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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'm rising at this time to speak to a point of order which was raised yesterday, just prior to the closing of the Legislature.

This point of order under Standing Order 49 was raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to language used in debate by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

Standing Order 49, which was cited by the Official Leader of the Opposition, states in part, "No Member shall ... use offensive words against any Member of the House. "

O'Brien and Bosc discusses unparliamentary language at page 618, stating that "the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order."

Any statements made during debate must be considered within the context of which they are made and the manner and tone in which they are delivered. Again, as stated in O'Brien and Bosc at page 618, "... the Speaker must rule on the basis of the context in which the language was used"

The video recording from Monday has been reviewed and I find that there has been no direct personal attack used by the minister against another Member.

I find that there is no point of order. This was simply a heated exchange during the course of debate. However, I must remind all Members that during debate, all comments must be directed to the Chair.

In addition, I ask that Members be cautious in debate with respect to referring to former members of the House by name as they are no longer in a position to defend themselves in this Legislature.

Finally, the Speaker of the House of Commons on December 9, 1980 – the House of Commons Debates at page 5534 – stated: "the

characteristics of parliamentary language are good temper and moderation"

This too applies to Members of this hon. House during debate and I ask that all Members keep this foremost in mind when making remarks in our Legislature.

Today, I welcome to the Speaker's gallery Jacob Elyk from Harbour Grace, who is job shadowing the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave. Jacob is entering his fourth year of political science in the co-op program.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we have the Members for the Districts of Conception Bay South, St. George's – Humber, St. John's Centre, Baie Verte – Green Bay, Lewisporte – Twillingate and Fogo Island – Cape Freels.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on April 5, I had the pleasure of attending the CBS Lions Club 46th Anniversary Charter Night.

Since 1971, CBS Lions Club has spearheaded numerous initiatives such as: Citizen of the Year, our first arena, swimming pool, playgrounds, Topsail soccer field lights and donated the first fire truck. Also, Lions awarded two sight dogs, fundraised for a kidney transplant recipient and recently helped a young lady obtain a prosthetic leg.

Thousands of dollars are awarded annually to organizations within and outside the community such as the literacy program, food bank, school scholarships, breakfast programs, Ronald McDonald House, Janeway Telethon, Cancer Society, sight programs, diabetes programs and Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp. They also

support the initiatives of two CBS Scout troops and manage a housing complex.

Saturday, May 6, is Lions Day of Service where you will see fellow Lions volunteering within our community. The CBS Lions Club are always welcoming new members and this year marks the 100th anniversary for Lions International. “Where there’s a need, there’s a Lion.”

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the CBS Lions Club for their continued dedication and hard work assisting the people of our community.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George’s – Humber.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to acknowledge the late Private George Edward Brake of the Newfoundland Regiment, 2716.

It was 100 years ago this past week, when on April 23, 1917 at Les Fosses Farm, not far from Monchy-Le Preux, France, during what was to be the Newfoundland Regiment’s last engagement of the Battle of Arras, that Private Brake, serving with A Company, was wounded by shell fire. Eventually evacuated to the eight casualty clearing station at Agenz-lés-Duisans, Private Brake died on April 25, 1917 and is buried at Duisans British Cemetery.

Private Brake received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, which is an Inter-Allied War Medal. The son of Aaron and Jessie Louisa Brake of Meadows Point, Bay of Islands, he was born September 3, 1890 and was also the foster child of Mrs. Annie Mercer of Birchy Head, Bonne Bay. He had five siblings – two brothers who also served in World War I with the US services. The war memorial in Curling and the one in Bonne Bay at Woody Point both honour the sacrifice of Private Brake.

I ask all Members to join me in acknowledging the contribution of Private Brake and all those who serve and continue to serve.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s Mental Health Week and I am thrilled to announce that our province’s Community Coalition 4 Mental Health held an empowered and energetic Mayday town hall on mental health and addictions last night.

