports, things that they enhance, things that people have access to, but not good enough to put in. Nickel-and-dime money we're talking in what we're saving.

"Reduce operational grant to Memorial University." It's going to have an unbelievable impact on everyone. The same student who's going to get hit with all these other cuts are now going to have to incur additional costs in the university system.

I can't wait to see what's coming for CNA. I dread what's coming with CNA because I see there's no vision around that process either.

"Eliminate the transportation benefit under the Child Care Services Subsidy Program." Again, another program that benefits young people and it's going to have an impact on those who care for young people.

Increase class size caps; we talked about that. We know everybody – just wait, the onslaught is starting. It starts tomorrow with the public meetings.

Every jurisdiction, every school council are having it, because not one of them can find in any way, shape or form how – not even how it enhances the education system, but how it

doesn't put it back two generations. That's what we're talking about now, the education going backwards. Not because of the skill set of our teachers, who are the best in the world, or the administrators, who have a great way to put things together and training and all the things that we do, or the school councils who support it or the communities itself. It's about not putting the right assets in place and putting people back when there's a process in place that works. It may need to be enhanced in other ways. There may be, obviously, new ways to move things forward, but this is regressive, putting things back a generation or more.

Implementing the combined-grade combinations; as we've talked about. It's a major issue, a major drawback. Nobody can see the benefits of it. I've got testimonials from teachers who taught in other provinces and see no benefit from it. They don't understand the process, no longer in the school system, out of the school system, no vested interest. The vested interest that we're missing on that side is the betterment of the students in this province. It's not happening here.

"Limit provision of intensive core french through reduction in teaching services budget." We're trying to integrate French society here. So we're making people more aware of bilingualism and more access to opportunities. We're cutting all these services. It's not good enough. It's not good enough if we want to make the next generation, the young people who are going to take over this province and guide us to the next century and have the skill set to be able to do it, but particularly have the resources to be able to do it.

Let's talk about some of the other things that have gone on in this administration over the last period of time. Let's talk about the levies. We all know where that's going now. We all know the backlash on that. We all know the impact it's going to have on people. Let's talk about all the other increases that are going to be incurred.

Let's talk about some of the things that are hidden. When we talk about all the other add-on fees that have been noted by this department or this government and are going to be impacted particularly on young people, I think you missed this. I added up here 35 additional fees

connected to the trades or education in other ways.

We're talking about \$2,000 being added to an institution who wants to start offering ABE programs. Who do you think is going to end up having to pick that up? That's going to be passed on to clients, to the students who may not be able to afford to do that now with all these added costs. They're unbelievable the numbers that are here, from a journeyman who wants to go in now, particularly with our system now, or an apprentice to try to get a copy of their marks to try to do one of the testings. The trade qualifier exam has gone up 40 per cent. Every one of these fees is gone up.

If you're in a particular category, particularly most young people who are coming in this, you might as well add on another 10 or 20 per cent of your income having to go for any one of these added fees here. Again, there's no vision. This was added up. If you sat down and looked at it, there are segments in our society. They're the working poor, they're the low income and they're the middle class who will be hit 10, 15, 20, 25 times.

I mentioned last week when I spoke, one of my constituents, 28 different hikes he's going to have to incur just to maintain what he's doing on a middle income here. These are the things we're doing. This is the vision that this administration has here.

If you go to build a house, it's not just the HST that's going to be added to it and the other costs, but all the other things. All the different permits now, the changes in fees. These are all hidden fees. They're out there, but people don't realize it because they are so caught up with the bigger hits that they are going to take. They're not going to realize, depending on what you do, you're going to be hit again. The problem is people are not going to do a lot of it.

So what's this going to do? It's going to stifle the economy again because people will not invest. They will not invest because they won't be able to afford to invest. They'll put it off and our economy will get worse and worse.

