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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I'd like to welcome to our public galleries today two relatives of Mr. Saul Keefe who will be remembered during today's Honour 100 Commemoration. They are Mr. Dean Brinton, great-nephew of Mr. Keefe, and Ms. Marie Keefe from the Speaker's office who is the cousin of Dean Brinton.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Members' statements today are the Members for the Districts of St. John's Centre, Baie Verte – Green Bay, Torngat Mountains, Conception Bay East – Bell Island, Placentia West – Bellevue and Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to stand here today to honour and congratulate activists in our communities who are working hard to change the landscape on mental health.

In St. John's Centre alone, CHANNAL and volunteer-run Better Days are at the forefront of our mental health movement – every day, actively embodying the critical praxis: not about us without us.

And our new Community Coalition For Mental Health is developing a comprehensive plan to implement substantive programs and, equally exciting, begin work with RIAC in assisting refugees.

These advocacy groups remind us: depression will rank second only to heart disease – as the leading cause of disability worldwide by 2020. Recently, lawyer Mark Gruchy spoke movingly to Waterford Valley High students about his own experience with mental illness. He said, “Stigma is about fear, but resiliency comes from being part of a community – you are the community – and you will build the community!”

I thank all these folks who are working on the challenge to build more effective responses and mental health supports. I encourage all residents to raise their voices and GET LOUD for mental health.

Let's all embody the Canadian Mental Health Association's campaign, GET LOUD.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the Northeast Sabres of the Central Newfoundland Hockey League in capturing the championship for the first time since entering the league in 2013.

This year, the league had four teams: the Exploits Blades; the Lewisporte Seahawks; the Twillingate Combines; and the Northeast Sabres.

The Sabres finished the 2015-2016 regular season with five wins, four losses, and three overtime losses, good for second place. They faced the Exploits Blades in the first round of the playoffs and swept the series in three straight. The Combines got past the Seahawks in their playoff round to set up a repeat final from the previous year between the Twillingate Combines and the Sabres.

The Sabres stole the first two games in Twillingate and came back to their home rink, the Tommy Ricketts Arena in Baie Verte, and didn't disappoint the standing room only crowd, turning in a dramatic overtime win to take the championship.

Team members are from all parts of the Baie Verte – Green Bay District. I congratulate Northeast Sabres Coach Lyndon Austin, the players, and all the supportive fans of my district and look forward to next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Susie Merkuratsuk, a young lady from Nain who has proven that miracles do happen.

Over a year ago Susie was diagnosed with TB-induced meningitis. She was medevaced to St. John's where she slipped into a life-threatening coma. During treatment, doctors discovered she was in the early stages of pregnancy.

As first, the doctors were unsure if they'd be able to save Susie's life, let alone see her through a full-term pregnancy. However, despite all odds, Susie fought back. She slowly pulled out of her coma and at first was unable to move due to the damages this serious disease had inflicted on her, but she continued to push herself.

In the last year Susie has managed to regain many of her abilities, and with the help of staff delivered her baby. Her health continues to progress, and although she may never fully recover from the devastation that meningitis inflicted upon her, she was able to return home.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in wishing Susie all the best as he continues to fight back against a dreaded disease that has claimed so many lives. She is truly an inspiration to us all.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today in this hon. House to congratulate a group of volunteers for undertaking a very valuable project. Mr. Speaker, I speak of Radio Bell Island which has operated for the past five years at St. Michael's High on Bell Island.

This asset includes a group of volunteers from the community, an operation manager but, particularly, students from St. Michael's High.

The shows program includes news, interviews, a talk show, call-in song requests, culture, sports and history segments and everything else to catch the ear of the preschooler to the seniors. The station has listeners in all parts of the country, and as far away as France.

While the whole of the community benefits from the operations of the station, there's one group that gains immensely; these being the students of St. Michael's High, who were trained in every aspect of the techniques of broadcasting, from interviewing, to research, to the use of technology.

I am pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that a number of these students who volunteer have shown an interest in a career in the broadcasting industry.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Radio Bell Island on their fifth anniversary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to salute five students and two teachers from Pearce Junior High School who raised an astounding amount of money during the recent Shave for the Brave charity event.

Shave for the Brave participants commit to shaving their heads in a show of solidarity for young adults who are battling cancer. I once participated in it myself and I'm still waiting for it all to grow back.

The participating students were: Claire Broders, Karen Sharpe, Emily Fitzpatrick, Josh Kilfoy and Jonathon Symes. The teachers were Matthew Peddle and Jonathon Hickman.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Claire Broders was the top fundraiser for all of Canada. Her ambitious goal was to raise \$3,000 and she ended up raising over \$5,000, almost half of the school's total. In total, the school raised a total of \$10,284, its highest amount ever.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join with me in thanking the students and teachers,

and countless Canadians who stand in the fight against cancer, and in particular support of young people living with cancer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is with a heavy heart that I stand today to honour the life of five-year-old Quinn Butt. The world was devastated to learn of her tragic death, which occurred in Carbonear on April 24th.

Although her precious life was cut short, her impact continues to be mighty. Those who knew her best say she was wise beyond her years. She loved to dress up, wearing her mom Andrea's high-heeled shoes. She was a ballerina but she also enjoyed playing hockey with her friends.

Quinn's favourite colours were pink and purple. Across the province over the past week, splashes of pink and purple were front and center in her honour. Mourners as far away as Italy donned pink and purple for Quinn and there was a special light show at Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida.

More than 3,000 people came out to light it up at the candlelight vigil in Harbour Grace on Thursday night. Quinn's death is having a significant impact on the lives of others. She is gone, but she will never be forgotten. Quinn has captured the lives of many. Rest in peace little girl.

Colleagues, please honour Quinn Butt and cherish her life.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before we recognize Honour 100, I think it is only fitting that – the private Member's statement today is something that has touched not only everybody in this province, but I think people around the world – we take a moment of silence to keep Quinn in our thoughts and prayers.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. SPEAKER: For Honour 100 today, I recognize the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Lest we forget: Francis Kearsey, Patrick Keating, William Keats, Aloysius Keefe, Saul Keefe, Mack Keepin, James G. Keeping, Solomon Keeping, Stanley Keeping, William Kehoe, Albert Kelly, Daniel Kelly, Francis Kelly, James Joseph Kelly, Michael Francis Kelly, Thomas Joseph Kelly, Edward William Kendall, Michael Francis Kennedy, William Kenney, Martin Patrick Kent, Martin Keough, Robert Kershaw, Aaron King, Alexander King, Arthur King, Ephraim King, George Joseph King, Henry A. King, Jabez William King, John F. King, Joseph Andrew King, William King, William King, William John King, William P. King, Patrick Kirby, William Kirby, George Samuel Knight, Thomas Knight and William Knight.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

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

Today the provincial government has released the transitional rules for the HST rate increase in

Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government knows that this has been a difficult budget for people, but the magnitude of a \$1.8 billion deficit leaves this province in a very serious financial situation and this figure could have been much larger if not for our decisive actions.

Announcing transitional rules as early as possible helps to reduce the level of uncertainty for businesses and consumers and allows businesses sufficient lead time to implement the system changes necessary to implement these rules. The details of the HST transitional rules can be found on the Department of Finance website.

Mr. Speaker, transitional rules are required to determine which tax rate would apply in respect of transactions that straddle the July 1 implementation date. Under these transitional rules, suppliers are generally required to charge the HST at the new rate of 15 per cent on any purchases or considerations that becomes due without having been paid, or is paid without having been received, on or after July 1, 2016 for supplies of taxable property or services. Specific transitional rules will apply to certain real property transactions.

Mr. Speaker, we have to make the right choices. While these choices are not easy ones, they are necessary to put our province back on track.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, many businesses, real estate agents and other sales people would have been familiar with the transitional rules as this was a decision of our government on January 1 to bring in the HST; however, hastily rushed to cancel it by the government today and then flip-flop back and made a part of this budget.

The Premier and Minister of Finance created not only confusion among the business community but also confusion among consumers. What's

more concerning is that in their rash decision to cancel the HST, the Premier and Minister of Finance also lost revenue for this province somewhere in the range of \$100 million. To put that in comparison, Mr. Speaker, that's more than the Liberal levy will generate this year. That certainly could have been avoided.

Mr. Speaker, \$100 million is a lot of money. I wonder how many libraries could have remained open, how many multigrade classrooms could have been prevented, how many current bus routes for kids could have been maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. An unusually complicated message for a Ministerial Statement, I say.

I ask the minister: What is she planning to do to help small businesses understand, prepare and navigate through the new complex transitional rules? It's a great deal of new red tape for a small enterprise. Will government provide training and guidance for administering this new tax? A tax, I remind her, she campaigned on not increasing but did when elected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, when disaster strikes, the time to prepare has already passed. To raise awareness about the importance of being prepared, May 1-7 is nationally recognized as Emergency Preparedness Week. This year's theme is Plan. Prepare. Be Aware.

Mr. Speaker, emergencies can come in the form of floods, fires, hurricanes, ice storms, cold snaps, landslides and we experience all of these. That is why it is so important to be prepared and have a plan. Everyone has a role to play in being

prepared for an emergency and Emergency Preparedness Week encourages residents to take a few simple steps.

Knowing the risks specific to your community and our province can help you prepare. Make a plan so you and your family know what to do. Get an emergency kit so you are prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours in an emergency. For more information and resources I would encourage everyone to visit www.GetPrepared.ca.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this hon. House to take an active role in their community to help build a culture of preparedness. With your help, together we can communicate the importance of emergency preparedness to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the minister for an advance of his statement. We, too, recognize May 1-7 as Emergency Preparedness Week. Mr. Speaker, I'd really like to thank the volunteers in our communities, especially the volunteer fire departments that do so much for municipalities to make sure that they're prepared for any emergencies that can happen in their towns.

I know, as a former mayor, that we work closely with the volunteer fire department in Torbay, making sure that everything was done in our town so that any emergency that took place, we could make sure that people knew where to go to, what was available and stuff like that. It's very important for communities, but it's also very important for us to be prepared in our homes.

There are little things that you can do like make sure that there's water available, make sure you have a flashlight, make sure there are batteries for the flashlight and little things like that –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: – that everybody can be prepared. We never know when an emergency can take place.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. It's good advice that everyone should have a plan in place in the case of an emergency. I encourage everyone to spend a little more time preparing for one with family and/or loved ones. Emergency kits, muster points, contact procedures are all excellent things to agree on ahead of time.

I also suggest government have clear and reliable communication strategies in place. They are so important when a disaster strikes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Forestry and Agrifoods.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to advise the public about forest fire season, which began on May 1 on the Island portion of the province and will begin on May 15 in Labrador. The season ends September 30 on the Island and in Labrador.

Due to the low snowfall this winter, we anticipate early drying conditions. Residents planning to burn brush as part of spring cleanup activities should be aware of how quickly fire can spread beyond their property.

In 2015, 70 fires were caused by residents in Newfoundland and Labrador, the majority during May and June, when many people were burning brush. Some of these fires were preventable.

Reducing the number of human-caused fires is an integral component of our fire prevention program. A permit to burn is required under the *Forestry Act* and can be obtained at no cost at regional or district forest management offices throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, the lighting of fires for cooking and camping does not require a permit, but certain forest fire regulations must be followed. Information on those regulations can be found on the provincial government website at www.faa.gov.nl.ca/forestry.

A toll-free number is available to report forest fires during forest fire season. The number is 1-866-709-FIRE (3473).

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement. When I received it, I kind of hoped he'd come to the House dressed as Smokey the Bear today – and that's an image I haven't been able to get out of my head ever since.

We, too, join with the government in encouraging safe practices among our residents when having fires outdoors, whether it's burning brush, cooking, or simply for recreational purposes.

A vast number of forest fires are due to human error or negligence. Curbing our behaviour and employing a more responsible routine can prevent these instances from happening. We know forest fires can cause significant damage to our environment, our personal property, and may potentially be fatal to those caught in a fire, or to our brave women and men who fight them.

Before having an outdoor fire of any sort, please check the fire index, consult with a local forestry management office, or visit the department's website, as the minister said, but most importantly, use care and common sense. And in

the words of Smokey the Bear: "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires."

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Unnecessary human-caused forest fires do cause too much destruction of our natural habitat and people must learn to be more careful with fire outdoors.

I do thank, though, the dedicated men and women of our many voluntary fire departments who will be called to help professional firefighters combat this season's forest fires. I hope the cutting of \$400,000 from the department's fire suppression and communications budget doesn't impede or make more difficult the work these people do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

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

The Minister of Justice and Public Safety is on the record here in the House of Assembly from his time back in Opposition when from time to time he asked government to expand and improve the Adult Dental Program. He even talked about the importance of considering the dignity of people. However, now the Liberal government has reduced this program significantly, by \$3 million.

Can the Minister of Health clarify exactly what's been eliminated from the Adult Dental Program and what he expects the impacts will be?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

The Adult Dental Program includes Foundation clients; it did before and it will do afterwards. The changes were made to align the Dental Program with that of other jurisdictions. The previous plan had been introduced at a time of plenty, which is now long since passed.

Those clients of plans that were in the process of having work done – prior to the changes – will have their applications processed in due course. Thereafter, the plan is limited to Foundation Plan members.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Well, what we're hearing is that seniors cannot get their dentures. Low-income workers, hard workers of Newfoundland and Labrador will no longer be able to escape pain and suffering. They are left hanging in the wind.

This is a most serious issue, Mr. Speaker. Treatments can expand for several months and people are being dropped without notice. It's caused havoc for patients, but also from dentists who are very concerned about this.

I ask the minister: How can he justify such a decision that has such a significant impact on people who need this very much-needed service?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The changes to the plan have been made to streamline it with other jurisdictions in Canada. Folk who are in need of emergency services, as far as dental work is concerned, will still be covered. That can be done through a separate process.

Those folk who are already in the system, we appreciate they have expectations and those will be honoured, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We know the Members opposite have been focused in the past on the least, last and lowest, but this program was heralded as one of the best in the country and now they're taking this service away from people who need it most.

Mr. Speaker, with the closure of services and health care clinics in rural parts of our province, the government is forcing people, especially those with higher health care needs, to choose between living without services or making very expensive moves to larger centres.

I ask the Premier: Are the cuts to rural Newfoundland and Labrador part of your stronger tomorrow?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the former premier for his question. The cuts that we've seen or the changes that we've seen in rural areas and in particular as a result of the budget actions that have been taken really is part of a stronger tomorrow for Newfoundland and Labrador. It's part of putting in place a better foundation for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

It is part of putting in place a foundation that is sustainable, unlike the previous administration that made decisions not only in health care, but in many other programs that we've seen in our

province like reducing taxes to the highest income earners in our province in 2007. These were not sustainable tax decreases, essentially added up to nearly \$4 billion. Four billion dollars that I would say right now we could use to provide essential health care services in all areas of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, last evening the Minister of Health stood on his feet in this House and said that the enhanced breast screening program was cut by the Liberal government because it was of no benefit to anyone. The response we've received to the minister's statement was overwhelming. Mr. Speaker, 20 per cent of breast cancers are found in women under 50. Wives, mothers, sisters and loved ones are alive today because of early detection. Women should have a choice.

I ask the minister: How can you state that breast cancer screening to women under 50 is of no benefit?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I would just like to correct the Member opposite. I didn't mention anything about enhanced breast screening last night. It is not me that is stating that it is of no benefit to low-risk women under 50. It is the Canadian Task Force on Preventative Health Care.

Their report out in 2011 was available to the previous ministers of health sitting opposite who chose not to act on it. As a result, we have spent money on services which have been of no benefit, created the worried well and denied the opportunity to spend that money in areas where it would be better spent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Well thank goodness for the webcast, Mr. Speaker, and it's travelling around on Facebook. Women in this province who can no longer avail of that early detection breast screening program are very, very upset, Mr. Minister.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: I say to the minister, we know that the Minister of Finance has stated that they will not make decisions based on who shouts the loudest, but I ask Liberal Members to tell that to the cancer survivors who are alive today because of early detection.

I say to the minister: As you rip clinics and health services away and make it harder to see a doctor, how in the world is this not going to have an impact on people's lives?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Member opposite confuses the issue of asymptomatic low-risk individuals who are in a position possibly to benefit from screening, and the evidence shows that that does not occur under the age of 50. The confusion is people who have symptoms or have concerns have free access to primary health care across the province. They can raise those concerns with their primary care provider. They can be assessed clinically and investigated. That has not

changed, nor will that change. We are simply trying to make sure that the health care budget is spent in the most effective way for the benefit of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, many schools are starting to get the true picture of what Liberal choices will mean. Parents are outraged with the reality that classrooms will be combined with two grades in many schools throughout the province. Grades three and four will share a teacher in classroom in many schools; the same goes for fives and sixes.