Community members with lived experience with mental illness, their families, representatives from at least a dozen NGOs, dedicated Eastern Health professionals and front-line staff from the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, university professors, teachers and guidance counsellors all came together last night to analyze the recommendations offered by the newly released report from the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. Everyone sprung into action. Words like “hope” and “momentum” and “accountability” were heard again and again. Careful notes from each table were shared and submitted and future meetings enthusiastically planned.

The Community Coalition continues to prove that there is no limit to what can be done when both collaboration and inclusion are prioritized. I think Geraldine Hollett, who presented the Inclusion Choir with a Music NL Award for 10 years of positive community empowerment only a few weeks ago, summed up what Mental Health Week is all about: “You bring light to darkness. You offer hope for a better world for us all ... You inspire ... and continue to do so every time you collectively open your mouths.”

Bravo to the CC4MH!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Life Unlimited for Older Adults, an important community organization in my district that is helping adults 50 years of age and older lead happy, active and healthy lives.

Based in Springdale, and open to residents from Springdale and surrounding communities, the goal of Life Unlimited for Older Adults is to engage older adults in planning and promoting social, recreational and educational activities to encourage healthy living.

Life Unlimited for Older Adults offers several programs and services, and their benefits to seniors cannot be understated. One such program is Care 2 Ride, a volunteer driver program for older adults and people with mobility issues, which provides transportation to appointments and social events to those that otherwise would have none.

Life Unlimited for Older Adults also organizes socials and birthday parties, exercise programs such as Walk the Rock, lifestyle clinics, lifelong learning opportunities, tours and excursions, and much more.

In honour of their important work and the services they provide to seniors across my district, I ask all hon. Members to join me today in recognizing Life Unlimited for Older Adults.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the outstanding performances and sportsmanship of the Lewisporte Seahawks and Twillingate-New World Island Combine Minor Hockey Associations during this past year's provincial tournaments.

All teams represented their communities with great pride, taking home a total of eight silver medals. In addition, the Twillingate-New World Island Atom Combines captured the gold in an exciting 6-5 overtime win against the Corner Brook Royals in the championship game.

Playing for the Atom Combines include: Forrester Baggs, Katie Baggs, Avery Blackler, Adam Bowie, Hunter Brown, Sadie Brown, Cassie Burt, Kiera Canning, Cassidy Compton, Evan Dove, Leah Gillard, Chloe Hillier, Jake Holwell, Patrick Ings, Carter Lambert, Kaitlyn Rogers, and Siehera Shea. Head coach was Nathan Hull; assistant coaches Patti Hicks Brown, Lee Baggs and Jeff Gillard. Trainer was Guy Lambert; and director, Jocelyn Lambert.

I ask all Members in this hon. House to join me in thanking the dedicated volunteers who worked so diligently to organize these sporting events and to congratulate the Atom Combines in capturing the provincial championship.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in this hon. House and inform my fellow colleagues of the super people in my district. Today I have a story of boys being boys.

On September 5, 1996 a group of young Fogo boys were playing on Sylvester Ford's wharf. Four-year-old Todd Freak slipped and fell into the water and started to drift out from shore. Everyone started yelling and running for help. Adam Payne, who was eight years old at the time, grabbed hold of a mooring line, pulled himself out to Todd, grabbed hold of him, and pulled both of them back to shore.

As you can imagine, people were running to help and were very surprised to see both boys safe. A lady watching from across the harbour witnessed it all.

While visiting in Fogo Island last week, I had the privilege to meet Adam Payne. I'm happy to say that after 20 years, Mayor Shea, the members of the Fogo Island Town Council and I had the opportunity to present Adam with the Newfoundland and Labrador Award for Bravery.

I ask all Members to join me in thanking Adam Payne for this honourable act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remind residents that forest fire season started yesterday on the Island and will start in Labrador on May 15.

Residents planning to burn brush as part of clean-up activities should be aware of how quickly fire can spread beyond their property.

Mr. Speaker, last year, 91 fires were reported in this province, burning almost 11,000 hectares. Half of those fires were caused by residents. The majority occurred during spring 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 forestry management offices. The lighting of fires for cooking and camping does not require a permit; however, certain regulations must be followed.