It's unfortunate that when you're elected to government, particularly in the administration

that was elected on all these promises, their glorious promises, I said it here in this House, I looked at the red book. If they had formed the government, which they did, I came in here after getting elected and was looking forward to them telling us how they were going to do all this. It was amazing. All these great things they could promise. How they were going to deliver on them. How they were the right things. It was going to make a stronger tomorrow. They had a plan. It was going to be a great plan. We'd all be happy. We'd bow down and say, wonderful job; a wonderful job for what you've done.

Well, I can guarantee you, in the last three weeks we haven't seen a plan. Nobody has seen it. I guarantee you the 20,000 people who've signed petitions, the 20,000 people who've sent emails, the thousands of people who've been on open line shows and making noted to everybody about what's wrong with this administration, I guarantee you are not looking at a stronger tomorrow and don't see any vision that this administration has put forward. Particularly, anybody connected to our education system.

It is appalling what's being said. Sometimes it's actually embarrassing because they realize now there's absolutely no vision. The leadership from the Minister of Education is embarrassing. There's no way it's going to move anything forward. There's not one good thing I'm hearing about our education system when it comes to changes being made by this administration right now. I can't find one person, I can't check one of my emails that will say that, even the people who supported that administration, who signed for it.

I've had people tell me, I voted Liberal in the last election. I'm an administrator with a hospital. I now regret what I did, but I was sucked into what exactly they were saying and I thought they had a vision for it. I wasn't sold on what your administration had done in the past but I figured they had a better vision. They'd do something different. They did something different already, I guarantee you, they put us back another generation. If we continue to let them do this, we're going to go back further and further.

Mr. Speaker, I guarantee you, I will be standing up many more times being vocal on this. I

guarantee you that I'll be fighting for education. I'll be fighting for our libraries, fighting for our AES offices and all the other things that are important to the people of this province. I guarantee you, I will be voting no on this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I recognize the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island in his opening remarks made reference to Fort McMurray. We're just learning – we still don't know the details of that, but I'm sure that all Members of the House share in our concern. I don't think there's a Member in the House who doesn't know somebody living in Fort McMurray.

There are a lot of people from our province living there. We have family and friends there, so obviously we share concern. Our thoughts are with them. We're very concerned. I will give a brief moment for somebody from each of the parties, if you wish, to recognize what's happening in Fort McMurray because of the very strong connection to this province.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Obviously, I don't have anything prepared; this is all happening very suddenly. I think many of us here in this House tonight, as we sit here, are also getting messages on our BlackBerrys and on our computers, messages from our constituents and our friends and our family who again – and as you said, I don't say there is anybody in this House or in this province that doesn't have some kind of a connection, whether it's a direct family member or a friend or somebody from their community that is in Fort McMurray or in that area this evening. You only have to look at social media, look at a website, look at TV right now to see the absolute devastation that is going on there.

I think it's only fitting that we here as the representatives of all the individuals, all the

people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but not only that we are, in many cases, the representatives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians all over the country and all over the world – that is who we think about all the time; we all have that connection.

I'd like to think that our prayers are with those out there. We know that we are in contact with our federal members to see what is going on there. We know that we are speaking to our friends and our family to see what's being done and to pass on whatever information we can get. Again, I know that the Minister Responsible for Forestry has been in consultation with the province as well. I'm sure there will be more information released as soon as we can get it there. I know the minister is keeping on top of that and I look forward to hearing what resources and what we can do from this province to aid in Fort McMurray right now.

Again, on behalf of the Members on this side, but I think all of us, I'd like to think that our prayers are with them. Let's hope for favourable weather to help us with this. Let's hope for safety for our firefighters out there and for our people out there, hope for the best and, again, hopefully we'll get some positive news as we reach tomorrow morning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate you recognizing the situation we have in Fort McMurray, Alberta. I certainly share with the Government House Leader and some of his concerns. We, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, have a strong attachment, obviously, to working elsewhere in the country and that connection is strong with the Province of Alberta. Fort McMurray is often referred to as a second home for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in many cases.