I ask the minister: How can you justify proceeding with full-day kindergarten at the expense of older children who will now have to merge in combined classrooms?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, it embarrasses me that the Member opposite has so little confidence in the skill of our teachers in this province.

In September, there will be 170 multigrade classrooms in this province, not counting combined grades classrooms and there will be far fewer of them. We have had multigraded classrooms for the 12 years that administration was in power.

Is the Member now suggesting that those teachers who have been teaching in multigrade classrooms all along are not qualified to achieve the educational outcomes in the curriculum? Is that what he's saying? Those 170 teachers this September in multigrade classrooms, is that what you're saying?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is I do have a lack of confidence in the minister to make decisions that will be in the best interest of the children and students of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Will the Minister of Education reconsider delaying implementation of full-day kindergarten? How can you slash and cut teachers and programs from grades one to 12 while spending approximately \$100 million over the next three years on this new program?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, as I said last night here in the House of Assembly at great length, there's quite enough evidence to show that the return on investment in our smallest children is worth it. Plans were well underway. The previous administration introduced this program and planned it for September. If they had such austere concerns about it why didn't they pull the plug on it before they let the train down the track before this government came into office.

We're trying to do what is best for children in Newfoundland and Labrador in early year's education. In many provinces in Canada they have junior kindergarten for four-year-olds. All the other Atlantic provinces have full-day kindergarten. Why does the Member want us to stay behind the rest of the country?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, the return on the Dental Program is a good investment too, but they're not doing that either.

According to the president of the NLTA, schools are being asked, and I quote: place "'good' kids in the multi-grade class & place kids with needs in other class." This is insulting and disgraceful.

Why are school administrators being forced to make these decisions?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, no such communication came from either the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development or either of the two school districts. So I'm not sure where the president of the NLTA is getting that.

The president of the NLTA has also referred to students in combined grades as leftover students. I would never refer to any one child in Newfoundland and Labrador as a leftover. That sort of language is unbecoming of educators; it is unbecoming of our profession.

Our teachers are capable of teaching in multigrade and combined grade classrooms, and that is a fact. The same as teachers in downtown Toronto teach in combined grade classrooms and downtown Edmonton teach in combined grade classrooms. Those are the facts. Let's have a little bit of respect for the profession and clean the language up here, please.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, the Opposition on this side, particularly, respect the education system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: That's why we're responding to the emails we're getting, the concerns we're getting from the leaders in the education system.

Mr. Speaker, as many as 2,400 students will be in multigrade classrooms in September. The NLTA is on record stating this move "will not improve student achievements and will be the cause of poor student outcomes." We know this will increase the workload and stress on teachers.

I ask the minister: Will you put a stop to multigrade classrooms?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, we have had multigrade classrooms in Newfoundland and Labrador since the beginning of Newfoundland and Labrador's schooling system. There were multigrade classrooms, over a hundred of them, in the school system starting last September.

Every year that the previous administration was in power we had somewhere in the order of over 100 multigrade classrooms in Newfoundland and Labrador. So I don't know why the Member all of a sudden wants to change what has been done in the school system for decades and decades and decades.

The combined grades initiative reflects trends in the rest of Canada whereby we are trying to achieve efficiencies in the teacher allocation formula. Our teachers are qualified to do that. We have confidence in that. Why doesn't the Member oppose?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, when the Member was in the Opposition and the critic, he wanted to put education forward, move it forward. What he's now proposing is moving education backward again, Mr. Speaker, not good enough.

I ask the minister: What supports and training will teachers receive to prepare for multi-grade classrooms? What is your plan?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, when I was in Opposition, I was decrying that over a two-year period that previous administration cut no less than 238 teaching positions. That was one of the things I was talking about over there, unlike this

year where we are seeing a reduction of just 73 in comparison.

As I said, I have far more confidence in our teachers than the Member opposite does. Many of our teachers have experience teaching in multi-graded classrooms because we have had hundreds of them over the past decade in this province.

Many of them have received professional development training in the area of differentiated instruction, which is key and crucial to teaching in this area. If there is additional professional development, we will see that it is provided. If there is PD needed, we will have it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, it took us a decade to cut the number of teachers that this minister cut in one budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Yesterday the Minister of Education called a news conference to defend the recent announcements –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: – that 54 libraries would close. Instead of saying that he would listen to the concerns of the public, the Minister of Education blamed the media, saying that these people are not getting the full story. This, just days after the Finance Minister said that the people did not understand the budget.

I ask the Premier: Your ministers are not taking responsibility for any of the budget decisions; will you?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I know that the previous minister of Finance, Mr. Wiseman, had some difficulty with math but now it's obvious that the Member opposite has great difficulty with it as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: He says that over a course of a decade, they didn't cut as many teachers as we did. In 2013, the previous administration cut 160 positions. In 2015, they cut 78 positions. This year the reduction is 73; 160 plus 78 is greater than 73.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. BRAZIL: The Minister of Education said that he encourages people to send him their feedback, but he also said unequivocally that there will no changes made to the budget for education.

I ask the minister: How are you listening if you're not willing to make any changes?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I've spent hours since the budget was released explaining to people the evidence-based decision making that went into this year's budget. We're trying to explain to people, despite all of the sort of overblown, hysterical machinations of the Official Opposition – the Official Opposition likes to take –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: – things and twist them and spin them.

For example, the Member openly admitted he has no idea that we have had hundreds and hundreds of multi-grade classrooms in this province over the course of when they were in Opposition. He's completely ignorant of that fact. He has no idea of the true nature of the teacher reductions that happened by their own administration. I think you first educate yourself on what you did before you try to start telling us what to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I recognize the Member, the constant interruption by certain Members during Question Period is unacceptable.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do realize the minister is getting very defensive, particularly something that is overblown by the NLTA, by the Federation of Students unions, by a multitude of parent groups and organizations here, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the hon. Member: Changes are coming to school busing, changes which will impact 30 schools, 17 communities; 37 less buses will be on our roads, which will result in changes to opening and closing times of schools.

I ask the minister: Can he clarify what is your plan for busing in September?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I've been waiting for this to come up. Under the previous administration there were regulations imposed on the busing industry in this province that increased the cost of purchasing a bus by tens of thousands of dollars. Previously, bus operators were buying buses in the order of \$20,000 and

using them for a small number of years. The previous administration insisted on the purchase of buses to the tune of over \$100,000 per unit. Well, guess who pays for all of that?

Our busing costs have skyrocketed as a result of the poor administration and management of the previous government. Our busing funding has now gone up to close to \$60 million a year because of their decisions. They went in and wrecked it and now we have to pay for it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: So from what I'm hearing here, Mr. Speaker, safety and school bus travel time is not important to that administration over there. Shameful, Mr. Speaker, shameful. No wonder that parents are rightfully concerned.

I ask the minister: Will school-aged children be on the road longer before they arrive in the schools? How does this change reflect the stronger tomorrow for kids that you promised?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the school district has made changes to routes for busing as a result of the skyrocketing cost of busing in this province that was stimulated by changes the previous administration insisted on.

We are spending millions and millions more this year than the previous one on busing contracts that are negotiated with that industry. The school district is trying to grapple with that. As a result, they're doubling up some runs. We do realize that causes some inconvenience for parents and students but we're in a difficult situation and we simply don't have millions of dollars to pay for the errors made by the previous government.

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, Mr. Speaker.

Municipalities have been given a one-year reprieve before libraries are closed.

I ask the minister: How many of the 25 municipalities have been asked to make decisions on future operations of the libraries in their towns?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, this government has come to the realization – in collaboration with the public libraries board – that the libraries we're going to need into the future are far different than the ones that we've needed in the past.

Twenty-five of the libraries in this province that are operated by municipalities, we will have communication in those instances. We will have collaboration with communities. We are hoping that over the course of the next year municipalities will have an opportunity to take on the operations of community libraries, if they choose.

In the meantime, the public libraries board is going to be working on the development of 41 regional libraries to create a more robust service, rather than the withering one that the previous administration resided over.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I wonder is the minister listening, actually listening to the people who use these libraries?

Mr. Speaker, municipalities were pleased to see the funding that we put in place last year remain the same in the budget.

I ask the minister: Are you asking municipalities to spend this funding to keep their libraries open?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question is: Was there ever any request to municipalities to take funding from the MOGs? The answer is absolutely, no.

What we will do, we will deal with municipalities because we know this is a service in a lot of municipalities that a lot of people want in their communities. Municipalities have contacted me already and said: What can we do to help with this? How can we help with these services?

So for the Member to suggest that there's any form of forcing municipalities to take any part of their MOG is absolutely false, absolutely incorrect. It was never discussed by me or any official in our department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, municipalities run their budgets on no deficits at all. So they had the funding allocated. How are they going to pay for it? There's added funding to come here.

Most municipalities are paying for heat and light, cleaning, snow clearing and in some cases, like the Town of Pouch Cove, the town also contributes \$8,200 to an after school program in library hours.

I ask the minister: How can you expect municipalities to pay more when they're already doing their part?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The idea is that over the next year 25 municipally located libraries will have an opportunity to be transferred to the local level. That may be municipalities in some cases may choose to operate them themselves. In other instances that may be local groups, community groups, service groups. We're not sure.

We are ensuring that over the transitional period that individual plans are put in place that respect the individual unique circumstances in our municipalities in our communities and all of the strong ties that we are aware that are associated with these library facilities in communities. None of that is lost on the government, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

What is lost on this government is the amount of money that municipalities will now have to come up with to keep these libraries going. These libraries are important services in rural Newfoundland, and I talked to all the rural MHAs. In rural Newfoundland there are seniors, young people using these services.

How can we expect municipalities that are struggling in rural Newfoundland to come with more money to keep a service that all their residents want?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I find this kind of odd, the fear mongering with the municipalities. Mr. Speaker, fear mongering with the municipalities, giving them some impression that we're going to force them to take on an extra load. This is consultation.

I noticed the Member, Mr. Speaker, hasn't talked about the \$350 million extra for capital works that is going to be in municipalities. He

hasn't talked about the funding ratio that stayed in place. He hasn't talked about how many municipalities – the president of MNL is thanking the government for all the work they've done because rural Newfoundland is going to be stronger with all the money that's going to be put into water and sewer through capital works, through infrastructure. You haven't mentioned anything like that because all he wants to do is fear monger.

Shame on the Member, I say, Mr. Speaker. Let us have the consultation with the Members. Let us have a consultation with the councils. Let's sit down and let's all work together. Let's not be heavy handed like the previous government did with many municipalities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in an April 9 interview the Minister of Finance stated: every decision we make will impact somebody somewhere and probably not in a good way. There are many people who would like to learn the true impacts on the Liberal's tax and fee hikes on our bottom line

I'll say to the minister: Why not develop an online calculator where people of all incomes could determine how the budget impacts them including all taxes, fees and the Liberal levy?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government announced the new online calculator for low-income residents, which is a user-friendly way for determining the approximate benefit that those low-income seniors would receive as part of the Newfoundland and Labrador Income and enhanced Seniors' Benefit that we announced in Budget 2016; \$63.7 million in the new Income Supplement and \$12.7 million in the enhanced Seniors' Benefit.

The tool we launched yesterday will help those low-income residents estimate how much money they will receive quarterly. In addition, online we have also posted how the supplement and the Seniors' Benefit will be paid, and we've also posted information about the temporary deficit levy.

I look forward to another question, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm really happy the minister has started this because the tool, the so-called tool, is supposed to help people – she led us to believe – to figure out whether they were going to be losing or gaining. Well, Mr. Speaker, it does nothing of the sort. All they can figure out is whether or not they're eligible and how much they're going to get.

So I ask the Premier: Where in the calculation do we find the full impact of all the tax and fee changes contained in Budget 2016?

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

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

I look forward to providing the remainder of the answer that I was providing the Member earlier.

Also available online is the information about how the supplement and the Seniors' Benefit will be paid, as well as the information about the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. Including the total increases in taxes payable, outlined in taxable income ranges, as well as the technical information about how the levy will be collected.

As I've said in this House repeatedly since the budget, the new quarterly Income Supplement helps the most vulnerable people in our province by providing very good supportive measures to soften the impact of the tax changes on lower income earners.

Mr. Speaker, I have begged the Opposition to come for briefings, maybe they'll do it now.

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: One of my constituents said today in an email: I'd tell the minister, I know how to read and I can figure it out for myself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, we know how to read and we have figured it out and we've done the math.

I ask the Premier, why he and his government are refusing to be open and transparent about the total cost of Budget 2016 on middle- to low-income people and seniors.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Member opposite with the question, one thing I would like to ask – and get some more information from her and the people that she is talking to. Why is it, Mr. Speaker, that she refuses to use the word, “temporary”? She never uses the word “temporary.” As a matter of fact, all we've heard in this House for the last 2 ½ weeks is about the impact. We have mentioned this as well.

The Member opposite always refuses to talk about the Income Support measures that we have put in place. We've put some of this information online. We're working. It is complex, as you know, because you have to know where the individuals are, where the family would be in terms of the tax tables and tax calculations that impact it.

I ask the Members, all Members in this House, when you're having the discussion, when you're having the dialogue with your constituents, let

them know what other options are available for them as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the minister guaranteed me last week she would put up an online tool so people could get the real facts on how the budget would affect them, I believed her. I thought, great, but her calculator doesn't tell the whole truth. Working families are in shock from how hard they are getting hit by her budget.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will she put up a real online tool that shows the real facts of budget impacts of the extra fees, taxes, cuts and her levy on her working people, a real calculator with the real facts?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the information we have posted on the Finance website and the government website provides all of the details. I can assure the people of this House that the 31 Members on this side, I'm sure like the Members opposite, are answering questions from their constituents on a daily basis.

It would be certainly helpful if the Members opposite would agree – and agree to sit down and have a discussion so they can have the same information for their constituents that our Members on this side have for theirs. If the Member opposite would like to do that, I can make that arrangement this afternoon.

I can assure the Member opposite that the circumstances in our province today require very difficult choices. We know these are difficult for the people of the province, Mr. Speaker. We understand that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, when I said this budget was hurting poor people in my district, the minister said I was fear mongering. That's their favourite word this week. The facts are the facts; a person earning \$25,000, even with the Income Supplement will be almost a thousand dollars in the hole with all the extra fees, taxes, losses and the levy.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – Why is she denying how this budget hurts the working poor?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the House that this is going to work both ways. I'm going to reset the clock for the Member for St. John's Centre. I'm asking for order.

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, last week when I said this budget was hurting poor people in my district, the minister said I was fear mongering, but the facts are the facts. A person earning \$25,000 – even with the Income Supplement – will be almost \$1,000 in the hole with all the extra fees, taxes, losses and the levy.

I ask the minister: Why is she denying how this budget hurts the working poor?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite also heard in this House last week – a Member from the Opposition say that somebody was going to pay an extra \$1,000 on tax related to insurance.

Mr. Speaker, in the context of that, that individual the Member opposite would have

referred to would have had to own a \$500,000 house, a boat, a car and an RV.

Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite just threw out an example of \$26,000. I would implore her to meet with Finance officials to understand the details between taxable income and non-taxable income so we can get the accurate information into the hands of her constituents, as well as the constituents on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

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

Yesterday, in the House during Question Period, the Member for St. John's Centre asked this particular question. She wanted to know, I quote: "Mr. Speaker, the minister has put \$20 million into a special pot of funding to dole out instead of keeping much needed libraries, schools and dialysis units open." She asked: "Is the \$20 million a slush fund for the Minister of Finance to do as she sees fit?"

Mr. Speaker, I am here to table today the background information for that line item in the Estimates. As this document will show, this \$20 million was for federal infrastructure initiatives, to leverage federal infrastructure initiatives that will be used to ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador has the ability to access new federal funding such as the social infrastructure

programs announced in the federal budget in 2016-17.

Program details are now being provided by the federal government in several areas, such as the new federal program for post-secondary infrastructure through the new federal strategic infrastructure fund, and details of the new clean water wastewater program.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue those are not slush fund items and I resent the fact that that was the way the Member yesterday posed her question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Pursuant to section 8 and section 10 of the *Public Tender Act*, I hereby table the report of the *Public Tender Act* exemptions for March 2016, as presented by the chief operating officer of the Government Purchasing Agency.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

It must be my younger legs, Mr. Speaker; that's all I can say.

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

WHEREAS the Deficit Reduction Levy is an extremely regressive surtax, placing a higher tax burden on low- and middle-income taxpayers; and

WHEREAS surtaxes are typically levied on the highest income earners only as currently demonstrated in other provinces, as well as Australia, Norway and other countries; and

WHEREAS government states in the 2016 provincial budget that the personal income tax schedule needs to be revised and promises to do so;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure that the Deficit Reduction Levy be eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin immediately to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am happy once again to bring this petition forward. The one I have in my hand today includes people from St. John's, from Portugal Cove, from Gambo – quite a number from Gambo – from Mount Pearl, Hare Bay and they keep coming in. People are concerned all over the province. I wish this government would listen to what people are saying, get rid of this levy which is going to be a real burden on people and let people focus on the real issues that need to be focused on.