Mr. Speaker, we ask residents to be Firesmart. May 6 is National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day and communities are encouraged to participate in mitigation projects to help reduce the risk of wildfire damage to homes and neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, a toll-free number is available to report wildfires. The number is 1-866-709-FIRE (3473).

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, it's a good time to take the opportunity, particularly this time of year when people are cleaning up around their properties, to remind residents that brush fires can be very dangerous and very destructive.

It's troubling to hear that half the fires reported last year were caused by residents, that some of them could have been prevented. It's important to raise awareness on this issue, and every effort should be made to reduce the number of these fires. We also encourage all residents to be fire smart.

Thank you very much, 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, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I am glad to see information going to residents about wildfire prevention. The minister notes that camp fires are subject to certain regulation, but I wonder how well known these regulations are. I urge the minister to look at the need for more public education about that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in hon. House today to highlight an amendment to the schedule of the *Citizens' Representative Act*. This amendment will allow the Citizens' Representative jurisdiction over regional service boards and ensure that residents, municipalities and businesses have a mechanism to address concerns they may have with the boards.

Regional service boards are independent entities established under the Regional Service Board Act to provide waste management services. They are responsible for setting rates for those services based on cost recovery. This amendment provides the Citizens' Representative the authority to assist the boards in addressing complaints or grievances from stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, by enabling the Citizens' Representative to become more involved in addressing the concerns of individuals in a timely manner, we are promoting greater accountability and transparency in the operations of the regional service boards. This will improve satisfaction with waste management services among residents throughout our province.

I encourage anyone who has questions about this new development, or would like to avail of the Citizens' Representative's assistance, please call the Office of the Citizens' Representative at 1-800-559-0079, or email at citrep@gov.nl.ca.

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 copy of his statement. I noticed this announcement a couple of weeks ago prior to the House of Assembly closing for Easter. To be truthful, I have more questions than comments related to the Ministerial Statement. One question will be concerning the availability of resources for the Citizens' Representative who will have jurisdiction now over the regional service boards.

We know the great work that the Citizens' Representative does on behalf of the people of this province. I'm hopeful that government will consider the impact on the office.

I look forward to learning more about the amendment and its impact on residents, businesses, municipalities and the regional service boards in the province.

Thank you very much, 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 too thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I certainly support this expansion of jurisdiction to include regional service boards. Now if a person or a community has an issue with their board they will be able to ask the Citizens' Representative for help in resolving it, but I do urge the minister to monitor the consequences of expanding the Citizens' Representative's mandate to see if an increased workload in that office will require additional resources in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Bern Coffey, the former clerk, has referred publicly to an arrangement he made with the Premier to "continue his law practice." Now, the Premier has referenced an arrangement for Mr. Coffey to "wind down his law practice," two very different statements.

I ask the Premier: Which one of those statements is correct?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When Mr. Coffey was hired, as I mentioned yesterday in many responses, the first – that there were a number of things that were done; one, he met with the Department of Justice to get some recommendations on how the flow of material should happen. He outlined the number of cases and there was a limited number, seven, that he would continue on representing the individual clients, taking on no new matters, no new files, no new clients. So it was always the view that he would transition out of his private practice, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at Mr. Coffey's situation as being a sole proprietor, a lawyer practising literally by himself, it would have taken some time. So we understand that the appropriate measures were put in place, the conflict walls, as was mentioned.

Added to that, in the contract itself, in his employment contract, we made provision, particularly in section 11 that you can refer to, that if there was anything that would have changed in terms of progress, if he felt that he was in conflict in any matter that he would declare that conflict, as is the onus on everyone in this House of Assembly. Mr. Speaker, it was always the view of the former clerk to get out of his law practice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again today the Premier just simply has not answered the question.

I ask the Premier this: What's your response to comments made by Democracy Watch that your decision to hire Mr. Coffey was unethical?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Democracy Watch, I think the gentleman's name was Mr. Conacher. He's made similar comments about decisions that you would have made, I would say, in your former capacity here, Mr. Speaker, but he also went on to say that you would speak to some special arrangements.