We, too, in the Official Opposition hope the very best for the people of Alberta in the Fort McMurray region in this time of need and difficulty and our hopes and prayers are with the

people there, the families. I acknowledge the words of the Government House Leader when he mentions that the officials from our government have been in touch with those in Alberta. I know if there's something we can do, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, as the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to assist them through this difficult time, no doubt we will do that, as we're known to do in our history and in any difficult times in the past, not only here in Newfoundland and Labrador but in Alberta.

Again, as the night goes on and into tomorrow, we hope to hear good news in regard to this tragedy coming under control and people being able to return back to their homes. Again, on this side of the House, we wish the very best to the people of Fort McMurray, for the emergency responders and those people that are there and the work they do. We certainly wish them well in the work they do, and wish the best to the people of Fort McMurray.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for bringing the attention to it in the House tonight.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to echo what my colleagues have said on both sides of the House. It is my hope as well that perhaps government can reach out and offer a phone number where people from the province can get reliable information, timely information, because I'm sure it's going to be difficult for some of them to be able to reach their families.

Also, I'm sure that a number of the first responders are also people from Newfoundland and Labrador, so we thank them for their commitment and their help in this really, really difficult situation. I'm happy that our government is reaching out to the Province of Alberta. It is my hope as well that as a province we would reach out and offer whatever help we can, even from a great distance, if there's anything in particular that we can do to extend our help. We are all carrying people in our hearts and family members in our hearts,

because I know many of us have family members there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My thoughts, too, are with the people of Fort McMurray. My only living sibling is in Fort McMurray, my sister. Many here on my team have met her. My beautiful niece and nephew are in Fort McMurray. I have not been able to make contact with her yet this evening, so that's very unnerving. Hopefully when I sit down – and she's a survivor and I'm sure she's somewhere okay. My sister went to Fort McMurray, 36 years old and an extremely successful business person out there.

I'm going to talk a little bit about our province and where we are right now and where we hope to go because she, like many others in the province, left 16 years ago with one goal, she wants to come home. Mr. Speaker, if we had not taken some action right now, those people that moved away, they would not have a place to come home to in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It's my first time on my feet. I spoke to a PMR in the past, but it's my first time to speak since the election. So it's an opportunity, never too late, to thank the people that put you there. The people of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair gave me a mandate when I went in in a by-election in 2013 and sent me back with a very strong mandate, Mr. Speaker, again in November, one that I take very seriously.

We've been accused – I sit here and I listened over the last number of weeks. I listen to Members try to provoke us and say where's your voice for rural, speak up for your people, and you promised all these things and you didn't deliver. Well I say, Mr. Speaker, to Members opposite and to whoever is watching tonight on television that when I knock on people's doors – and I've done it three times now – I promise one thing and that's to work hard on their behalf. I will continue to do that.

It's tough times right now. The Member of the Third Party got up tonight and talked about the budget: cut, cut, cut. All she can hear is cut, cut, cut. Well, Mr. Speaker, when you've had a decade of spend, spend, spend, at some point you have to reign that in.

As we've listened to the budget and as we've gone through the last two or three trying weeks, I've reflected on my own household and how we manage our own household. We all have a certain amount of money coming in, Mr. Speaker, and if you just spend needlessly running up the credit cards and taking out loans wherever you can get them, sooner or later that all comes to a head. If you don't take action, you stand to lose everything that you have.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.7 billion; somebody said – and the Opposition often accuse us of the blame game, oh, you're looking back and you're blaming us. You have to look back. You have to learn lessons from the past. Somebody said if you don't know where you came from, you won't know where you're going. I think we all know the mess that we are climbing out of right now.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of new Members here. I haven't been around a long time myself but, in 2013, when I came in, it was when I was continuously getting feedback on Muskrat Falls. A lot of concerning things around Muskrat Falls: contracts coming and going, money coming and going, nobody with a handle on anything. We knew that it could not last. We knew that we would find ourselves in a place where we would be in trouble financially, like we are today. A province of just over 500,000 people, you cannot spend millions a day – completely mismanaged, nobody with a handle on it.