People continue to send in their reactions to us and I have in my hands today an email from a 69-year-old retired woman saying: “Thank you for absolutely nothing.” She is talking about the levy, the head tax she’s calling it. “I planned my retirement so that I would have no outstanding bills and to have my senior years affordable – nothing fancy – no big house; no big SUV gas-guzzler; I’m not interested in travelling (did that years ago). I just wanted some peace after working 47 years. You’ve taken that away. So I’m thinking the best thing to do is to ‘take myself away from this hole’ ” – that’s her word – “and the shortmindedness of governments here ...”

Mr. Speaker, these are the strong words that we’re getting from people all over the province,

the people who are signing this petition, the people who know what the impact on them is going to be; senior citizens, retirees like this woman who lives from month to month on fixed income. They plan their budgets very, very closely, as this woman said. She did her travelling when she was making money. I will be happy to bring their voice continually to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mount Pearl North, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Mount Pearl North, my fault.

MR. KENT: Thank you.

I am rising to raise a petition on behalf of residents of St. John’s and Mount Pearl, actually, today. This petition is signed by residents of St. John’s.

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

WHEREAS an extension is urgently needed at St. Peter’s Primary school in Mount Pearl in order to accommodate full-day kindergarten and the growing school population;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to clarify its position and plan so that St. Peter’s Primary and other schools in Newfoundland and Labrador can properly accommodate students when full-day kindergarten commences in September 2016.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to have an opportunity to raise concerns on behalf of parents and families of St. Peter's Primary, both in St. John's and Mount Pearl once again. I'm pleased to say that recently I did have some discussions with officials from the English School District, and was able to express a number of concerns and make some constructive suggestions on behalf of parents and others in the community as well.

Despite the fact our extension won't be ready for this fall or even next fall – it will be ready for September 2018, I'm assured – there are things we can do to make the best of a bad situation over the next couple of years. That's what I'm calling upon on behalf of my constituents, calling upon government and the school district to do just that.

For instance, we have a situation currently, but this September it gets even worse. We have an overcrowded school in Mount Pearl – significantly overcrowded – where there's going to be a couple of modular classrooms added, there's going to be four classes where team teaching is taking place, yet down the road at Mary Queen of the World School – also in Mount Pearl – there will be six empty classrooms in September – six empty classrooms.

So yes, it will cause some disruption, yes, there is a downside to forcing students and families to move and staff to move, but it's unacceptable that we're going to have an overcrowded building with modular classrooms and team teaching while down the road we have a building with six empty classrooms as of September. Both great schools, both with great administration and staff, and I believe there is a solution here, Mr. Speaker.

One suggestion that has been endorsed by many parents is creating a French immersion stream at Mary Queen of the World. It would deal with some of the overcapacity issues at St. Peter's Primary, it would fully utilize that space that's available, and it would take some of the pressure off St. Peter's Primary at the same time.

So I think that's one viable suggestion. If the department or the school district has other suggestions about how to make use of this space and address the overcrowding and space issues

at St. Peter's, then we would welcome those as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS a Deficit Reduction Levy is an extremely regressive surtax, placing a higher tax burden on low- and middle-income taxpayers; and

WHEREAS surtaxes are typically levied on the highest income earners only as currently demonstrated in other provinces, as well as Australia, Norway and other countries; and

WHEREAS government states in the 2016 provincial budget that the personal income tax schedule needs to be revised and promises to do so;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure the Deficit Reduction Levy be eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin immediately to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitions are coming in the office daily and they're coming from all over the province. People are hurting. This budget is hurting working people. Some people, of course, many of us can tighten our belts a little bit and do something about the current fiscal situation we are in, but for some people the budget is actually hurting them. They do not have any notches left in their belt to tighten.

The minister keeps talking about her Income Supplement – the Income Supplement is a good idea, Mr. Speaker, but what she needs to do is she needs to look at the LICO. She needs to look at the Low Income Cut-Off, how many people – I don't know if she's even realized how many people she's actually pushing into poverty by the regressive nature of the budget and the regressive nature of the taxes that she's done.

Instead, she should be looking at, at this time, how we can lift people out of poverty. Somebody had said this doesn't just hurt people who are falling between the cracks; this is actually pushing them down in between the cracks. The facts are the facts.

I'm sure the minister didn't intend to do this. I'm sure government didn't intend to put such a heavy burden on the working poor and on poor people, but with the increase in HST, the increase in the gas taxes, the levy, also losing the Home Heating Rebate, losing the provincial portion of your HST rebate, the load is too heavy. It is unfair; it is unequitable.

I believe government didn't intend to do this, but they have done it and they have to stop and look at the facts. They have to stop and look at the real impact on people's lives across the province because the impact is dire and the resistance to it is growing. It's not going to go away.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to stand in this House and present a petition that I received in my office.

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

WHEREAS Budget 2016 closed the Advanced Education and Skills office in Bonavista; and

WHEREAS the residents of Bonavista and surrounding communities require and deserve an appropriate level of service;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reconsider its decision to close the Bonavista Advanced Education and Skills office.

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

Mr. Speaker, I have a number of sheets here signed by people from various communities in the surrounding area that the Bonavista office served, from Catalina, Little Catalina, Bonavista and the other communities around that.

Daily, we're getting petitions in from various communities, particularly around the services that have been cut. The AES office is one that is near and dear to people's hearts because it offers a multitude of services for people, particularly in rural communities. It offers something that is a hand up versus a handout, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we're talking about employment programs. We're talking about being the focal point for people who may want to look at the employment skillset that they may need.

They may want to look at what jobs are out there. How do they access those? That's what our AES offices were very capable of doing. Making that connection, providing the services that people needed.

I had the privilege for 25 years of working in the AES system. I know all around the province the benefits they provide to their citizens. They're unique, but at the same time they're uniform. That everybody in this province has access to proper services.

We talked about employment, but we talked about education. We talked about Adult Basic Education. How people who sometimes are reliant on offices like that may need some additional supports and some additional guidance. The ABE program was a key one that partnered with the AES offices. The employment counsellors there, the intake officers, had a direct connection with the

community based ABE programs or the college based ones over the years.

Income Support; people who are reliant when they have no other form of income, Income Support is a key component for their survival. It's very important. There are all kinds of nuances and all kinds of processes to go through to ensure you get what's adequate enough for your survival and to make sure you do it in an equitable way. If you happen to be able to move forward, you have a process to tell the officers that you've made a step forward, you're no longer in need of Income Support. So that down the road you don't get hit with this bill because unbeknownst, money kept going into your account.

We talked about housing. In a lot of these communities Newfoundland and Labrador Housing doesn't have an office. So the AES office is that link between affordable housing and, particularly, subsidized housing in some of these communities. It's a very important service that was being offered to the people through the AES offices. All eight have similar programs and skillsets by the trained employees who could offer that to individuals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: There are a multitude of services they offer in the communities, Mr. Speaker.

I want to conclude by saying, every day I will get up and talk about the closure of AES and encourage government to reconsider.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: I call from the Order Paper, Order 6, second reading of Bill 24.

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that Bill 24, An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province, be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 24, An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province." (Bill 24)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

By way of background, the payment of medical and hospital services in this province is currently governed by two pieces of statute and by two separate plans.

The first of these is the Medical Care Plan, which covers services provided by physicians and dentists, is governed under the hospices of the *Medical Care Insurance Act, 1999*. The second, the Hospital Insurance Plan, which covers those services provided in a hospital is set out in the *Hospital Insurance Agreement Act*. These acts have been in place for almost 50 years. While these acts have been amended occasionally over the years, these have been mostly of a housekeeping nature.

It's time to modernize this legislation to ensure it complies with the principles of the *Canada Health Act*, which in actual fact, both of these old statutes predate. The new legislation is also required to strengthen financial accountability of those who provide and receive medical and hospital services funded by the province.

Since the inception of medicare in our country and province the world has changed greatly. Travel between provinces and countries have

become easier and more accessible. People are generally more mobile. They travel between provinces and countries to work and vacation, and they also travel to seek medical treatment.

The province's legislation needs to keep pace with that reality and the reality that our world is a smaller place. It's time to adopt new legislation which meets the current needs of the beneficiaries who are eligible for coverage and who require medical or hospital-insured services, the physicians and dentists who provide those services and finally, the province, which is the primary funder of medical and hospital services.

To highlight the key changes, this single new *Medical Care and Hospital Insurance Act* will cover both medical care and hospital insurance plans. It contains a number of changes which I'll reference now. The first and most obvious is the change from two acts to one. The current *Hospital Insurance Agreement Act* contains six sections with two of those sections being identical to sections in the current *Medical Care Insurance Act, 1999*.

Upon review, it was felt, given the similarities in acts, two separate acts were not necessary and that the eligibility for hospital services could be adequately covered in the same act that also addressed eligibility and payment for medical services. It is important for both beneficiaries and practitioners that the rules regarding payment by the province for medical and hospital services are clearly set out. One act will help achieve that objective.

The second issue and changes speak to confidentiality of information. While there continues to be a general requirement to maintain confidentiality of information gathered under the new act, there are a number of exceptions including the authority to release demographic information only to the director of Support Enforcement in the Department of Justice and Public Safety. There have been issues where people have vanished from the jurisdictions of both of those and yet obviously continue to maintain active registration with the Medical Care Plan. That has produced some challenges for law enforcement and Support Enforcement.

Under the Confidentiality of Information, the authority in the act will allow MCP data also to be accessed to obtain a recent address for those individuals who have either unpaid amounts owing on child and spousal support. Personal health information of these debtors however will not be disclosed.

The third issue that is readdressed or newly addressed is the phenomena of extra billing. The act prohibits medical and dental practitioners from both opting out of MCP and billing their patients over and above the rates set out in the MCP payment schedule.

One of the pillars of medicare is that insurance services ought to be provided to beneficiaries free of charge. The prohibition on extra billing will ensure that patients will not have to personally pay for those medical services that are covered under MCP. For those who are not familiar, extra billing is a practice whereby a practitioner who has opted out would normally bill the patient directly rather than the health care plan. The problem with that is some practitioners have actually billed an amount greater than that is possible to be claimed back from the province under the plan and the patients have been left out of pocket.

This prohibition on extra billing is actually consistent with prohibition set out in federal legislation in the Canada Health Act. The federal government can, and has in the past, directly reduce federal transfers to the provincial Treasury as a penalty for each extra billing. Dollar for dollar, the federal government can remove from the health transfer any money that is charged directly to the patient for an insured service, and they have done in the past.

The prohibition on extra billing is simply the right thing to do. The principle of medicare is that it should be free of charge to the beneficiaries. It protects patients from paying for insurance services and it also protects us from federal claw backs under the Canada Health Act.

With regard to financial accountability, there is specification in the act for a 90-day limitation period. The new act sets out the time limit in which practitioners are to submit their billings to MCP for payments. There is an ability to extend this time limit where circumstances warrant,

such as where billings are delayed due to technical issues, staff illnesses, or delays in obtaining patient information.

The time limit isn't actually new. It actually exists already but it's in the form of regulations and precedent. This change will actually enshrine in legislation the 90-day limitation period. It would entrench it with the force of law.

It's important that practitioners submit their billings in a timely manner for a variety of reasons. Not only is it good business practice for the physician or dentist, because they can't get paid without submitting an account, it's important that the information submitted be as accurate as possible to avoid delays in payment or issues that could be raised in an audit. The accuracy of the information is more likely if the account is submitted within a short time frame from when the service was provided, rather than a longer one.

The act also makes specific reference to the issue of third-party liability. Under the current legislation, the Minister of Health and Community Services has a right to recover the cost of providing medical and hospital services to beneficiaries who are injured by a third party. Again, some of this is enshrined in the previous legislation; other is scattered through regulations drafted under that old legislation.

Such injuries, for example, would occur possibly from falls, the use of defective products, or motor vehicle accidents that occur outside of the province. Currently in our province, as is the case in most provinces, if a beneficiary is injured in a motor vehicle accident in the province, there is no requirement for the beneficiary to recover the cost of medical or hospital services received as a result.

In 1994, the MCP legislation was amended to set out an arrangement with insurance companies in lieu of paying the cost of medical and hospital services in each personal injury case, simply paid a fixed amount to the Treasury on a quarterly basis. This was derived on an actuarial basis from indices that the insurance companies have of their likely exposure to that risk in any given period and was adjusted from year to year.

This bill does not propose to make any substantive change to that arrangement. It does, however, clarify that the minister has the authority to recover costs in circumstances where the arrangement with insurance companies as set out in the legislation actually doesn't apply; for example, where a beneficiary is injured in a motor vehicle accident outside of the province.

What the new *Medical Care and Hospital Insurance Act* does is clarify the minister's ability to recover the current and future costs of providing medical and hospital services to beneficiaries injured by a third party. That doesn't exist in current legislation. For someone who has an accident while on vacation in another province and litigation may take place, it puts the province in a difficult situation of being able to recover future costs that will incur to the medical care plan.

Whilst this may not be common, there may be occasion where a beneficiary, due to the nature of the injury sustained, may require such future services. Bill 24 requires the beneficiary to seek recovery of the cost of those future services, should a personal injury claim for damages be commenced. So this is a legal enforcement, if you like, or injunction on those suing for personal injuries that the province's interest for future costs be safeguarded.

The final chunk is a piece around audit. The MCP program currently has a budget slightly in excess of \$480 million. There is pressure on us, as we've heard in Question Period and in the budget, and on other occasions, to be good stewards of the public Treasury. Particularly in a time of fiscal restraint, we have to ensure that the funds budgeted are indeed paid out in accordance with the appropriate rules and applicable rules. You need a robust audit regime to achieve this objective.

The new act clearly sets out the process by which practitioners billings are to be audited, as well as the powers of auditors in conducting those audits. Because there has been nothing put in legislation, because this legislation actually predates Medicare, there have been occasions where there have been, if you like, loopholes through which lawsuits and argumentation could be provided to reduce or constrain the

department's ability to both audit and make recoveries under those audits. So this act clearly sets out the process so that everyone knows upfront what's expected

There is a significant enhancement to the authority to recover overpayments and the ability for the Minister of Health to file with the court a signed order so that order would then become enforceable as an order of the court, rather than legal proceedings having to be instituted as of present for each of those occasions where overpayments have been made.

We recognize that there will be some significant changes as set out in this act if adopted and, as such, we are proposing that Bill 24 would not come into force until October 1, 2016. This delay in proclamation would provide all of the stakeholders, such organizations as the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association, with sufficient advance notice before they come into effect so their members could be apprised of these changes.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker – I don't need anywhere near the allotted time – this is a legislative regime currently governing MCP which has not really changed in 50 years, despite the introduction of the *Canada Health Act*. We have not made significant alterations to the way practices are currently in place. What we have done is identified areas of loophole, if you like, or potential slackness in the process and tightened them up.

This new legislation to address these changes is really long overdue. This bill is our response to the changes that we've seen in the delivery and funding of health care locally and across the continent. I would ask that all Members of this hon. House join me in supporting this bill.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Lane): The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's somewhat of a pleasure to have a different topic to discuss today, off the budget for a little while, on Bill 24. I'm not sure how much time we'll spend on Bill 24 today, but it's always good to talk about and have an opportunity to debate other matters that are on government's plate and priorities, and matters that come before the House for us to debate and discuss. That's what we do here. When a new bill or a new proposed piece of legislation comes to the House, then it goes through this process.

About a week or so ago I had the opportunity to attend over at the department. I extend my thanks and appreciation to the officials in the minister's department who were quite cordial and helpful as they pretty much always are. In this case it was no different. They were very helpful in going through the bill.

It is a fairly lengthy bill, relative to many we see come here in the House. There are about 63, 64 sections in total, including administrative ones. There are times we come to the House when we have three or four sections in a bill or amendment and they're quite small. Similar to what we just saw with the minister who in about 14 or 15 minutes really summed up the bill in total, I don't anticipate I'm going to need any longer than that to bring my remarks forward this afternoon, even though it's a very important bill. It's an important piece of legislation and it does have 60 sections.

Essentially, this bill is a combination of two acts as laid out – two existing pieces of legislation as laid out by the minister: the *Medical Care Insurance Act* and the *Hospital Insurance Agreement Act*. Essentially MCP, as many people know it, and also how hospital services are insured. I know this piece of legislation will benefit those who work within it.

Quite often our health authorities or people who work and are guided by this legislation will be looking back and forth to which piece of legislation applies here, with currently having two separate pieces of legislation. This will streamline it I'm sure. It also clarifies some of those contentious points that sometimes happen

when it comes to medical care as guided by these legislations.