He went on to say that what we have here is weak legislation. As a matter of fact, he blamed it on the legislation within this current Legislature, Mr. Speaker. It's a 25-year-old piece of legislation. He went on to say it was not illegal that anything that would have happened, that these – the conflict walls that were put in place in this particular case around the procedures that were put there.

Mr. Speaker, it was always Mr. Coffey's view to get out of his law practice. We just ran out of time in the transition. As it happened, he tendered his resignation and is very clear that this human resources issue that we dealt with yesterday, or Sunday in this particular case – he just ran out of time to transition fully out of his private law practice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Democracy Watch didn't say it was illegal, they said it was unethical. And, again, the Premier doesn't have an answer for that.

Yesterday, we learned that the Minister of Justice had knowledge of this matter for some time. The Minister of Education did not know about the arrangement, this confidential arrangement until it hit the news.

I ask the Premier: What other ministers did you trust with this sensitive information?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, number one, Mr. Coffey is the deputy minister for the Premier, as the clerk of

Executive Council. The only minister in this particular case would have been the Minister of Health or the Health Department, as the files were related to the Department of Health.

There was a conversation, that I mentioned yesterday, with the deputy minister, but everyone in Cabinet was aware that Mr. Coffey was there. Everyone understood. We worked with the man on a daily basis. And at any particular point in time, a conflict of interest, the onus is always on that individual.

Mr. Speaker, with the Nalcor file as an issue – because this was raised; I heard about it in the media. I made no secret of that. When you look at section 11, there were provisions there for that to occur in writing. When I asked Mr. Coffey about that, he didn't feel he was in a conflict because he would not be representing that client on a file which has never been served.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier says one minister knew. Are you saying the Minister of Natural Resources wasn't aware?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Department of Natural Resources in this particular case here, the conversations that Mr. Coffey would have had with the appropriate deputy ministers – in this case, there was no conflict, in his view, with the Department of Natural Resources because there was nothing filed.

When I asked him about this – I mentioned this quite clearly on many, many times, what happened with the statement of claim that I found out about in the media. Mr. Coffey, his response to me was this: I'm not in a conflict. He didn't feel he was in a conflict, simply because what he did was preserve the right of the individual to actually go forward with the legal issue on a wrongful dismissal. That has not

been served with Nalcor, Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, based on a conversation this weekend.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. The Premier says the Minister of Natural Resources – there was no conflict. He did nothing to ensure that the public, the government, was looked after – that there were checks and balances to ensure and protect the public and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is outstanding, Mr. Speaker – unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development: When did you first know the former clerk was given permission by the Premier to continue to practise law? I ask the Minister of Children.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'm going to answer – I'm going to get up first because in the preamble that the former premier, now the Leader of the Opposition, in his preamble he made reference to – which is really an unfair representation of what happened. Mr. Speaker, as was mentioned, Mr. Coffey would have notified the appropriate deputies. There was a list. There was no advancement on the file with Nalcor. It didn't advance.

I made many, many comments that that was sitting there for two years. What happened is when the statement of claim was filed, it merely gave the client the opportunity to pursue a wrongful dismissal case. It has not advanced; it has been filed in the court, Mr. Speaker. It has not been served on Nalcor. That was the question that I asked the former clerk this weekend.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

So the Premier confirms that the Minister of Natural Resources was not made aware of conflict with the clerk in her own department.

Again, I'll ask the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development: When did you become aware that the former clerk was given permission by the Premier to continue to act as the clerk while he was in a conflict of interest?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to sit in this House and allow the Member opposite to go on with preambles that misrepresent what happened. I just will not allow it. I will stand. I clearly outlined – if you want to go on, Mr. Speaker, if the Member opposite wants to go on with those preambles which don't represent what actually happened.

There were conflict walls that were put in place and the information that would have come in – he met with Cabinet Secretariat, outlined all the cases, met with the Justice Department. There were provisions made in the individual's contract that would allow in writing to me, as the Premier of the province, if indeed the individual felt there was a conflict.