I'm going to take you back for a moment to the beginning. I wasn't here for Bill 29, but I certainly, like many others around the province, heard lots about it. I've got to go back there tonight, Mr. Speaker, for a moment before I can move on.

When they decided they were going to plow ahead with Muskrat Falls, the PUB and the Joint Review Panel, the only two independent groups that were going to look at this and see if it was in fact the least-cost option, they were denied the

right to do the review. The UARB in Nova Scotia had the luxury of a full review and made their choices, but here in this province we did not have the luxury.

What did they do? They brought in Bill 29. It caught national attention as the most draconian piece of legislation to ever enter the Legislature. They brought down Bill 29, they voted it in, they covered everything up, rammed it through, sanctioned the project and here we are today billions and billions in debt.

By the time this new government, a Liberal government, took the reins on the 30th of November, Mr. Speaker, now choices have to be made around that project as well. We have already spent – we're committed to \$6.6 billion. It is a lot of money in a small province and, yes, we do need power. So I'm very happy with recent changes that have happened. I'm happy with the work the Finance Minister has done around this. I've heard nothing but positive feedback on Mr. Stan Marshall at the helm, and I believe that whatever in the coming weeks comes out around the Muskrat Falls piece is what will be the best and the most fiscally prudent for Newfoundland and Labrador as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Opposition has to get up and ask questions. That's democracy and that's important, but I'll tell you I cannot believe day after day the questions they get up and ask when they got us where we are today in this mess of a \$2.7 billion deficit.

The stories that come out continue to astound me; \$500,000 for two libraries, Mr. Speaker, and then they can stand up over there – over the last number of days I've heard, what about rural, where are the people that's standing up for rural. Half of them over there wouldn't know rural if it smacked them between the two eyes, but all of a sudden now they're concerned about rural.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: I'll tell you what's rural, Mr. Speaker. Rural is when I get on a plane every Thursday night or Friday morning and I fly for three hours into Goose Bay and then I get on a road for 420 kilometres. And I guarantee you it's not very good this time of year when

you're in the middle of spring thaw, when you're up and you're striking the bottom of your vehicle and you have your two hands on the wheel. After a 4½ drive, I get to my destination in beautiful coastal Labrador, and that's rural, Mr. Speaker.

When you hear people out in the media saying they're 27,000 people and do we really need to be putting all that money in for a Trans-Labrador Highway, I say, Mr. Speaker, come up with me some weekend, come up and after your drive you tell me if you think that road needs to be completed. I took the Minister of Education up there in February. I don't know if he is over it yet, to tell you the truth, four or five hours on an ice road, Mr. Speaker.

That road is not just for the people of Labrador. That is a link that connects from the Island and right down through –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: – the main artery of Labrador and into Quebec. So I'm going to be touching on things in this budget and, for sure, I'm going to run out of time, I always do, but I'm going to be touching on positive things. So while I'm talking about the Trans-Labrador Highway, this budget that we brought down was a tough budget, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing from our constituents. We're hearing from people around the province about the tough budget. Tough choices had to be made.

But, Mr. Speaker, I was elated that the Cabinet that sat at the table and deliberated, and Premier Ball, even during this tough time, they did put \$63.7 million aside for the Trans-Labrador Highway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, \$63.7 million; that is going to be used to leverage federal funds to match. They recognize that there has been a disconnect from the Island to Labrador. We are a long time getting to where we need to be, but I am encouraged in tough, tough economic times when I see commitments like this.