There are a couple of changes that are being made in this act under this bill. One of them is very close to the front under section 4. It deals with confidentiality. The minister referenced this as well, and there is a new section in confidentiality. Currently when it comes to the confidentiality of information, of course it has to be highly protected. People have to have an assurance that when they're dealing with health care matters they are protected, that their privacy and confidentiality is protected.

What is proposed here, of course, is it allows "A person employed in the administration of this Act shall maintain confidentiality with respect to all matters that come to ..." their attention or knowledge in the course of their employment and they shall not communicate the matters to another person, including an employee of the government. Then it says, except. There are a number of exceptions to this, and that's "to a person to whom an insured service is provided"

If a person wants to go the hospital and wants to learn about their own file, they have a right to do that, "to a practitioner for a purpose relating to insured services" If you go to a hospital or you go to a health care facility and you require services, it is quite often important for those providing the health care to you, their health care service to you, to understand your past, your background and so on. In a case like that, then they should have full access to your medical history.

So, "to a professional corporation and its directors, officers and employees for a purpose relating to insured services that were provided through the corporation." Such as a health corporation, one of our health regions.

Also, for consultation, "for the purpose of consultation between the minister and the medical association or the dental association." Of course, people's personal information would always be protected but there are times when the minister who is making decisions in the best interest of the people of the province and health care requires certain statistical data, information

and so on. It would give him the access to that, and professional and regulatory boards.

Also, to a police officer or a peace officer as it's termed in the legislation, "to a peace officer for the purpose of reporting a suspected offence." Then there are a couple of others, "to a person who is empowered by a statute which requires disclosure ..." and so on.

There's a new one here under section 4(f), which is "to a person employed by the government to enforce support orders under the *Support Orders Enforcement Act, 2006*." So that's a director of Support Enforcement. We know the director of Support Enforcement and their team are engaged on a regular basis in ensuring that family court orders are upheld and ensure they take place.

It makes a lot of sense to do this, where a person has an obligation directed by an authority not living up to that obligation and they avail of or access health care which could assist the director of Support Enforcement. We know from our own history that sometimes Support Enforcement has a really difficult and challenging time, quite often under very difficult and challenging circumstances, to ensure that orders are maintained and upheld has they've been directed and intended to. This will assist them in doing that role.

There is a section here under extra billing. Again, the minister articulated and referenced that particular section as well. He talked about where sometimes there are extra billings, and also discussed the opt-out opportunities for practitioners. I think he's clarified that one sufficiently. I don't need to go over that one.

One that is new to both the current legislation, and currently found in regulation, is under section 10 where it says, "A participating practitioner shall submit an account for an insured service no later than 90 days after the practitioner provides the insured service. (2) A beneficiary" – the patient – "shall submit an account no later than 2 years after the insured service is provided to him or her." That's tightening up processes to make sure that the management of processes and billings and accounts happens appropriately.

There is a section on audits and how they take place to make sure that services are being provided, charged and billed correctly. We've heard stories and suggestions in the past of certain circumstances where that may have not been taking place as intended. It's appropriate to have an audit process, especially when there's such a high value, high amount of money, high amount of cost and it is important of our service to the people of the province who we are involved with here to make sure that it is being done properly.

Under section 29, there is a new section when it comes to audits and payments under Part IV. It indicates that a minister may make a written order after reviewing audit findings and so on. That currently exists. In order for that to take place, the minister may do one or more of the following things. One of the things he may do – which are new – is where the minister makes an order under this section, also order that all or part of the order, referring to overpayments, and interest being deducted from an amount payable to the practitioner. If there's an audit and it determines that there has been an overpayment, then it gives the minister the authority to collect that overpayment – to order it and to collect it.

As well, under this same part of the new legislation or the new bill, the minister can make an order when a party doesn't appear. Parties aren't required to appear. I understand there's been difficulty with that in the past when parties haven't appeared to audit processes and audit hearings. Sometimes it can leave that process in limbo. Under this case, there's a section that's tightening that up which allows for the minister to make an order, even if the person doesn't appear through the audit process as required. It does tighten it up, so it'll make the system move more effectively and be more meaningful.

Mr. Speaker, there's a section on levy and then there's a section on recovery of costs for services. This is not entirely new, but a part of this is. What this section refers to – and I won't read it all paragraph by paragraph – essentially is that when there's a civil action, a person becomes injured through a matter that results in an action of liability that takes place.

For example, in the example used by the officials in the department, they'll say a person

had a slip and fall on private property. If that slip and fall results in the person taking action against the landlord or property owner, then this will require that the health care costs for that person be included as part of that action. Instead of the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador having to bear the burden of paying for the cost of health care required to someone, in this case the example used here was slip and fall, or because of an incident that occurred where there's a court action or a lawsuit filed, then this section will require that lawsuit also require the person to sue for the cost for the health care.

This is a new section in this bill and I think it's an important one. I know that from my own experiences there's a significant amount of cost borne by the province, borne by the taxpayers whereby a person has a slip and fall, an injury, or a requirement for health care where there's been an action, a lawsuit taken as a result of what led to that injury.

When the injured party sues the responsible party such as the property owner, as I mentioned, then this section will require that appellant to include the cost of the insurance services in their lawsuit. This will change that and, of course, that will reduce the cost to the taxpayers of the province.

Automobiles are in this section as well, but it also includes only where motor vehicle accidents in which the person who is determined or deemed to be negligent is not covered by a policy. In a case like that, with a civil matter as well, then the collection can occur under those circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, there is regulation-making authority under this piece of legislation. It is interesting to note that I perceive there's a change on the regulation authority giving the minister a greater and broader, stronger regulatory regulation-making authority than what exists today. I don't believe that's a bad thing. I believe it's a good thing. I believe it gives government more flexibility. It gives government greater flexibility to create regulation. Then regulations quite often have to be adopted and changed as services and processes change with the times.

As new processes are developed, new practices are developed, new best practice is learned and processes change then to give the government greater regulatory regulation-making authority I believe in this bill, under this legislation, will benefit the province, it will benefit the minister and, as a result, will benefit health care and the services, the back off of services that happen through health care. That's really what this legislation is about.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my place. Again, I just want to confirm our support for this bill. I believe it is going to streamline and benefit health care. It's going to reduce the administrative burden. It's going to tighten up auditing functions as well. It gives the minister greater authority to make improvements and find greater efficiencies in health care.

Again, I thank the officials in the department for the briefing and broadening our understanding of the contents of the bill. I thank the minister for introducing it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for the District of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to see that my colleague across the House seems to be in full support of this new amended bill.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. B. DAVIS: Excellent.

Bill 24 is An Act Respecting Insured Medical and Hospital Services in the Province and we have it divided into eight parts that I'm going to discuss here today.

Part I sets out the rights of the beneficiary and practitioners, meaning physicians and dentists, with respect to the provision and receipt of medical and hospital services. It also requires that information collected under this act is kept confidential. The exceptions to this requirement

are explicitly set out and I'm just going to go through some of those exceptions.

One of the exceptions that I wish to highlight is the authority to release information to the director of Support Enforcement. The director is responsible for enforcing child and spousal support orders. In some cases, monies may not be collected under these orders because a person owing the money cannot be located. If the debtor is residing in Newfoundland and Labrador, then the director will be able to access the debtor's address, physical address, through MCP data which will help them locate the person and assist in the collecting of these monies which are primarily owed to women and children under the support orders.

One interesting note I would like to address is the MCP keeps physical addresses, not just mailing addresses and it's important for people that are being summoned so that they can be located so that these orders can be paid and at least reached out to. It is important to note that the personal health information of the debtors will not be released under these exceptions.

Part II continues both the Medical Care Plan, or the MCP, which applies to services provided by physicians and dentists and the hospital insurance plan, which applies to hospital services.

Part III sets out the rules regarding the submission of accounts by practitioners and the manner in which those accounts are to be paid. It requires practitioners who wish to bill MCP directly for services provided to be enrolled in the program. In practice, practitioners complete an application form and then are provided a number which allows them to bill MCP directly. This process will not change under Bill 24.

It also requires practitioners to notify the Minister of Health and Community Services should they wish to opt out of the MCP and bill beneficiaries directly. As the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services mentioned before, this is possible. In this case, the beneficiary pays the practitioner and then is reimbursed directly by MCP.

Bill 24 prohibits extra billing by the practitioner who provides insured services to the

beneficiaries, whether the practitioner is enrolled in the program or not. That's a change in the previous bill.

Even where a practitioner opts out of MCP and elects to bill the patients directly, the practitioner cannot bill the patient over and above any amount that MCP will be reimbursing the patient. Extra billing is an offence under this act, subject to the fine of \$20,000 for each offence.

Part IV is simply entitled Audits. It sets out the powers and the authority to conduct audits on practitioner's billings. This bill permits the audit of all practitioners who provide medical services through MCP, whether they opt in or opt out of the MCP.

It sets out the audit process and the manner in which disputes and audit findings are resolved and adjudicated. It permits the Minister of Health and Community Services to make various orders for the recovery where an overpayment has been identified following an audit.

The minister may make an order, whether the practitioner appears at the review board or not, provided the practitioner has been given sufficient notice of the review board hearing. The minister may order, for example, that the amount of the overpayment be deducted from the practitioner's future billings under MCP. Interest shall also be recovered. Once the minister makes an order, the order may be filed with the court at which time it becomes an order of the court and may be enforced as such. It also permits the appeal of the minister's order to the court.

Part V sets out the regime by which the insurance companies pay the Minister of Health and Community Services quarterly amounts which represents the cost of medical and hospital services provided to beneficiaries where they have been injured in a motor vehicle accident. Under this part, there is no requirement for the injured party to recover the amounts of the medical and hospital services incurred by MCP. There are no substantive changes proposed to Bill 24 to this particular regime.

Mr. Speaker, Part VI is the Recovery of Costs for Services. It applies where a beneficiary

suffers injury during the negligence, act or omission of a third party. It also applies where the beneficiary is injured in a motor vehicle accident to which Part V of the act does not apply. This may be the case, for example, when a beneficiary is injured in a motor vehicle accident in another province, but receives medical or hospital services in this province.

By accordance with this part, where a beneficiary makes a personal injury claim to recover damages suffered, he or she is also required to make a claim for the amount of the insured services received under the MCP and/or the hospital insurance plan related to the injury sustained.

Mr. Speaker, where a beneficiary has received medical or hospital services related to an injury, he or she is not permitted to settle the personal injury claim without the consent of the Minister of Health and Community Services.

Part VII contains general provisions relating to the ability to make regulations under the act and to create offences for the failure to comply with the act. For example, regulations may be made to establish a formal procedure for reviewing decisions made under the act.

Regulations may be also made to prescribing agency fees that may be paid to lawyers who recover the cost of a medical or hospital services on behalf of the minister in personal injury claims. This part also offers a – contravening the act. This act is not about punishing people; however, it is important that there be penalties in place to act as a deterrent for those who may choose to act contrary to the act.

Part VIII clarifies that the act will come into force on October 1, as the minister said. This delay in proclamation will provide advance notice to all stakeholders, including the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association, of the changes to the act. This part also sets out the transition from the current legislation to the new *Medical Care and Hospital Insurance Act* once it comes into force.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members in this House to join me in supporting Bill 24.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm quite happy to stand this afternoon to speak to Bill 24, An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province.

The minister, in particular, has given a good detailed outline of what this bill is about. I'm not going to go through it piece by piece. Anybody watching, or in the future, anybody reading will have read what the minister has said and what his parliamentary secretary has said, but just to make the point that it's a new bill, but a new bill modernizing other bills that we have had. *The Medical Care and Hospital Insurance Act* will repeal the *Medical Care Insurance Act* and the *Hospital Insurance Agreement Act*.

We have a new bill, modernizing some pieces that have needed to be modernized, putting in some new pieces and making sure that our health insurance program is modern, up to date and dealing with the issues that have been identified over the years as needing change.

As I said, I'm not going to go through every single piece but there are a couple of areas that I do want to highlight. I think from the perspective of how it impacts individuals and people who are insured in our province, the important thing is that this act is bringing in new protections. I think that's something people should feel good about.

I'm sure that people have experienced that we have different groups in our province. We have medical practitioners who are recognized, recognized by associations and recognized by our government who choose to be part of the MCP and according to the act, they are called participating practitioners. Then you have medical practitioners who don't participate in the MCP, yet they have to be regulated by our government. They are part of the health care

system, though they don't participate in the MCP.

There are provisions now in this new act, which are extremely important, to bring protection to patients, to beneficiaries of our act. I think one of the most important things in the act is that it puts up a wall against extra billing. It turns out – and I do want to thank actually the minister and his staff for the briefing that our researcher received on this. She found it one of the best briefings that she'd ever had and I want to thank the minister and his staff. He can pass that on to them.

During that briefing, my researcher learned that extra billing had been permitted in this province. What that means is that very often – I am not going to say very often, but there are times when practitioners who weren't under the MCP, just practitioners, charged more to the beneficiary than MCP would pay. The service that the beneficiary received was a service that was covered by MCP, but he or she was going to a practitioner who did not get paid through MCP. You had practitioners who were charging extra. In actual fact, that is illegal under the *Canada Health Act*. Other provinces have had to deal with the fact they allow this and have had to be brought in line. I think British Columbia is one which had to be brought in line by the *Canada Health Act*.

What would happen is a practitioner who opted out of MCP, though the practitioner offered services that were under MCP, would bill a patient, the patient would then have to go to MCP to get reimbursed. MCP would only pay for the amount of money that MCP covers, the scheduled amount. So if the person had gone to a practitioner who was under the MCP, he or she was actually paying more to the practitioner who was outside of the system.

What has happened now is a practitioner cannot bill a patient over and above what's listed, over and above what is the MCP schedule. That's extremely important. There is a whole section in the piece of legislation, section 18, which explain the details of how physicians who opt-out are not covered by the new act. So now they have to go receive the money from MCP and they will be paid for what any one of the practitioners under the MCP would be paid. The

extra billing has to end. The MCP payment schedule has fee codes and amounts for all services. That should be for everybody who's receiving those services in the province.

New fees and increases were actually just recently negotiated with Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association and the Dental Association. Both of these associations, they are members who are part of MCP, plus practitioners who are outside of the MCP have to follow the MCP payment schedule. I'm really quite happy, actually, that we now have this protection in our province for the people of the province.

Section 10 of the bill requires the registered practitioners submit a bill to MCP for services rendered within 90 days. Now, that's not new. The provision was taken out of the regulations and placed in the act, though, because it was only in regulations before. It is now in the act to make it as firm as possible. There could be exceptions if the practitioner became ill and wasn't able to perform his or her business, but for the most part it's now in our act that any practitioner who submits a bill to MCP for services rendered has to do it within 90 days. I think there are penalties. Well, they won't get the reimbursement if they don't do it within the 90 days. This is one thing that I think is extremely important.

I also want to talk about the levy regime that's in the bill and that has been in place in the province since 1994. Levy has been a bad word here in the province over the last couple of weeks, but this levy is different. This is a levy that has to do – it's an arrangement between government and auto insurers in which they make quarterly payments to MCP based on the number of vehicles insured during that quarter, instead of each company making payments on a case-by-case basis for expenses MCP has incurred providing services to someone injured in an accident who sues the driver at fault.

In other words, it cuts down on red tape. Instead of each insurance company – every time there's an accident whereby somebody in the accident can get MCP, instead of having to submit that every time there's an expense, they pay a levy to MCP.

This is also quite important that this is continued and that it is in our new act. We had an old piece of legislation with regard to the levy, so it has been modernized in the act. It has strengthened and updated the levy re: third party liability, which is really important, and clearly set out the eligibility rules. It also has clarified the physicians and oral surgeons' bill submission process, or the process they go through. There had been some lack of clarity and that has now been clarified.

I think one of the things I should mention also, to put people's mind at rest, is the whole thing of the audit of practitioners. It's extremely important that auditing takes place. There is a whole section in the bill on auditing. I know the minister has spoken to it, as has the other speaker from the government side.

I think the important thing for people to know is that there's a very solid system in place for practitioners to be audited. If an audit is done and the practitioner feels they haven't been fairly treated, there will be a review board to make sure they are treated fairly.

It's interesting that, "An auditor performing an audit may at reasonable times and for reasonable purposes of the audit, (a) without a warrant, enter and inspect premises where insured services are provided or where documentation required for the purpose of this Act is stored."

The auditor has been given some significant powers, which I think is very important. I note that even though without a warrant they may enter and inspect premises where there are insured services carried out, they may not "enter a dwelling-house without the consent of the occupant except under the authority of a warrant." So, there's also protection there for the practitioners. Even though the auditors have a lot of power, there also has to be protection for the practitioner.

As I mentioned, there is the provision as well that there be a review board put in place if a practitioner does request a review because they don't think what has been done has fairly represented who they are.

There's an issue I have a little concern about, and I'm asking the minister to give us some

clarity on it. The issue has to do with – it's under section 4. Section 4 deals with confidentiality.