The conflict of interest is always the responsibility of the individual. With the Department of Health and Community Services, there was movement and he met with the deputy minister in that particular department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again, I ask the minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development to tell this hon. House when did she first find out that the Liberal clerk was given permission to serve as clerk while in a conflict of interest.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, in this particular case, as I've mentioned so many times, Mr. Speaker, the seven files would have involved two departments. It would have been Health and it would have been Natural Resources. Indeed with Natural Resources, no movement on that file for two years. It was early April when the two-year period of limitations had occurred.

Mr. Coffey then, what he did on behalf of the client, he put a statement of claim, preserving the right of the client. That has not advanced. That has not been served on Nalcor, Mr. Speaker. That's the situation. With the Department of Health, there was a conversation with the deputy minister at that point.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

In yesterday morning's press conference, there was a question from the media asking if Mr. Coffey was involved with a file involving C-CORE.

So I ask the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation: When were you first told about Mr. Coffey's legal work and conflict of interest?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any funding that would have been appropriated to C-CORE, we've certainly made funding available through the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, and the Research & Development Corporation and provided that upon request.

When it comes to any particular conflict of interest matter that's put forward, then if there is a conflict of interest, the onus is on the

individual to make that declaration to the specific department.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I ask the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation: When did you first find out about the conflict of interest matters involving the clerk?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, as I mentioned yesterday, the list that was supplied, there was nothing there. There's been no Mr. Coffey in the list that was discussed with the Cabinet Secretariat and the Justice Department. There was nothing there with C-CORE on that list, Mr. Speaker. We never did have that conversation. So this was something I'm not aware of. I mentioned this yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is having some difficulty hearing the questions and answers. I ask Members who are not identified to speak not to inject yourselves into the questions or answers on the floor.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'll ask the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources when did he find out about the clerk's conflict and was there any files in his department that may have been restricted as a result.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. It's the responsibility of the person with the possible conflict to make it known to the department.

Mr. Speaker, there were no files in the former clerk's possession that had anything to do with my department.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

That's three ministers who won't answer the question. So I'll ask the Minister of Finance, when did she learn about the conflict of interest.

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

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

I became aware of the clerk's activity in the court cases that had been reported in the media, in the media.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We finally have a minister who will answer a very simple question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the Premier: How can we trust that the former Liberal clerk removed himself from sensitive files where there may have been a conflict of interest?

Does the Premier just expect us to accept that because he told us so? How are people supposed to trust the Premier to know that the clerk removed himself?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, when you look at the professionalism of any lawyer in the province, when you look at the professionalism of physicians – maybe not the Member opposite, I don't know what his past practice was, but I have no reason to question the integrity that Bern Coffey in any conflict of interest would remove himself, just like I would have done when I was Leader of the Opposition a few years ago in a significant debate in this House of Assembly.

I'm not sure what the Member opposite is referring to. If he is saying that someone like Bern Coffey would not remove himself, if he's questioning the integrity of the man that has a tremendous legacy in this province, Mr. Speaker. That is what he's questioning right now, is the integrity of the man that went through a Cameron inquiry, made a significant impact on health care for cancer survivors in our province.

That is what the Member opposite is questioning right now. There is no doubt in my mind, if there was a potential conflict of interest, Mr. Coffey would have disclosed it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We're not questioning the history or integrity of the clerk; we're questioning the judgment of the Premier on this matter, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Were you comfortable with Mr. Coffey profiting from suing Nalcor and Western Health while he was the clerk if it was done before June 30 as you identified yesterday?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to go back to the previous comment that was made too, of course, about sworn oath and that when you get – any time a clerk that is sworn in to that department, Mr. Speaker, we all know what happens, no different than any premier or a minister that would be sworn in to their office.