Another part of my road, 40-year-old pavement in the Labrador Straits, Route 510, from L'Anse au Clair, the southern part of my border, down to Red Bay. Many, many times I stood on my feet and I petitioned in the House of Assembly. Mr. Speaker, I was so frustrated that just before Good Friday one year, I was just thinking someone is going to be killed, someone is going to lose a life, and I actually said whose hands over there is the blood going to be on of the person that gets killed – strong language, Mr. Speaker, that's the pressure I was feeling. I was driving the road every day, 40-year-old pavement. Somebody alluded to it tonight. Districts were getting new pavement put on good pavement when we were fighting still in some places for our first.

I'm delighted that the Minister of Transportation and Works – I know I drove him a bit crazy since December, but when the budget came down, he delivered. He had a lot of tough choices to make. Mr. Speaker, I brought him up in January. He saw first-hand how bad the road was. He saw that it was a safety issue. He's made it a priority. He gave provincial funds to that and I thank him very much for being fair, for taking the politics out of pavement –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: – and, Mr. Speaker, he's also put requests forward to leverage federal funds. So I say to the good people of the Labrador Straits that the start of the upgrade of your road is coming, it's started and I want to thank the Minister of Transportation for that.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a background of – I spent a lot of years in municipal politics. As deputy mayor, I had the privilege to represent all of the communities in Labrador on the provincial municipalities board. I know the challenges that these small towns are dealing with. These councillors that volunteer give of their time, endless hours, because they want to play a little role in making the place that they live and they call home better.

It's not always easy, Mr. Speaker, when you have aging demographics, you have seniors on a fixed income. So you only have so much revenue coming in, then you have to make choices and you have your expenses. A lot of

times you have to make decisions, like maybe to cut off someone's water. In a small town – I always say because we usually get our groceries on Saturday night in these small communities – you have to line up and get your groceries Saturday night perhaps with the person in the lineup ahead of you that you had to disconnect their water because they couldn't pay.

Mr. Speaker, these small communities have a lot of needs, a lot of infrastructure needs. There are still communities where seniors don't have good drinking water. There are sewer issues. I'm delighted that again in these tough economic times the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the budget stayed the same: \$22 million for Municipal Operating Grants. I know that many communities in my district especially that have capital works applications submitted are anticipating getting some projects. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs have also put in requests to Ottawa and he is going to leverage federal funds where he can.

Also, I want to mention the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and the Seniors' Benefit. We talked about the aging demographics in this province. By 2025, one in every four people will be a senior. Mr. Speaker, that's going to bring its own set of unique challenges to this whole province with all of these people that are aging. It also means that there are all of these people now that are on a fixed income.

Mr. Speaker, when we took government in November and we actually learned of the staggering deficit, we were at a place where when you are tittering on bankruptcy, when the people on Wall Street that lend this province money, when they're saying we have to change you from stable to trending negative, tough choices have to be made. But what happens if there is no action taken?

I don't know if this message has gotten out to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador the way it should. What happens when no action is taken? You throw your hands up in the air and you say we can no longer govern our own province. We have no money to provide services in our own province and then another province takes over or the Government of Canada takes over and we cannot govern.

I say that would be an extremely sad day for Newfoundland and Labrador. When we look at the accumulated debt of around \$11 million, how it took us 66 years to get there but in the next five or six or seven that would double, that staggers my mind, those figures.

While tough choices had to be made around this budget, it was imperative, it was incumbent – I think somebody said they would rather be here one term and do the right thing than to be here for longer doing the wrong things.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, they can stand on the other side and say where are you, why aren't you standing up and voting no against this budget. Don't you care about the people? Well, I want to say tonight, Mr. Speaker, and I'm getting to know a lot of my colleagues, a lot of them are new, but these are first-class people that stepped up because they care about the districts that they represent.

They knocked on doors and they asked people to give them their support. I see them every single day working hard on behalf of the people that they represent. So don't stand up over there and say vote against this budget and vote against your own government.