Section 4(1) says, "A person employed in the administration of this Act shall maintain confidentiality with respect to all matters that come to his or her knowledge in the course of that person's employment and shall not communicate the matters to another person, including an employee of the government, except" Then there are a number of exceptions.

We are wondering, there's one exception in particular, section (f). The exception – and it was added with this bill; it wasn't in the former acts – has to do with allowing the sharing of information with the support orders division of justice. The support orders division of justice doesn't have anything to do with our medical system. So I'm wondering why this is the case. It turns out that the Attorney General did ask for this as the best way to get an up-to-date address for someone who the Department of Justice or the legal system is looking for.

So the Attorney General has asked to be able to access addresses and there will be no personal health information shared. We were assured in the briefing that MCP would make sure of that. But I do have a concern because we have had privacy breaches inside of our health care system. One has to wonder why would it be MCP that Justice would go to, to find people's addresses. I'm sure there's rationale for it, but officials in the briefing weren't sure if other provinces had this particular provision. So I'd like to know – and maybe Justice is the one who has to give us this answer, not the Minister of Health, but surely there are other ways in which the Department of Justice and the legal system can find up-to-date addresses than through the MCP.

I can understand it's an easy way to get it. It easy access, but I really do fear the possibility of privacy breaches. All the other groups who are listed – also (h) concerns me because it's "to a peace officer for the purpose of reporting a suspected offence." I suspect that's connected to the same reasoning around the *Support Orders Enforcement Act*. Neither one of those connect directly with health issues.

Everybody else who is mentioned as an exception is somebody who has a connection to the act: "(a) to a person to whom an insured service is provided about that insured service," that's understandable; "(b) to a practitioner for a purpose relating to insured services that the practitioner has provided," that is understandable; "(c) to a professional corporation and its directors, officers and employees for a purpose relating to insured services that were provided through the corporation," that's understandable.

"(d) for the purpose of the administration of this Act; (e) for the purpose of consultation between the minister and the medical association or the dental association ... (g) to a professional regulatory or licensing body for the purpose of making an allegation ... (i) to a person who is empowered by a statute which requires disclosure of information; (j) for the purpose of releasing information, including personal health information as defined in the *Personal Health Information Act*, to the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information in accordance with the *Centre for Health Information Act* and regulations made under that Act; or (k) in other circumstances that may be established by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council."

All of the other sections that are exceptions under the confidentiality section make sense to me. The *Support Orders Enforcement Act* one and the peace officer for the purpose of reporting a suspected offence; I don't know why these are in this list. As I said, we did ask in the briefing whether or not this exists in other provinces and the officials at the briefing really didn't know.

I do have a concern about using our health insurance and the health care system because of the type of information that they have, the degree to which it could open up for the danger of privacy breach. I have mentioned this to the minister and I am asking for a clearer explanation of this. It could happen today or it could happen in third reading. I would like to know, at least, if it exists elsewhere because I have questions about that.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, I think I have raised the points that were a bit, sort of, key

points for me that I wanted to mention. I don't have anything else.

I am looking forward to getting an answer with regard to the issue I have raised about who gets access to information. Of course we'll be supporting this act. I'm glad I've had the opportunity to speak to it today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 24. One of our defining characteristics as a nation is our universal health care system. It is such a part of our identity that we often take it for granted, Mr. Speaker.

Taking care of our citizens and providing them with health care makes so much sense that it's easy to forget that it wasn't always this way. Thanks to the multi-partisan efforts of Tommy Douglas, John Diefenbaker and Lester B. Pearson, between 1962 and 1966 Canada implemented universal health coverage, an initiative that has been of tremendous benefit to Canadians ever since.

We have much to be proud of about our universal health care coverage, Mr. Speaker, especially when we compare ourselves with our neighbours to the south. The United States privatized health care system seems absolutely baffling to us. How is it possible that in the wealthiest country the world has ever seen there are enormous numbers of low-income Americans who are unable to access even basic medical care because the cost of insurance is beyond their means?

Mr. Speaker, to us that seems unthinkable, even obscene. To us it seems like a government that is only interested in the health and well-being of some of its citizens. Ones with money enough to afford too-steep insurance premiums.

Mr. Speaker, there have been improvements to their system since the passage of the Affordable Care Act under President Obama, but the United States still fails many of its citizens. Its health care system is a long way from addressing the diverse health care needs of its entire population.

Here in Canada, that plan just doesn't make sense to us, Mr. Speaker. That sort of neglect and indifference simply wouldn't fly up here. We recognize across this country that even in the toughest of economic circumstances, we still have an obligation and a moral duty to provide medical care to our citizens. It is in our power and in our interest to do so.

Keeping our people healthy makes a stronger workforce, Mr. Speaker, happier communities and a more sustainable future. It just makes sense to provide universal health care. Again, it makes so much sense that it is very easy for us to forget that it isn't something we have always done, that there is a definite start date for this Canada-wide policy. Just like any policy, it is constantly evolving along with the needs of people with shifts in government and systematic upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, insurance is an exceedingly complex operation with lots of different stakeholders involved. In the case of health insurance with people's good health hanging in its balance, it's crucially important that it's done right.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to rise in this hon. House today to speak to Bill 24, which is an important piece of legislation that is being brought in by our government. This bill accomplishes a lot of things, but in broad strokes. It allows us to continue to offer insured medical services to our citizens. It allows practitioners of dental and medical services to receive payment for their services, and it protects health care consumers from being over billed for services. In short, Mr. Speaker, it's one of these periodic and necessary adjustments to the whole complex system that enables Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to receive health care services.

The passage of Bill 24 will enable us to continue to provide MCP and hospital insurance for residents of this province. Health care is very

important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and it represents our single largest budgetary expenditure year after year.

MCP is the insurance system that allows us to pay our health care professionals and our support staff, and allows us to pick up the tab for our citizen's health care cost, as we are obligated to do, Mr. Speaker. It is therefore a privilege to stand in support of a bill that will enable us to continue to provide this critical service to our people.

Bill 24 will also allow medical and dental care practitioners to receive payment for their services. Without our health care professionals, we have no health care system. These are individuals with specialized training who strive every day to provide top-quality care to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Bill 24 ensures that these individuals are properly compensated for their services.

This bill also protects us, the government, from being overcharged for services. Part of Bill 24 is ensuring our health care practitioners receive payments for their services in a fair and efficient manner, Mr. Speaker. On the other side of that coin, is that it prevents the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador from paying more than a fair price for its services.

Mr. Speaker, what this bill essentially does is it makes sure that the fair delivery of health care services cuts in both directions, for the providers and for the taxpayers. It's a further refinement to the existing health care insurance system in our province that will allow us to deliver health care services in the best way we can.

There are other tweaks to the system contained in the bill. It grants the minister the power to conduct audits for any kind of irregularities in the existing insurance system. The minister might conduct an audit to identify cases of claims that aren't supported by the proper documentation. This protects the taxpayer from fraudulent or spurious insurance claims.

Mr. Speaker, the minister can also conduct an audit to identify cases involving uninsured services, medically unnecessary services, billing errors and claims that don't follow the average patterns. The bill will enable an auditor to

inspect premises, review documentation, interview practitioners or employees.

Mr. Speaker, with a system as complicated as health care insurance in a single-payer system, there are many possible avenues for abuse. Bill 24 protects taxpayers by granting the minister and his officials a recourse to identify, prevent and seek remedy against any possible abuses. Again, an adjustment such as this is keeping with the general theme of Bill 24, which is making sure that the health care insurance system in our province is working the way it should.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 24 also makes some necessary adjustments to the ways in which services are paid for in cases of injury caused by motor vehicle negligence. Injuries due to accidents and negligence are a terrible thing to live through. It is incumbent upon us as a government to ease the burden on the injured party and also to ensure the province is able to recover the cost of paying for care in these cases.

Bill 24 contains other similar adjustments to the system of health care insurance in our province, Mr. Speaker.

I will conclude my remarks by restating how important this bill is. Since the creation in the 1960s of universal health care coverage in Canada, governments have a duty and a privilege to provide health care to every single citizen. A machine as complex as the province's health care insurance system requires periodic maintenance and updates, Mr. Speaker.

I am honoured to speak in favour of Bill 24 which will allow our government to continue providing the best possible health care to our people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly an honour to rise in this House and participate in the debate on Bill 24. I too, like my colleagues, will be pleased to support this bill in the House.

I won't speak very long, Mr. Speaker. The Members who have stood in the House so far have raised many issues and have summarized the bill quite well. So I won't repeat any of that, but there was one question I did have pertaining to the bill, and that is there are no reciprocal agreements in place with other provinces. I was hoping that before the minister closes, perhaps he can tell us if he thinks there will be any negative impact on our province without such a reciprocal agreement.

I guess the only loophole that's really jumping at me here is, if a practitioner were to be overpaid and it was discovered through the bill and mechanisms put in place to try and recover that overpayment, but the practitioner decides to leave Newfoundland and Labrador and go on to another province to live and work. We have no mechanism to recoup that money with legal action. If that is something the minister could elaborate on for us, we certainly would greatly appreciate that.

As Members have already stated, this legislation has been in place since the 1960s. The provision of health care coverage to each and every citizen in our province is absolutely one of our greatest privileges that we have as Canadians. We're very fortunate to have it in place.

I look forward to passing this bill in the House and continuing the great work that does happen in health care for the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services speaks now he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

I'm heartened to hear the support from all sides of the House for this bill. I acknowledge the questions that have been raised.

In terms of the issues around access for Support Enforcement and peace officers, my understanding is that this is an issue on a certain number of folk who have support orders and they are not locatable. MCP does require a civic address and not merely a mailing address. I think that has been the driver for justice and public safety, as well as Support Enforcement.

I think the Member opposite raises the issue of reciprocal billings. Just on that, there is an interprovincial reciprocal billing agreement which is actually governed under regulations under this act. Those regulations will be refreshed from the two old acts and that's one of the reasons for a delay in implementation to the 1st of October.

Those are my closing comments, and I'd urge Members to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the bill now be read the 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 Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province. (Bill 24)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read the second time.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 24)

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

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 24.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Against?

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 24, An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province.

A bill, An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province. (Bill 24)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 64 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 64 inclusive carry?

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

MS. MICHAEL: Everybody is having a hard time with that, Madam Chair.

I would like to come back to a point that I raised in second reading. The minister did refer to it, but I do have a specific question that I’d like to put to him to see if he can come up with an answer. It has to do with section 4 of the act which concerns confidentiality of information.

As I pointed out in second reading “A person employed in the administration of this Act shall maintain confidentiality with respect to all matters that come to his or her knowledge in the course of that person’s employment and shall not communicate the matters to another person, including an employee of the government” and then there’s a list of exceptions.

I put a question to the minister with regard to an exception that had to do with information being given “to a person employed by the government to enforce support orders under the *Support Orders Enforcement Act, 2006*.” That is new in our act and, as I pointed out in second reading, it was asked for by the Auditor General.

I know the minister explained what the reasoning is, but I would like to know if this is a common practice in other jurisdictions in the country for another department, such as Justice, to be able to access information about an individual and in this case – I know it’s just the address but to access information from the health care repository of information. Is this a common thing? I don’t know if the Minister of Justice has an answer to that, but I would like to know if it happens in other places.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak and refer to the question here. I've requested this information from people within the department. I'm pretty sure that this has been done in other jurisdictions in this country. I'm pretty sure but just to make sure, I'm asking for clarification. I can ensure that I will provide that to you.

Again, I understand there is always a concern about protection of privacy but when it also comes to certain matters where we're talking about Support Enforcement or talking about MCP billing, we want to make sure that individuals are paying what they should. There's always weighing that, but what I can do, I can certainly ensure that I will provide that information to the Member opposite as soon as I have that.

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm delighted the minister has stood and made that commitment. And just to say this is not frivolous on my part because we all know every time there is new access to information, you open up the danger of a breach. So that's what I'm concerned about. I look forward to the answer from the minister.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions, we will now call the clause again.

Shall clause 2 to 64 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 64 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, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting Insured Medical And Hospital Services In The Province.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 24 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

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 24.

CHAIR: It has been moved that I rise and report Bill 24.

Is it the pleasure of the House?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 24 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed her to report Bill 24 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the 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, just before moving to the next motion, pursuant to the Order Paper, number 15, I would move, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 3.

Pursuant to number 16 on the Order Paper, I would move, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 3, 2016.

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's indeed a privilege to get back up here again today and to speak on the budget. For those following at home there's after being a sub-amendment, an amendment and now we're back on the main motion today. This is the third opportunity that I have to get up now and speak on it. There are some bills coming that we'll all have an opportunity to do a little bit more speaking.

This budget is something that I'm sure that everyone in the House could get up as many times as they wanted. They could get up 20 times to speak on it because there's a lot to it. There are some things in it that are good. Like I said last week, there were things in it that are good and there are a lot of things in it are not very good, Mr. Speaker. I think we're seeing it all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

People are very upset and rightfully so. I know the government is accusing us of fear mongering, frightening people and everything else. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll assure the people in Cape St. Francis I would never do that to them because that's not who I am as a person.

I think they should know the truth. I think they should know the implications of what the budget is going to mean to them. I think that they should understand the effect it's going to have on their families. I know some people have grandchildren and children. Down the road there are going to be huge effects.

If you listen to the Members across the way and they give what they think of the budget, it's action we have to do now and it's action that we have to do to save our future and everything else. My fear of this budget – and I'm going to get into a few different aspects, but I just want to get this part. The only fear that I'll put into the

people in my district is the fear of not knowing what's going to happen when people don't have the excess money in their pockets to keep our economy going.

That's the biggest problem I find with this budget because I believe it's way too much, too fast. I believe it's putting a burden on low-income, middle-income, middle-class, hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I also believe it's really going to smack – I spoke to a gentleman a couple days ago – small businesses.

As we all know, small business is the key to any district in the province. They're the generators that give us the jobs, whether it's the grocery stores or it's the guy who's building homes or the guy who's doing renovation. It could be anything. Small business plays such a role especially here in Newfoundland and Labrador because we're spread out all over the place and we do need to rely – most businesses, with only 500,000 people and the geography we have, we know that each one of our communities, whether it's the Burin Peninsula, the Northern Peninsula, Labrador or whatever, small business is the key to the economy in our province.

The only fear I have – and it's a real fear – is what's going to happen to small businesses in this province. It's huge because when people have money in their pocket it's the business that really benefit from the revenue that's generated in the economy when people do have a chance to spend. They'll go to the restaurants. They'll do that renovation on their home. They'll do the small little things that keep these businesses going.

For every job in a small business, it generates jobs all around. Whether people are going to build homes or, like I said, do renovations, it's not only the person who's doing that, it's the home building supply that's in your neighbourhood. It's the local grocery store. It's the restaurant you go to have your lunch and stuff like this. That's what's going to happen.

I understand Members opposite get up and they say it's the worst time in 66 years – worst time ever in 66 years. B'y I'll tell you one thing, if this budget goes ahead it's going to be the worst time we'll ever see in this province, down the

road. I really do believe that because people are not going to have the money to spend. You have to understand, this is going to affect every one of your communities. It's really going to affect every one of the communities in this province because people don't have that extra couple of thousand dollars that keeps the economy going. This is what you're doing to them. It's way too much, too fast.

Mr. Speaker, in Question Period today I had the opportunity to get up and ask a couple questions on libraries. We left the House here late last night and I got home in time to watch the news and saw a few things that were on the news last night. It really struck home to me because rural Newfoundland and Labrador – people will say: B'y, you're not from rural Newfoundland and Labrador, but I'm from a small community, it is outside of St. John's, and we know the little things in your community means a lot. Whether it's the community centre that you go to for a community event, whether it's a birthday or whatever, there are things in your community that are the centre of your community.

In rural Newfoundland, a library is important. It's an important part of who we are. There are not a lot of things in rural Newfoundland – it would be nice to have all the stuff that you have in St. John's, whether it's a swimming pool or activities for children or whatever it is that you could do that people could go to, but in rural Newfoundland – I watched last night in Catalina, apparently now what the news report said last night was that it is the oldest library in the province – the oldest library. It was the first library that was built outside of St. John's.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: That's good; I'm glad you're happy to see that. I'm glad you're doing this again today because do you know what? That's important to the people in Catalina. I saw two little girls on last night saying if they close our library, where I'm going to go to? I'm sure in Catalina – I drove through the community thousands of times; it is beautiful. That area of our province is absolutely beautiful. It is absolutely beautiful. Go down around Trinity, down around Bonavista, couldn't meet a nicer place in the province and I'm sure there's lot of places like that.

There are young people that live in these small communities and these two little girls that were on last night, they said this is a big part of my community. What am I going to do? I'm going to go out on the streets; what am I going to do out on the streets? I go to the library because we get free magazines. They get to read; they get to use the Internet.