There's a very high level of responsibility that occurs and comes with those sworn oaths, Mr. Speaker. I have no doubt in my mind that Mr. Coffey would have sworn or would have brought any conflict of interest forward. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind that would have happened.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at his contract, when you look at the conflict walls that were put in place, they were there for those very reasons, to support an individual that would come forward with any conflict of interest, like anyone else in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Again, Mr. Speaker, no answer to that question from the Premier.

Premier, why was there no reference to the June 30 transition date, the one you spoke about yesterday, in Mr. Coffey's contract that you say we should look at for the terms of that agreement?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From my perspective at that particular point in time, we would have hoped that this would have been done actually even sooner than that. So there was no reason in my mind to actually put the transition date. The transition date for any particular person might be different for any premier that would sit in this case.

I guess when we look at the number of files that he was able to actually shed from the list that was provided to us, there was significant progress that was made, but after the discussion on the weekend, Mr. Speaker, it was clear that

those files could not be dealt with in an appropriate fashion. So I felt it was appropriate to put a timeline in place that they could be dealt with. Mr. Coffey could not make that commitment. He is a very loyal individual to the clients. There was an outstanding file that he had to deal with, Mr. Speaker. We just ran out of time dealing with this transition period.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I'll try this. Premier, are there any documents, or any document whatsoever that will establish that you had a June 30 date in place in your arrangement with the clerk or is this something you just made up when you got caught in this conflict of interest?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Within the contract, the employment contract that was disclosed yesterday, Mr. Speaker, there was no transition period that was identified there. They were pretty obvious. He needed to get out of this. He was going to transition – the former clerk would be transiting out of this as quickly as possible. We've always said that.

There were no new clients, no new matters for those individual clients. There was a limited number. Mr. Speaker, things move through the court process, through the justice process very slowly from time to time. It was felt that after the discussions we had on the weekend, that he just could not get to a transition time frame that I would feel was reasonable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Coffey did what he felt was the appropriate thing to do, and we accepted the resignation, Mr. Speaker. His resignation was received and he is no longer the clerk for this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, section 9(2) of the ATIPPA legislation under public interest states: "...discretionary exception shall not apply where it is clearly demonstrated that the public interest in disclosure of the information outweighs the reason for the exception."

I ask the Premier: Based on the current controversy and the hiring of the clerk, isn't it in the public interest to release the legal advice?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm happy to stand here and speak to the Opposition's request to waive solicitor-client privilege. I know it's not something they always grasp but, again, there's a significant amount of jurisprudence and legal work that has been done on the concept of solicitor-client privilege. I know they're trying to use legislation to supersede that, but the fact is solicitor-client privilege is something that we must stand for and I hope that they understand the importance of it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, is the minister saying that the exception is absolute? The legislation says you may refuse and where it's in a public interest you have the authority to release it.

So the question is: Why wouldn't you release it in the interest of the public to answer some questions that we haven't received in this House from the Premier?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The fact is that the Opposition want to breach solicitor-client privilege. I know it's not something – again, being involved in the Justice department – they feel is important, but the fact is that it is.

The Premier has proactively released a significant amount of information, including the contract of the clerk which clearly lays out the stipulations that Mr. Coffey had to abide by and the stipulations that have led to his departure, the resignation that he filed. The fact is that information was put out there early on to show the public all the information.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I'll ask the minister: Are you saying there are no exemptions under the legislation for you to consider to release the information we've asked for?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that I'm not going to breach solicitor-client privilege or ask anybody to breach solicitor-client privilege for his benefit.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Okay, so he doesn't deny the exemption exists, but in this case he's not

going to exercise it in the interest of the public to release the information.

Mr. Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: I will, yeah. You try and answer them. Maybe start that, try and answer them.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier referenced a transition time for individuals joining government from the private sector.

I ask the Premier: Where is the policy, and could you table a copy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the issues we have to deal with, with current legislation, is that there is no prescribed timeline for transition. We've heard many Members in this House of Assembly that would put in place, as an example, blind trusts that would impact them as ministers and even former premiers. There are prescribed timelines for that, but, Mr. Speaker, there are lots of examples where that just could not have been met.