Mr. Speaker, we passed a bill tonight, Bill 6, the *Professional Fish Harvesters Act*. I would have loved to have spoken to it. I come from a strong fishing district. I've been in the fishing boat myself too; that's how I started out. That's where I found the good money was when I was a teenager. I had a choice that I could stay in the store coming from a business family and operate the cash register, or I could go jigging in the boat, and that's where the money was back in the good ole day, I say.

I want to use the analogy of a ship, given my background and my history. I still do a lot of boating in the summer. We have a little 35-footer. We go up north, the most beautiful place in the world driving in boat up to the North Coast of Labrador to the Member for Torngat's District.

When we came on this side, we did not cause this problem, but we inherited the problem. I

was thinking about that this morning as I was thinking about speaking. I compared it to a ship. We were going down so fast, Mr. Speaker, you couldn't bail fast enough. That's what happened; you couldn't bail fast enough to get the water out. That's where we were headed as a province and we haven't fully corrected it. We have taken some extreme measures, but all we have done is stabilize the ship. Stabilize the ship because that's how bad it was.

We still have a deficit of \$1.8 billion, Mr. Speaker, in a tiny province.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, \$1.8 billion in a tiny province of 500,000 people, many of which are seniors. I have confidence in the people at the helm. I have confidence in the people that are making the decisions. Tough choices, but the sun will rise again. The ship will become strong again. We will sail into open water again and we will enjoy many more sunny days.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, because tough choices had to be made, around our table we are always thinking about the disadvantaged in society. We are always thinking about those on income support. We are always thinking about the seniors. Many, many times our current Speaker, the Member for – I just forget where he's from –

AN HON. MEMBER: Waterford Valley.

MS. DEMPSTER: – Waterford Valley would stand and speak on behalf of seniors because we care about seniors and we know that they can only stretch their cheque so far. It would concern us when we would hear about seniors in the malls because they couldn't afford to have the heat up in their home.

Mr. Speaker, what did my government do to address some of that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: A couple of initiatives: the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, the new quarterly Income Supplement provides good, supportive measures to soften the impact of tax changes on low-income earners. There's a calculator that's put out.

Many people are calling my office very concerned about the tax increases and all of the fear mongering that they're hearing. Once we explain to them, once we find out what their income is and we explain, most of the ones that we have talked to are actually going to be financially better off. In addition to the new Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement that's going to be paid out quarterly – and I might add, Mr. Speaker, eligible residents will not have to fill out any new paperwork or navigate their way through red tape. So that was a big relief for them. If they file a tax return and their income qualifies, they will automatically receive quarterly payments to offset the tax increases. But in addition to that, we put in place a Seniors' Benefit.

The budget also provides additional support for seniors. With the enhancements to the existing Seniors' Benefit, low-income seniors will be eligible for an added payment that will complement their quarterly payments from the new Income Supplement.

Mr. Speaker, this means that for our seniors there are two separate measures in this budget, two separate measures meant to offset the impact of the tax increases. For the people watching tonight –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: – too, I want to say as well, when they talk about –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: – we've gone and we've hiked the taxes so –

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker has asked for order.

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, they talk about the taxes and how we've hiked everything to death. Actually, what we've done is only gone back to 2006-2007, still very competitive taxes, making us the third most competitive in the country.

I'm running out of time and I had so much more to say. I want to mention the levy and all the talk around the levy. Mr. Speaker, the levy is going to give \$126 million a year. Because of all the wastage and the mismanagement and how badly they bungled, measures had to be taken. But I want to say to the people, 38 per cent of the province will not be paying for the levy, and 43 per cent of those who are paying will be paying less than \$340 a year. This year, Mr. Speaker, that's only half of that – \$170.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: We know that any time you have to make increases people hurt, Mr. Speaker, and we've tried to share it around, but the levy is a temporary measure. I look forward to having other opportunities to talk about all of the wonderful things in my district and what I hope to do going forward for the people that I represent and the legacy that I want to leave for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I would move, seconded by the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Contra-minded?

Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 2 o'clock tomorrow, being Private Members' Day.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2 p.m.