I saw seniors there and they are using the Internet.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Now if you have something to say, go ahead; I'll listen to you. Is there something wrong with that: rural Newfoundland and a small library in rural Newfoundland that means a lot to the people that live there?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: It means a lot to the people that live in rural Newfoundland.

Do you know the one thing that really struck me last night? I watched a lady last night and I'm not sure now it could be her grandchild or her child, I wasn't sure because I didn't know who it was, but she was saying about how important the library was to this little person who is going to kindergarten next year. Because when they join the library, they get two free books. The parent or the grandparent can take the child to the library so they can read books.

I know the Minister of Education knows all about education. He's the smartest fellow in this House of Assembly; nobody else knows it like he do. But any time we can encourage young children to go to a library, whether it's a grandparent or whatever, to take a young child to a library and read to them, that's got to be a good thing. It has to be a good thing. I mean, that's a service that we're offered in – it has to be a good thing.

I know that my sister-in-law takes Jaxson – I will say his name and then I'll tell him I mentioned him today now in the House of Assembly – to the library in Torbay. She said you can try to get him at the house, say read to him, but yet – this was last year because he's in

kindergarten now. She used to say him, come on, we'll go to the library. He used to get excited about going to the library. I wonder, how many of these 54 libraries that are in our province that young children are not excited about going to.

I'll go back to the Catalina one, because I know the Member knows a lot about it and everything else. Do you know what the guy said last night? Just guess? This library cost, he said, less than \$10,000 to keep open. That's what the cost is to government, less than \$10,000. He said I think it could be less than \$8,000. Here's a service we're offering to people in rural Newfoundland, in small communities, and \$8,000.

I know we shouldn't be closing libraries and taking away services from our seniors, our young people, our teenagers who use it. It's not something we should be doing. That's a backward step.

I talked to a gentleman yesterday in Pouch Cove. He hasn't got a car. So we tell him that the library you can use is in Torbay. How do I get to Torbay every day, Kevin? He uses the Internet. He checks on stuff. He says it's a great source. It's only lately he's really learned how to use the Internet and get on things. What do we tell that gentleman? His library is closing down.

You guys were over last year, you were up talking. I know the Minister of Seniors, Wellness talked about the seniors' advocate. I was here last week, it got pretty wild about the seniors' advocate.

Let me tell you something. Can I tell you something right now, and I'll tell you seriously. You go back to all your districts, go back to every one of your districts and see how many seniors are using your libraries. I bet you any money that there'll be more seniors using libraries in this province than will use the seniors' advocate. I really believe that because they –

AN HON. MEMBER: Absolutely!

MR. K. PARSONS: Absolutely! Especially in rural Newfoundland, just think about it.

I saw the Member for Stephenville, there was a lady on last night and that's what she talked

about. She talked about the seniors who were in that community who are going to use it. This is what they do. It's a service we're offering people in rural Newfoundland. It's unbelievable that we can even think about doing this cut. It's just not right.

The longest library in the province, outside of St. John's, is in Catalina, and for \$8,000 we're going to close her down. I hope the Member from that area votes for the budget and says he agrees with shutting down that library for \$8,000. That is ridiculous. That is shameful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: That is so, so terrible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

I ask the hon. Member, when the Speaker is standing all Members in the House are supposed to recognize the fact that the Speaker has stood. I ask for order in the House.

I've recognized the Member for Cape St. Francis to speak. I expect that all Members of the House will respect his time to speak uninterrupted.

The Member for Cape St. Francis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, listen, I understand what Members are going through over on that side. This is a very, very difficult budget. It's difficult. I understand how difficult it is to sell it in your own hometown. I understand that.

I understand how hard it is going to be for that gentleman to walk into Catalina and explain to those two little girls or the lady there who was teaching, why the library is closing down. I really do.

All I'm asking, you guys and ladies over there said you listened. If you had to be listening, like I did last night, to these people, why don't you react to it? There's some little thing you can do. We need the libraries.

Honestly, I really believe we should be able to work on things like this. I believe that for \$8,000 I think that library should stay open and I think all the libraries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I'll give you an example. I said today – and I got a little bit involved in libraries. My library in Torbay, there was a problem there. I got down with the library association and we managed to save our library. It had to move out of a municipal building into a new place. We were looking for extra funding, but we got it and it was good.

In the Town of Torbay, there was a fear they were going to lose their library. Mr. Speaker, 1,700 signatures were presented through a petition to the town council in Torbay and the town council in Flatrock, because some people in Flatrock used it.

Do you know what those elected representatives did? They stepped up. They said we'll pay the \$20,000 to keep that library open because it's important to the people that elected us. It's the right thing to do.

Listen, whatever you do, can you just go and talk to rural Newfoundland, just talk to the minister and explain to him. Maybe he doesn't know. Maybe he just doesn't understand. Like most people don't understand what it's doing to your communities. Think about it. Think about what it's doing to your communities.

Let's have a look now at the communities. Let's have a look and see where they're from. I guarantee you, just listen to where they're from: Arnold's Cove, Bay St. George South, Bell Island, Bishop's Falls, Brigus, Buchans, Cape St. George, Cartwright – the Member who was just heckling me a few minutes ago – Catalina, Centreville, Change Islands, Churchill Falls, Codroy Valley, Cormack, Cow Head, Daniel's Harbour, Fogo, Fortune, Fox Harbour, Garnish, Gaultois, Glenwood, Glovertown, Greenspond,

Harbour Grace, Hare Bay, Harry's Harbour, King's Point, La Scie, Lark Harbour, Lourdes, Lumsden, Musgrave Harbour, Norris Arm, Norris Point, Point Leamington, Port au Port, Pouch Cove – in my area – Ramea.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's shocking.

MR. K. PARSONS: It is shocking; it really is shocking.

Robert's Arm, Seal Cove, Sops Arm, Southern Harbour, St. Alban's, St. Bride's, St. Georges, Stephenville Crossing, Summerford, Trepassey, Victoria, Wabush, Winterton, and Woody Point.

Do you know what they all have in common? They're all from rural Newfoundland. Now you Members who are representing rural Newfoundland, that is shameful.

To the Member from Burin, it's shameful that the library in your small community is getting closed and you're happy about it. You're happy that your place – you're smiling at me because your library is closing down.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: It's shameful! Shameful, that you're doing that.

Mr. Speaker, libraries are an important part of rural Newfoundland. They're an important part of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's very important.

AN HON. MEMBER: Humber Valley Paving.

MR. K. PARSONS: Humber Valley Paving. Do you hear that? We're talking about libraries, b'y. We're talking about libraries. It's shocking.

I told you earlier, there are seniors who use them. They go to find some information. They go to use computers. They use email. They get information. Maybe they can order something. I don't know, that's what a lot of people are doing today.

We have young children – like I said, last night in Catalina, while the Member over there is

grinning at me again. Over in Catalina where they closed down – the children last night said, well, where are we going to go to? We're going out on the streets. He's happy about that. I can't believe it.

Teenagers use it. There are a lot of teenagers out there who can't do their homework at home, in smaller parts of Newfoundland and Labrador. They go to the library because it's a quiet place to go to. It's a very quiet place to go to, and there are resources there that they can use. Maybe the resources are not at home.

Why are you closing down these small libraries? That's my question. I don't know, there are things we can do. Listen, there are lots of things in this budget that we can do and there are a lot of good things. I think there are some good things in there. I really do believe there are good things in there. I ask every Member over there that I just named off in one of these small communities that are losing their library, I don't expect you not to vote for the budget, but I expect you to lobby the minister and tell him how – because he obviously doesn't know how important the libraries are to rural Newfoundland.

Obviously, he didn't watch last night to see – like I said I'm not sure if it was the grandmother there with the little child where she gets two free books. That's a service. Do you know what? We're spread out. A lot of the problems in Newfoundland are that we're so spread out. Everybody realizes it is. It is a problem when you go down the Burin Peninsula, then you go down towards Marystown. We're spread out all over the place, but there are little services that we're offering.

The lady out in – I think I read Lourdes and Cow Head, read a story on CBC this morning. They were talking about the cost. They can't justify the cost.

Mr. Speaker, we have municipalities stepping forward. You take it there are 25 libraries that are in municipal buildings. So let me tell you now, the municipality in those 25, most of them pay for the heat. They pay for the light. They pay for the cleaning. They pay for the snow clearing. In some cases, and in a lot of cases,

they give a grant to the library to help them stay open like they did in Pouch Cove.

Pouch Cove had a group that was coming down, children after school for a reading program, but they never had enough hours. It was only like 15 hours or something like that to keep it going for that group. So the town stepped in and they're a municipal town. They stepped in and under taxpayers' dollars – they thought it was that important that they invested \$8,200 so this program could be offered to the children after school. Isn't that a great thing?

Municipalities are doing their part. They are. They're paying the heat and light. That's the one in Catalina you'd say, gee, it can't be \$8,000. That's why it's \$8,000 because the town is paying for everything else. It's just a librarian, as far as I know, is the cost.

Of all the cuts you can do, you're hurting the most vulnerable people in our society. You're hurting the most vulnerable people. Like I said, there are a lot of people in these towns that you say, okay, 30 minutes away – go use it, 30 minutes away. There's a library 30 minutes away and we're going to open it for 30 hours a week.

There are a lot of people in those communities that haven't got transportation to go the 30 minutes. I tell you when I looked at some, where they're to and listened to people talk, a lot of them, I don't know – the one on Bell Island, I guess, they're coming to Torbay. I tell you that's going to be 30 minutes, yes. I'm not sure – what do we have? We must be given – I know what we're going to do to those communities: helicopter service. It must be.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about Fogo?

MR. K. PARSONS: Fogo – just think about the islands. It's unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, I only have a short time left, but I'm just looking to the Members opposite, especially the ones in rural Newfoundland. I'm asking you to stand up for the people in your district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Stand up for the people who are using these libraries. Stand up for the seniors. Stand up for the teenagers. Stand up for the young people who are taking advantage of the libraries in your community. This cost you're doing to these people, it's not worth it. Down the road, we need these children well educated and our seniors –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's my second time up talking to the budget. I have to say it's been a very interesting debate. One thing that's fascinating is what goes on here in the House of Assembly versus what's going on back in our districts.

I live in one of these rural districts and I can tell you it's a very interesting contrast. It seems that the further you are, of course, from the voice that is St. John's, perhaps the more challenging it is. I must say, as I get back, which isn't often enough – I need to figure out how to clone myself – it's important to sit down with people and walk them through it. There's no question the budget is complicated. It's complex. There were a lot of changes that needed to be made and, frankly, there are a lot more that need to be made in the future.

The state of the affairs was, as many have described, when we went in in December into the Cabinet room, we were thinking we might be dealing with something in the vicinity, in the order of \$1.1-plus billion. Over the coming weeks, it was clearly evident that we were approaching some \$3 billion and not only did we have to check ourselves, we actually had to do something about it very seriously.

A couple of the comments that the Member for Cape St. Francis just made, I just wanted to respond to. I think it's really important. He

talked about the truth. It's really interesting. There are different definitions to the truth. One can be the factual statements that you make, but there can also be the collective whole, the sum of the parts. I believe that's what we need to focus on.

At the end of the day, we added things; we took things away. There's no question the Opposition is pointing this out, both in the House and around the province. They're identifying: Oh my gosh, they took this wonderful program away, the Home Heating Rebate program or they added the levy tax. What are these guys doing?

Collectively – and I can assure everyone – in the Cabinet we took a great deal of energy and attention to ensure that those most vulnerable in society would clearly, and will surely, be protected.

What I'd like to do is walk through a couple of examples just to reflect that. It's interesting, I had a gentleman in my office about two weeks ago; he was 69 years of age and he had an income of \$16,000. He lives west of Happy Valley-Goose Bay in a small home. He's got a truck that gets him going, but it's certainly not one he's going to be able to depend on, so of course he's nervous. He's hearing all of these alarming comments and, frankly, he wanted to come see me and learn the truth.

So back to the truth, I was able to sit down with him, and it was a good thing I had some examples. Since that time, we have gone public with our app online and people who can and are interested can go online and actually determine their own situation. But for this gentleman, he's a senior; he's about 69 years of age. I don't need to mention his name. His taxable income is very different from his net income, which is about \$16,000. His taxable income, after all those deductions are made and so on, it's sort of that last entry on your income tax form, is only \$6,717.

He's well below the threshold through which the levy would even start. He's way below that. In fact, if you think about it – and maybe I'll get off topic, but I'll come back to my gentleman here in a second. In fact, you can be much, much higher than this taxable income threshold of

\$20,000. It's actually, at the end of the day, where do you sit after your deductions?

In terms of his personal income tax payable, he doesn't have to pay because of his income level. As I said, in terms of the Deficit Reduction Levy, given he's below a threshold of \$20,000, he similarly doesn't have to pay. We estimated his increased estimated cost of consumption taxes, the various little fees that we've added on there, represents an additional \$240. So unbalanced and the truth in terms of the whole sum of the parts, he would have to pay an additional \$240.

However, in terms of benefits, he's able to avail of two very important programs that we've offered provincially. And as we've indicated, the Premier has talked about it and the Finance Minister has talked about it; we have greatly supplemented the Seniors' Benefit. So he's receiving an additional \$250 there. Then our corner piece, which is the piece that, frankly, as we were going through the deliberations of this GRI Phase I, we wanted to make sure again that those most vulnerable, the low income, whether it be low fixed income, persons with disabilities, seniors with low fixed income, we wanted to make sure that these people were not under any further stress. That's the last thing from anybody's objective in this House, or anywhere else in this province, or frankly around the country.

We cannot afford to make any more strain or hardship on those folks. So we took that money out of the Home Heating Rebate program. We've created this Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and I'm very pleased to say that instead of money going to a household now just because you might be running heating oil and so on and you're looking for an annual payment, let's give it to the folks who actually need it. So we targeted for this income, the lowest income groups. They received an additional supplement there.

Now their total additional benefits are some-\$470, representing for them provincially an additional \$230, this is net, plus the Guaranteed Income Supplement of \$947. This individual who lives in his home west of Goose Bay – if he's listening he'll recall our conversation I'm sure – he now is able to receive, as a result of the

actions we took, as a result of the care we placed on those most vulnerable, an additional \$1,200 a year. I would suggest that might be closer to the truth.

As I said, when we walked into Cabinet and had the full realization, and then through the budget we were able to roll out and explain to the rest of the province where we were.

Back to my comrade from across the way from Cape St. Francis, he talked about the need to keep this economy going. Well, the fact of the matter is the way we were going, we were going to be broke in just a few years if we kept at this rate.

The difference between spending and revenue is so dramatic, that gap has gotten so out of control that even at the height of oil back around 2007, and height of oil price, we were spending well beyond our means. Running up deficits when, frankly, we were hoping for even higher oil and production rates. We knew then that we'd hit our peak. Yet, we still kept spending.

We don't have a revenue problem. Everybody keeps being fixated on what we need to generate from oil, watching the price of oil, and yes, it will help us right now, but we actually have a spending problem. We are spending so far beyond our means. So in terms of keeping this economy going and so on, that's in fact what we were thinking about when we made these decisions.

A key fact I think that everyone needs to realize, even after this difficult budget and the measures we've had to enact to finally get us back on the right track, we are still spending more on servicing this massive debt than we spend on educating our children.

My comrade, I watch him every day, very eloquently defending the very difficult decisions he had to make in education. The fact of the matter is he has less money than the bankers are asking for in terms of what we owe them for the monies that we've had to borrow in the past. That same kind of pressure translates to every one of the ministers. We're all feeling that pressure, and I must say it's an oppressive pressure. We cannot continue on this same vein.

Another comment the gentleman just made across the way from Cape St. Francis was that we are enacting these measures way too fast. Yes, it might feel that way in terms of the full extent of everything we did and what we changed. The fact of the matter is that this needed to be done.

I also would argue that by targeting seven years out before we're going to get back to a surplus, which is where any responsible government should be – it's seven years away so I would argue it's actually not that fast. It's going to have to go through some seven years of action and sticking to this plan that we've launched before we get there.

As painful as it is, I can assure people that if we really went in a quick way, we would really be dealing with some strong ire and some kickback. As I said, yes, in terms of looking to the future and not having the dollars to spend, we need to make sure that we make these fiscally responsible decisions right now.

Another comment that I hear out there, and again I'm going back to the truth, whether it be last night watching our Premier and the Finance Minister answer questions put to them by CBC, who I thought did very well and did a very good job – there's often a point raised that somehow the actions that this government has just taken are going to drive people out of this amazing, wonderful province. In fact, they may have to drive quite a ways before they find a better situation in terms of personal income tax payable.