We talk to individuals as they put business assets and sometimes personal assets that they have to deal with to actually transition from private life into public life, Mr. Speaker, and there is really no prescribed timelines. It's a situation where it does evolve over time.

Mr. Speaker, in this particular case, as I had mentioned yesterday so many times, is that the reasonable amount of time frame for Mr. Coffey in our case, it just didn't exist and we just ran out of time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as well, yesterday the Premier referenced a time frame was given to anyone that comes from private life. What is the policy on that? Certainly, can you release that? Can we see it?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the Member opposite is asking questions right now and after about 12 years in government they obviously had no policy on many things, Mr. Speaker. We've seen that for sure with Humber Valley and many other contracts that would have been put in place.

Mr. Speaker, in this particular case, the case we're referring to about Mr. Coffey, there was the transition period that I wanted Mr. Coffey to actually make a full transition into public life. We talked about June 30, Mr. Speaker. It was very clear, in this particular case, he was not going to be able to meet that timeline because of the client list, that he had outstanding – very limited. It made significant process, as I've said so many times, Mr. Speaker. So the transition didn't occur and he decided to tender his resignation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has accused MUN of fudging its books, but national watchdogs and the Board of Regents say MUN's reporting is sound.

I say to the minister: Do you stand by your statement?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, the administration of Memorial University of Newfoundland did report to its Senate on Monday, April 24.

The numbers that were supplied by me – in actual fact, supplied by MUN to the Canadian Association of University Business Officers and to Statistics Canada, those numbers were valid. In fact, Memorial University of Newfoundland informed its own Senate that they would have to restate their numbers. In order to achieve the \$26,000 per student, per year figure, they would have to restate their own figures. They would have to reduce their expenditures by \$55,000 and increase their student enrollment by 1,000 students.

That's the statement that came from MUN to its own Senate. If it would like to correct its own statement to the public, we'd be more than happy to receive it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, since accusing MUN of fudging the books, have you had a face-to-face meeting with the administration to discuss these scandalous allegations?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with the chair of the Board of Regents on several occasions and since their allegations. In fact, what's happened in the last little while, these statements that I've made were not new. In fact, I made them some months ago.

It wasn't until there was a decision by MUN to increase revenue – what this issue is all about, Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear with each other, is that MUN has chosen to raise, or is considering raising revenue from taxpayers or students, one of the two, but they want to raise revenue before they look seriously at their expenditures.

MUN had no issue whatsoever with any statements that I was making until they found that it contradicted their argument for raising more money from students. That's when they brought forward a counter-argument and then they torpedoed their own counter-argument to their own Senate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: The minister's comments have not only damaged the reputation of the university; it's displayed a lack of confidence in the leadership.

Is the minister preparing to fire the executive at MUN?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, this is not 2008. In fact, while, yes, there is a disagreement that is occurring between myself and the administration, this is one of the greatest universities anywhere in North America and it is producing incredible results for our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: But, yes, there is a disagreement. I and this Cabinet and this government think very strongly that before raising revenue on the backs of students, the university should consider reducing its expenditures and disclosing its expenditures for all to see.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Media across Canada have reported on the Bernard Coffey resignation with headlines such as, beyond bizarre, and Ball says he would do it all over again.

I ask the Premier: Will government establish an ethics office to guide them on ethical matters in the future?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I seldom intervene during Question Period, but I remind the hon. Member that you're not to refer to individuals by name, only by title or district.

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things, as I just mentioned a few minutes ago in a prior question, is that there are a number of changes that we see. And when you look at the mandate letter for the Minister for Minister of Justice and Public Safety, our House Leader, what we've been asked to do is modernize a number of pieces of legislation, activities around this Legislative Assembly; many of which are outdated.

We've made significant changes already in the last year around the Independent Appointments Commission, around how we handle parliamentary secretaries, the way we sit, the sitting days within the House of Assembly, the Procurement Act that I mentioned earlier. There are a number of pieces of legislation and a number of things that we'd like to be able to do in this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to get on to this in our mandate, Mr. Speaker, but what I do not want to see are Members of this side of the House support and vote for their own raises, like the Member opposite did in the Management Commission.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I point out to the Premier that having an ethics officer, having an ethics office is a very common thing in this country. And if

he really wanted to show the public how serious he is, then he would set up an ethics office.