Despite all of the moves and the initiatives – and yes, we have had to increase taxes – we still remain at or below our Atlantic provincial counterparts. I can go through each of them and fill up all manner of time, but the key point is that we are at or below each of our Atlantic provinces. As you look across the country, in fact, we are extremely competitive. This is across all taxable income brackets from \$20,000 to \$150,000. We have taken steps to ensure that we remain very competitive. I would suggest that if people are leaving, it can't be because of our budget moves.

I also have another, and the Minister of Finance tabled this last week so I don't need to table it

again. It's there for everyone to review. There's a breakdown. It actually goes up to the super high-income earners of some \$250,000 to \$10,000 taxable income. You can see where we sit across the country; extremely competitive, again, back to the truth.

In terms of looking at where we are in terms of overall taxation and as a comparison of provincial income, what we're seeing in terms of income tax, the temporary levy we've had to instate, that total cost versus what was going on in 2006, we are at that level now. To suggest we've somehow put additional hardship on people of this province, in fact we have had to step back and get a grip on our spending. We are just back to where we were just a few years ago when oil and oil production and oil prices were at their peak, but we've managed to go back. This time with the full realization and full commitment as to what we need to do, we should be in a much better position than we found ourselves when we walked into that Cabinet office on the 14th of December.

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the – as the Member for Cape St. Francis as indicated, there is good news in the budget and I'm going to talk a little bit about that. I'm going to talk specifically about my District of Lake Melville and Labrador.

While I'm thinking about Lake Melville, and before I forget, I did want to make a special mention of a very important individual who, unfortunately, died just a couple of days ago. He was a very good friend of mine, David Massie. He's one of the builders of Labrador. His funeral is tomorrow.

Even in the last few days of his life he still was talking to me about my impressions, what we were doing and full faith and support of me. I must say, when you have people like that, people who literally in their dying breaths are saying: Perry, do the right thing. I'm very proud to say that I feel that's in fact what I'm doing. That's what I'm charged to do.

I do apologize for just mentioning my first name. I'm like my comrade over on the other side.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: In terms of Labrador and some key spending announcements we've made, perhaps the most common comment that, frankly, anyone in Labrador will make in terms of where we need to invest when it talks about infrastructure is in the Trans-Labrador Highway.

As I've mentioned before in the House, the Trans-Labrador Highway is not just a regional highway. It's a highway that connects the entire province to the goods and services that we will be able to avail of at a much cheaper, a much more efficient means in the future when it's completed. It's just been a few years of course since we hacked that path through the woods. I was actually involved in the environmental assessment of the project. I know it very well.

We are now moving. The previous administration was allocating significant resources, absolutely, to getting the widening and the paving done to create a safe highway. Madam Speaker, you know yourself how dangerous it is driving on that road when it's not complete. We both are sharing lots of excitement and adventure in the last few weeks even.

It's not done. So we need to recognize that, and I'm very pleased to say our government has agreed with that. We have allocated some \$63.7 million for actually leveraging very soon to be announced federal commitment which would greatly supplement that and certainly will carry us on for completing this important link as soon as possible.

Further to that link of the Trans-Labrador Highway, of course, is how do we get across the Strait of Belle Isle? I know yourself, Madam Speaker, you know how important that link is especially to your district. You feel and hear it every day. While we're making progress, it remains a bottleneck in terms of efficient movement of goods and services and people safely across between the Island and Labrador.

Until we get this entire link put together, I would suggest we will not feel like a solid province. We still are challenged by our geography and it's infrastructure like that that will pull, not only the province together, but I suggest it will pull the province into the country.

It's good to see we've also allocated some three-quarters of a million dollars towards an update of the feasibility study associated with that fixed link. How might we do it? Would we copy the Bay Bridge-Tunnel down to Chesapeake Bay where we might go under, or a bridge, or some other option perhaps of an enhanced ferry that could deal with the ice and the demands of linking up the Island with Labrador?

Further on transportation, I'm also very pleased to say the clear recognition of the cost of travel. I feel it every time I travel back and forth to my district, down to the office here. We've allocated some \$730,000 to continue that travel subsidy for Labrador teams and individuals to participate in athletic events here on the Island.

Somehow I'm always amazed how the small communities, especially the ones in the Member for Torngat Mountains but also in your district, Madam Speaker, small, little communities, and one could certainly recognize the infrastructure could be better in terms of training facilities for recreation and so on, but somehow they pull it off.

I've seen outdoor arenas, no roofs on them, yet the kids are out there in some super-cold weather developing important skills playing hockey, for example. So it's good to see that recognition that will help bring our very capable athletes to the competitions and, frankly, whoop them good sometimes, as they do really well.

Another important concept in Labrador – it was interesting; I was in a meeting this morning with the Member for Torngat Mountains talking about the importance of the winter access we enjoy just through that beautiful 10 months of winter and two months of bad skidoing. That's Labrador. To really take full advantage of that situation, we need to work with the Labrador winter trail system and the trans-Labrador trail. We've allocated \$351,000 for continued grooming of the trail subsidy and maintaining our winter trail system, and pulling all of our communities together. It's extremely important.

Another important announcement for Labrador, and one that I'm particularly proud of because it falls within my own Department of Environment and Conservation, is the ongoing need to continue the remediation at the former American

radar base at Hopedale. The provincial government has spent, to date, some \$12 million on the remediation of both soil that's been impacted by contaminants, mostly by PCBs, and other hazards.

Government has recognized the importance of cleaning this up. We agree with that concept – not concept, but with that absolute requirement, again, a vulnerable population. I'm very pleased to say that government has announced a further \$1.46 million this year towards the cleanup and the remediation of the impacted soil.

I note – and I wanted to underline this because, of course, there was another announcement of a pullback of some \$200,000 from that program. The \$200,000 was actually allocated towards steel and non-contaminated debris that sits in another aspect of the former radar site in Hopedale. While it would be nice to get this eyesore out of the way, frankly –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

MR. TRIMPER: – it was recognized that we should deal with what's most important for human health. So that's where we put our effort.

Another little small detail but very important, we have some amazing communities throughout the province. One I'm very proud of in my district is that of Mud Lake. The community of Mud Lake has some 56 people when everybody is home.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. TRIMPER: The only way you can get there is by boat in the summer and snowmobile in the wintertime. They have a little bridge that connects the two parts of the village. That bridge has deteriorated to such a point that – and I was there just a couple of weeks ago – I could literally walk right through the bridge if I wasn't careful. It's extremely dangerous.

I'm very pleased to say that my colleague from the Transportation and Works Department has announced tenders for the resurfacing, upgrade

and stabilization of that very important bridge in the community of Mud Lake. I'm very happy to see that happening.

(Speaks Russian.)

I'll go back to speaking English. People said I should speak Russian to get everybody's attention. I could do that too.

AN HON. MEMBER: You got everybody's attention.

MR. TRIMPER: Okay.

(Speaks Russian.)

I think that an important aspect of some of the medical transportation programs and so on – I just wanted to assure people, before I run out of time, that there is support where there have been tough decisions. I'm pleased to say that I was in a meeting this morning with my Labrador colleagues talking about ensuring we have programs there to support people even where there are cuts.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's good to get up and speak again on the budget. Like I said yesterday, I'll say every time, it's always nice to get up in the Chamber. As my colleague said, there are some good things in the budget, no doubt. I'm not sure what they are, but we'll find out eventually I guess.

I said to someone today it's incredible; outside of the 30 Members here in the House, I haven't heard a one single person that supports the budget so –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: I am still willing – I live in hope; I might die in despair, but I do have confidence I'll hear some good news eventually.

What we've heard so far is not very good, Madam Speaker. As my colleague pointed out about the libraries closing, Members opposite don't seem too stressed about it, but on this side of the House we have concerns. My colleague for Conception Bay East – Bell Island is losing his library. Most of my colleagues are, Madam Speaker, and I think everyone should be concerned. The public are concerned and we have stacks of emails that will also support how people are concerned.

People can make light of it, but I'm sure all the hon. Members don't. We most definitely don't, but some do and that's their prerogative, Madam Speaker, and that's something they'll have to answer to their constituents for.

As I was speaking yesterday, I think I'd like to go back to what you constantly hear when you go to the coffee shops or you go out in my district anyway. I know most other districts must be the same. People's confidence is down – their consumer confidence. Again, if you're consumer confidence is down, it don't take an economics major to figure it out. If you're consumer confidence is low, spending is low. It has a drastic effect and everything else. I said yesterday about home builders. You go talk to automotive dealers, you go to most small business owners, you go to large business, you go anywhere – people are noticing the slowing down of business at Tim Hortons, believe it or not. Now I haven't seen that yet because every time I go there I'm in a lineup, but there is apparently a slowing down.

That's not abnormal. We've had a good run of years but you go back years ago and you look at restaurants. Downtown, we noticed, in the last year there was a downsizing – maybe it was too many, but some restaurants are closing. You watch as time will progress here now and you will see a rash of that happen again because again consumer confidence is low. It is going to be a lot lower. Ironically, talk about messaging,

a lot of these budget initiatives haven't even taken place yet and people have pulled back already, just on the fear.

Back in December and January when the Minister of Finance and the Premier went up – I went to one of their briefings in the media room and things were still relatively going well then, but they put the shock to the system. It was like hang on; we're probably not going to see a lot of these real effects until later on in the summer and fall but people pulled back immediately.

That's the risk you run when you shock – you are sending shockwaves to the economy. And like I said, you don't have to have an economics major to figure that out. People pull back. They are uncertain. Am I going to lose my job this fall? Where are we coming up with this extra money? I have insurance renewal. Wait until July 1 comes. Most everyone's insurance renewal is in July – I know mine is. You're going to start to see a trickle effect but right now we're into April and we're just into May and consumer confidence is low.

I can only anticipate it getting lower. As I stated earlier, I haven't heard anything good in the budget. Again, I'll give it weight and my colleagues can fight it out, I'm sure there is stuff good, but maybe the messaging needs to improve because I'd love to hear some good news. I keep saying, I've said this numerous times while I've stood in this House and I'll say it again, if there is stuff we don't understand – because I do know, there's one thing I'd like to point out too. I forgot to say it yesterday, but I have to say it today. We may not be as smart as a lot of Members on the other side, but we do know how to talk to our constituents. We can talk to them and they respect what we have to say. We may not be up to the level over there, but tell us what's in the budget. We want to know. You might have to say it slow because we don't understand.

The hon. Member for Labrador West, you have to say it slow to us because we don't understand. I tell you, people in our district understand us and we all just got elected because they like us and they listen to what we have to say and I'm going to continue say and stand up for my district, like you should stand up for yours. All of you should up for your districts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: That's a problem in this House. You can play the game of party politics but you should be standing up for your district residents. Look at the emails. My colleague there has a folder; he can't even get them on his desk. They all have concerns. A lot of them live in your district; maybe you should start looking at that.

I got some more notes – where am I going to now? I'm going to read a couple of emails. As I'm sure you are aware – these are from real people, by the way. These are not from anyone's puppets in here; these are real people. This is not cherry-picking; this is right off the list.

As I am sure you are aware, the 2016 budget recently announced by the sitting Liberal government is a direct slap in the face of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The number of fee increase, new fees, newly imposed raised taxes is nothing more than a knife in the back of the province's people. Once again, the middle and lower class people who are the backbone of the province are being required to bear the brunt of government's fiscal situation while upper class continues to pay minimally.

There has to be other ways of reducing debt and maintaining services without crushing the spending power of people – point in case, the consumer confidence. I can't throw it away; I have more on this one. After all, the people will stop spending due to higher tax and fees for just about everything that our government come up with the money to pay the debt and pay the services. A good point.

If people stop spending, it has a trickle effect. Again, I'm going back to the economics point but I have to say it again. It's counterproductive because you are upping the taxes so they are pulling back, revenues will slow down. I don't see the balancing effect. If you're going to raise taxes and everyone is going to have the same confidence and safe spending the way they've been spending for the last five years, well maybe it works; but it's counterproductive because you're upping the taxes, spending is going down and you're not getting as many taxes. You are crushing the economy. Time will tell, but I'm convinced that will happen and I'm sure a lot of

Members opposite, if they want to be honest, will tell you the same thing.

I have another few emails. I got up again last week and I had a list there and I could go through it again. I am sure it is too painful for some of you to listen to about some of the investments in the last 10 years. The MHA for Torngat Mountains, I made a note, he mentioned the other day – if we had the money that the previous government had, what we would do differently. He is welcome to read this because there are a lot of great investments and I don't think anyone over here is going to hang their head about it. What would you not have spent over here? Anything in that list you wouldn't have spent? I don't think so.

I'll make another quote, Madam Speaker, what I heard – I heard this yesterday and I like to make notes. I like to use real stories about real people. This person – who, again, I don't have a lot of political conversations – said outside consulting for labour negotiations, unbelievable. So I made a note of that. That's what the real people, that's what the people who voted for each and every one of us in here are looking at everyone in here for leadership, that's what they're saying. They're all in shock.

AN HON. MEMBER: Five libraries can say that.

MR. PETTEN: Five libraries, absolutely. We're only saving a million dollars on libraries. We are probably going to spend several million dollars paying for these experts. But again, we don't know as much as the other side so again we have to be careful. You need to be careful.

Someone called me this morning too. They were having a discussion, just talking about what's going on with all the budget. They said: I remember back in 2004 when the public sector strike was on. The previous government was just in their first several months in their mandate, a big protest; there was a lot of uprising. You had the public sector affected. My wife is a public sector worker; she was one of them people on that picket line. You are a select group. There is a vast majority of people in this province were not affected. There was one group affected and they spoke out and they fought and that's what the unions – that's what was supposed to

happen. Government had their battle; it was a tense time.

You had the crab dispute. Again, you were into one pocket of fishermen and their families. That was a really tough dispute. It worked out, but those disputes will come and go but you zeroed in on a certain specific groups. This budget is after hitting every single person in this province, every single group in this province, every single region in this province, every family.

I can sit here and criticize it, but that's the reality. I'm not making this stuff up. You just turn on the news, flick on the radio or go out and walk to the supermarket. I went out Saturday and Sunday to events in my district and I spent half the night talking to people about the budget. They weren't like: Oh, the Liberals are this or the Liberals are that. They were almost dismayed.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. PETTEN: That's the word. They're speechless. I don't know – what are they at? Could you do any worse?

Again, you can stay in a bubble and not realize that's the reality that's out there. Members on this side of the House and I'm sure a lot of Members on that side because there are a lot of good Members over there, if they listened to what people are saying, they're hearing what we're saying too.

I realize – I will say it again – it's a tough situation to be put in, but it is what it is – a quote that was said by the Premier recently. I use that quote too, by the way. It is what it is. They're the ones who have to answer to their constituents.

Good or bad, I don't shy away from my constituents. Whether they call me, whether they email me, whatever they want to do, they come in the office, whatever. That was one of the things I campaigned on. That is one of the things I will continue to be and one thing, I believe, we all should be is accessible. I won't shy away from issues whether they like stuff or not, I will take it head on.

I will be quite honest with you. I really believe that's what the public are looking for, for all 40 districts. You read some stuff – I don't like personal attacks. I've read some stuff recently in the news. I don't condone that. I don't like it. It's not where I'm too, but on the flip side – and I am not justifying by no stretch, Madam Speaker – people are frustrated. If they don't feel like you're listening to them, they're going to get more frustrated. They're going to get angrier. They're going to have these events and that's the unfortunate part.

Frustration brings the worst out of a lot of people and, I believe, right now, we're seeing the level of frustration rising on a daily basis. We're seeing protests. I'm fearful these protests – if there don't soon be some action or something – the people are looking for answers. They're looking from something from the government.

They can watch Question Period every day. They can watch the hon. Members get up. They can watch us get up and throw questions and the Members get up and answer questions. They're not getting the answers they want. I know, personally, I see the emails come in.

We sat last night. I got home around 12:15 a.m. When I got home I spent 20 minutes or a half an hour reading emails on the budget. It's tiring, but I try to respond to every one of them. I'm reading them and I'm going: Oh my, not another one, but I'm not complaining. Don't get me wrong, but it's like you realize the anxiety. I'm getting people emailing me at 2 o'clock in the morning. It's incredible.

I'll read another email I have here. I know desperate times call for desperate measures. Having said that, the combination of raised taxes, additional levy, putting sales tax back on insurance – they say in this Newfoundland is the only province that will have tax on auto insurance, let alone a 15 per cent increase in fees. I'm not sure if that's accurate but regardless, these people are desperate. People who are currently struggling will never survive. Average-income people will have stress and it will impact family relationships. Children will be denied participation in sports, other activities and result in hanging out, which may lead to other further problems.

Whether that's true or not, that's their concern. They're real people. They live and walk. They drive the same streets and have to go to the same coffee shops. These are the people that marked X's for a lot of people in this House. That's what people are concerned about.

They want people to listen to them. They don't want to get up and get theatrics and point the finger and blame this crowd and blame that crowd. They could care less for that. Your library is closing, but they'd rather the Minister of Education get up and give a valid reason and justified reason instead of pointing the finger at what was done over here, or cutting teacher positions. They're worried about the children being jammed up in a class.

No, he's going to get up and point fingers across the way and blame and play the role of theatrics. I said yesterday to my colleague there – because me and him have a few good conversations – I think some Members opposite were auditioning for the Trinity Pageant. I don't know if Ms. Butt is looking for new recruits because I think there are some of them moved up along. I think the Minister of AES is on the top of the list. There are others over there too I think are trying.

AN HON. MEMBER: An Oscar win.

MR. PETTEN: He's going for the Oscar award because he was all over the place. I don't have a clue of what he said, Madam Speaker. He got up the other day and he went on and on and on and I looked – what did he say?

The Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay, is it? He got up yesterday and I have to give him credit, he was phenomenal. He made shots at us, he made criticisms, but myself and my hon. colleague he was singling out. That was for no other reason to say he did a great job. You can criticize; you can do what you want. That's fine, that's fair game. We all do criticism. Do it in a respectful manner.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Me and my colleague gave him – and I'll do it again. It was a great job. Not that I can say the same about the rest of them because they're getting up, they're dealing with their constituents, the ones that voted them in.

Instead of talking to them, they're in here blaming us.

Like the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port, he was there yesterday and it was you. I said my God, what about the libraries? What about the stuff that matters to the people? No, no, he wanted to blame the former – we had another Member who was up and he was going on and going on and criticizing. That's not what people want to hear.

MR. K. PARSONS: They want to know about their library.

MR. PETTEN: They want to know about their library, about their schools, about –

AN HON. MEMBER: Health care.

MR. PETTEN: Health care. What else, b'ys?

AN HON. MEMBER: Busing.

MR. PETTEN: Busing, yes. Those are the real bread and butter issues. They don't care about blaming anyone else.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much is it going to cost to live here?

MR. PETTEN: How much is it going – what about the levy? What about the insurance tax? What about the gas, 16.5 cents a litre; what about you have to pay twice as much to get into a park, twice as much to get your car into a park. If they like to camp, they can't afford to camp because they can't tow the camper. When they get enough money to get gas in the truck to tow the camper they can't afford to get in the park. So what's the good of it. Sell it all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: But no, they'll get up and point fingers and blame and heckle us, oh yes.

The hon. Member for Cape St. Francis mentioned about the library in Catalina because he cares, people care in this province. All we get is heckling from over there. What's he saying wrong? He's upset the library is closing.

Another Member there from (inaudible) talked about the AES office closing. That was a terrible thing. It's not happening is it? Is it all reversed?

The Minister of Education is over there. He's ready to go jarring me, but every answer he's given has been theatrics. He's number three on the list for the Trinity Pageant.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: He's number three. He's dropping down the list.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: The Minister of AES is still number one, Madam Speaker. He's still on the top of the list. He's fighting it, although I don't think he's going to pull it off.

I'll go back to my point.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is having trouble hearing the hon. Member. I ask Members for their co-operation.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: I have to remind them, because when you get these opportunities you have to make your point clear. There are a lot of people – I won't say everyone, because I like a lot of those Members, but there are some of them over there a lot smarter than us. It's frustrating.

I considered myself to be – before I came in here I thought I wasn't bad. I passed everything I touched, but this crowd here. I thought I could handle myself around most groups but they're smarter than all of us. Everyone in Newfoundland –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. PETTEN: Yeah, I would say so – but nobody understands like them.

I'm soon going to start emailing constituents back and say, I don't know what they know. Maybe you should cc them on all the emails you send me because when I write you back, if I make a mistake they can fix it for me. I'm thinking about doing that, Madam Speaker, because we have a lot of smart people over there. We have people who tell us they're going to say it slow so we can understand. Now I have to tell you, that was the most offensive comment, one of the most offensive things I've ever heard in my life.

Then we have the Minister of Health. He gets up and I mean – he was up today in Question Period questioning what the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said. We watched it. We watched the recording, then he denied it.

Again, there are a lot of women in his district who have early breast cancer screening. He'd better go and talk to them. Don't talk to the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. Talk to the people out in his district who voted for him when he's up with his nonsense comments. Do you know what, Madam Speaker? Again, he's a bit smarter than us. So I have to put that in context.

I have to go back again and say, the Minister of AES, I really don't think there's anyone going to come close to beating him in the Trinity Pageant. I know it might be when the House closes, the timetable. I believe Donna starts that around – my time in Tourism, the Minister of BCTRD knows that. I think it's around June it runs. When the kids get out of school, isn't it, they start up? He may be late for the first performance but he'll be there.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's rehearsing.

MR. PETTEN: He is. He did a great job rehearsing. I'm not sure what sketch he's going to have this year, Madam Speaker, but I have a feeling he's going to be definitely on top of the list. There are others fighting for it.

The Minister of Education, I don't think he's going to make it but he got – they have a lot of roles. I know the *Republic of Doyle* used to be down there and we'd call them fillers. They give them a couple of hundred dollars to walk around while the main actors are doing their

performance. So while the Minister of AES is up doing the lead act the Minister of Education walks behind him, waves, with his hands in his pocket. He'll be great at that but he won't be able to say nothing.

When the libraries are closed, he'll be the guy going around putting the locks on them, right? With a nail bag on, he'll be putting the lock on the door. I really think he'll do a great job at that. I do and I wish him well.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) closing them down.

MR. PETTEN: Oh yes, I hope he doesn't close her down.

The Trinity Pageant is great. I'm not sure which district this is located in. I'm not sure if it's the Member for Terra Nova. That's a great pageant, by the way. When you go this summer you'll be able to see your colleagues on the stage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: How good can it get?

You should invite all your Members out. Hopefully they can walk in public then. Go out and take them out for a day because they have an outdoor pageant. But it's going to great to watch the Minister of AES lead the charge. I might even drive out to it. I live in CBS, I might come out and join you.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. PETTEN: I'll stay with you. You got her buddy, I can stay with you.

My time is wrapping up and I'm in a mood now, I can go for about two hours.

Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to get up and speak on the budget. We don't agree with this budget. We don't agree with a lot of the stuff we've heard across the House. We ask for you guys to start listening to the people, not talking to us, talk to the people.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HOLLOWAY: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The budget came down and for the last two-plus weeks –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. HOLLOWAY: I don't know that I want to match that because I've looked at postage from Members opposite and some members of their family and how they criticize Members on this side of the House for laughing and smiling when we're talking about such a serious thing as the budget. I take exception to the Member opposite today joking and carrying on about the Trinity Pageant. Well, that is a great event; I've attended it. I know some of the organizers quite well, good friends of mine. But this budget – and it's so serious – for us to be accused of laughing and smiling, yet there's so much jovialness that's happened this afternoon in this House about the budget, that's where the real shame is. It disheartens me actually.

Madam Speaker, the Member opposite talk about we have not gone to our districts. We have been in hiding, afraid to approach our constituents. Well, I can tell you for certain that Thursday nights after the House is closed, I get in my car and I drive to my district. I go to meetings; I spend all day Friday, Saturday and Sunday meeting with constituents addressing their concerns.

My intent, Madam Speaker, is to provide clarity because of the misconceptions that have been provided to people. On this past weekend – and I was criticized for it – I went to one of the most remote communities in my district: St Brendan's. On Friday night – and the Members opposite talk about that we're afraid to talk to our constituents, to deal with the questions that are going to come. I was informed on Friday night that there was going to be a protest once the ferry docked in St Brendan's.

Do you know what, Madam Speaker? That did not deter me because it's extremely important to meet constituents and to answer their questions, no matter how upset they are over this budget or how upset they've been made by the misinformation that's been provided.

So I went to St. Brendan's; there was no protest. I was told on my way over there that the protest would probably go to the community centre. Still, my interest is to go and meet the good people of St. Brendan's and to talk about the issues that are important to them. When I got to the community centre, people were quite friendly. They shook my hand and invited me inside. Forty-seven people turned out, Madam Speaker. The mayor of the island spoke and she talked about the impact of the budget on the people on the island, and the impact on the people there is very similar to everybody else in this province.

So when I had the opportunity to speak, I referenced some of the things that the mayor had brought up. They asked about the levy. It was an issue for people there. It's been an issue for everybody in my district. It is an issue for everybody in this province. And when I clarified for them that 43 per cent of the people in this province will not be impacted by the levy, people's attitude started to change.

When I further said that of the remaining people, the 62 per cent that were going to pay the levy, that the amount they would pay would be less than \$340 – so in effect, Madam Speaker, we have 65 per cent of the people in this province that will pay less than \$340 as the deficit reduction measure that's been brought out by the levy. And it's temporary, so it's meant to be phased out. When I talked about and provided that clarity to people and I said for this year, it's really half that, the attitude again started to change.

People asked about full-day kindergarten. I said what I can say to you about full-day kindergarten – and I draw upon my experiences as a volunteer, having been a volunteer in the community. I was involved with the Family Resource Centre in the Clarendville area. We tried for five years to get daycare, make it available to the community. The current Leader of the Opposition was actually the minister for

Child, Youth and Family Services at the time. I can remember the money that was required to retrofit the building, to provide public child care to the community so that parents could go back to work and continue to be contributing members of the community and of our society, it required \$300,000 to do the renovations and to meet the legislation and the guidelines.

The former member for Trinity Bay North, I can remember when he called and he said: Do you know what? The minister has \$100,000; that's all he can give you. I said: Wow, we've worked at this for five years as a not-for-profit. We had to give up on it. We couldn't provide it. So I said to the folks in St. Brendan's that one of the reasons I'm in favour of full-day kindergarten – now my background is in is in early childhood development. I know all the studies. I know all the benefits of kids having early intervention and how that gives them a one-up, a better chance for the education they will have and the outcomes they can achieve, but it's also tied to the child care piece.

We can invest money into child care. The challenge we ran into in the Clarenville area – besides the fact that we couldn't convince the former administration to give us the money to do something as extremely important, despite all the money that was available – and lots of times it's been already referenced about \$25 billion – but we couldn't get it for something so important to allow parents to go back in the workforce and to put children into quality child care.

So we couldn't get the money. We also couldn't recruit the staff. So parents said: I wouldn't have this issue for my child that's in half-day kindergarten if they could stay all day. When I referenced this to the folks in St. Brendan's, they said: Okay, we get it. Now we understand.

The point I'm trying to make, Madam Speaker, is that it's important, and it has been extremely important for all of us, to provide clarity to the information that's been put out there. Somebody asked me: Where did all the money go? I said: Well, I can give you a couple of examples because I really don't know where all the money went. I worked in the public service, but I still can't tell you where all the money went.

I gave them the example of the Terra Nova trestle. I mentioned it when I spoke to this budget over a week ago. The fact there was a brand new top put on a trestle and the minute it was finished the trestle was closed. Now, in this budget we've had to identify some funds to go and fix the problem so that it reopens.

I talked about the fire truck that went to Eastport – a \$275,000 investment that couldn't fit in the fire hall. Again, we have to find \$600,000 to right fit a fire hall. Where did the money go?

I had a call from a resident from the Member for Ferryland's District who said to me: Do you want to know where the money went? Roads that were perfectly fine to go over, good asphalt, repaved last year – terrible, awful, terrible for that to be happening. I suspect there were lots of examples like that in this province.

So people ask: Where did the money go? I can tell you at the end of the discussion, people came up to me and they shook my hand and they said thank you very much for clarifying the things that are out there. I got on the ferry and then I went to Glovertown because I wanted to meet with the local library board to talk about the impacts of that library board and the library in the school.

I met with the local library board; we had a wonderful conversation. It is a fantastic venue for kids, for the school, for the youth. We sat down and we had a great conversation. My commitment to them was to see if I could work with them to find a solution; \$25,000 is what was required to continue with the library in the school. It's a tremendous asset to the community, and I get it.

Now, some people were accusing me on Saturday of being afraid to go out and engage the members of the library board. I can tell you, I am not afraid; I look forward to the opportunities to provide clarity and information. So I met with the library board and they, too, thanked me for coming out and meeting with them.

I was pleased to have had a discussion with the Minister of Education and to hear of his comments now over the last day that there is no movement on school libraries. We have some

opportunity now until the end of October to work with library boards and schools to find a sustainable solution.

I talked to the chair of the library board; I talked to her yesterday and I talked to her again today. She phoned to thank me for helping them to find a solution so that this asset is still available to the community. So I say to the Members opposite, I have – like my colleagues – been engaging our members, our representatives, our constituents to hear the concerns that they have.

I will read for a second, Madam Speaker – because I get these messages all the time as well. I won't use my first name and be out of order: Just wanted to send you a little note today to encourage you. As of recent I've seen some very – and it uses a colourful language – commenting on your posts and updates. It seems like everyone has an answer to fix the problem, but no one is willing to stand up and do the work.

So I thank you for taking the time to be a public servant. You were not required to have these headaches and tough conversations, but you chose to represent your district. I'm not sure if you are – and he talks about being a religious person. He says that he's praying that I will have the strength and the ability to continue and that I will have the encouragement to do what is best for the people of Terra Nova District. Thanks for your efforts and enthusiasm in serving the people of this district. Have a great day.

I've had a lot of messages like that. I've also had a lot of negative ones. I've had some of these other ones who are from people who truly understand, Madam Speaker, that when it comes to fixing this issue, this problem that we have, there are only a few things before us. We can borrow money and we've almost borrowed to the extent that we can. So we've got a couple of other options before us.

We can raise revenues through taxation and economic development or we can reduce public services. Having been a former public servant, I can tell you that would not be my primary option. We have talked about reducing services, finding the right fit, being more efficient in the public service through attrition. It's our preferred option. That's certainly a method that I'm interested in.

It goes back to what other options do we have. Now, we've done some things in this budget that nobody likes. We've raised taxes that are going to have impacts on everybody. We've also put in some mitigation that's going to lessen that impact by the low-income supplement and the Seniors' Benefit.

The calculator came out yesterday. I know within my constituency office, my assistant has been helping. People have been phoning in trying to understand how all these impacts are going to impact them. My constituency assistant tells me that people are put at ease when we explain the impact and give them some real information.

Madam Speaker, I had a call over lunch from a lady in my district. I recognized the first three digits from my district. I answered the phone and she said, oh, you're not so-and-so. I chuckled, and I said who are you looking for? She said the person's name. I said, no, actually you have the MHA for the Terra Nova District. Oh, she said, it's nice to talk to you. Well, she said, I have a question for you. She wanted to talk about the Debt Reduction Levy, and she wanted to talk about the increase in gas and the HST. So I explained it to her and I explained the calculator. I explained how it was going to impact her and the income that she has. At the end of the discussion, she said to me, I am so glad I dialed the wrong number because you've made my mind at ease.

Now that has happened so many times in the past two weeks. When I see all the postings on social media and people saying negative things about us, and putting out not quite the accurate information and the fact that we've taken the time to clarify for people, people have a different perspective.

There was a demonstration in Gambo about the movement of staff and the closure of the CYFS office. I received an invitation after the fact, but do you know what? Again, I'm not afraid to approach people, try to understand their perspective and to bring those issues forward to my colleagues in caucus and into this House.

So I called the organizer of the rally. He was surprised actually, that I gave him a call. We had a great conversation about the rally and the

impact the closure of that office will have on the community. I said to him at that time, that I had actually spoken with a lady, a public servant who works in that office. She had told me about the impact it would have on her and the fact that her colleagues now would be working out of Gander but providing service back to the Gambo area.

I related to it, in that when I worked in the public service and I was moved from Clarenville to Bonavista and still provided service back to Clarenville, how I was able to do it and still provide great service to the people of the entire district. So at the end of the discussion, while we didn't agree on every aspect, at least we had respect for each other for the points we both made. The person who organized the rally was very appreciative of the fact that I picked up the phone, I took the time to give him a call.

Madam Speaker, there are a lot of really good things in this budget – I see my time is running out. I really wanted to talk as well about a great piece of work, and maybe I'll get a chance to speak again before the vote on the budget – a great piece of work when we talk about, how do we make rural Newfoundland sustainable?

Well I was involved in a wonderful project that was just finished since I became elected. It was just finished. It really gives a great report on the things we need to invest in in our rural regions to make them sustainable.

I encourage, and I provided copies of that report for Members of this House so that they can see. There are things in this report, Madam Speaker, that directly speak to the investments we have made in this budget and it's the evidence we need for the investments that are being made. We have said we will make our decisions based on evidence. This research, which was done in conjunction with Memorial University, supports that.

I encourage Members opposite as well to take some time to read the report and then compare it to the investments in the budget and you can see why we made the investments we are making because this is the evidence that supports that.

I see my time has run out, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. HOLLOWAY: I'd welcome an opportunity to speak again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Speaker, given the time, and with the consent of my colleagues, I would suggest that we adjourn now for supper and return at 7 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: This House now stands in recess until 7 p.m.