On the day he was hired, the former clerk sued Western Health on behalf of a client. I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services when he was made aware of the lawsuit and that it was the clerk who was representing the plaintiff.

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

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

Western Health is an autonomous body constituted under the RHA Act. There were discussions, as the Premier has mentioned, between the deputy to ensure that there were walls to preserve any apparent conflict of interest.

I think that answers the question.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: After being informed by his officials, Mr. Coffey was going to continue as a lawyer in private practice; why did he think it was acceptable for the clerk to act as a lawyer, working contrary to the best interests of government and the people of the province?

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

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

Certainly I was made aware very early on. The Department of Justice staff looked into this and made recommendations on ways we could preserve this. What I can say is that one thing I realize is that transitions happen. When I got elected to this House of Assembly, it took me some time to clue up my own legal practice. Some lawyers, including the former Member for

the NDP, the former leader, continued their legal practice throughout their entire career sitting in this House of Assembly.

The fact is that Mr. Coffey had a practice that he was winding down. He was in that process. As the Premier stated, he never got through that. But again, he was working through that, and that's the issue that we've dealt with here.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, we are speaking about the senior clerk here, and we're talking about cases against government departments.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Justice: Why did he not refer this matter to the Conflict of Interest Advisory Committee as created by the *Conflict of Interest Act*?

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

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

Actually, I don't think that the Member opposite has read the *Conflict of Interest Act*, because that's not actually how the provision is written out. So the first thing I would direct her to is to read the *Conflict of Interest Act*.

The fact is that the *Conflict of Interest Act* puts out a number of things here to speak to. One of them – and again, there are various members. In this case, Mr. Coffey spoke to Cabinet Secretariat, he spoke to the Premier's office, spoke to a justice solicitor, and there were a number of steps taken, including what were put out in the contract that Mr. Coffey signed. The fact is unfortunately we have a situation now where Mr. Coffey has resigned, and there we are.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre for a very quick question, no preamble.

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

I ask the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: Considering the clerk's job is to serve Cabinet, who probably knew all about this, did he think this information should have been kept secret from his Cabinet colleagues, or was it revealed?

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

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

The fact is the information was not kept secret. The Member opposite likes to make very scurrilous allegations here, but the fact is she's simply not on the right track here.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling one Order in Council relating to a funding pre-commitment for the fiscal years 2018-19 through 2022-23.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

I hereby table the 2016 Annual Report of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

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.

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

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

WHEREAS the US Centre for Disease Control now estimates that autism spectrum disorder affects one in 68 children, which represents a 30 per cent increase from the estimate two years ago; and

WHEREAS early diagnosis of ASD is essential because there is a critical developmental period when early intervention is vital for future success of children with ASD; and

WHEREAS in other provinces an ASD diagnosis can be made by specialists certified and trained in ADOS;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to allow other specialists trained and certified with ADOS to make the autism spectrum disorder diagnosis.

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

Mr. Speaker, once again I am happy to stand and speak to this petition which has continued to come to my desk. It was only this morning that the president of the Autism Society was once again in the media talking about their grave concerns, talking about the fact that the numbers of people coming to them for services and for programs is multiplying. How they do not have

adequate resources to meet all the needs and once again trying to get the support they need from government to help them meet the needs of the children and adults in this province who are on the autism spectrum.

Mr. Speaker, this morning in Estimates I did ask the Minister of Health and Community Services about the fact that the IQ 70, or the evaluation of children with an IQ of 70 who are on the autism spectrum, 70 or above means they cannot avail of services. The problem with this is that the IQ 70 marker is looking at autism from the perspective of intelligence, and we all know that many people on the autism spectrum are highly intelligent. Some of the basic issues with regard to being on the autism spectrum has more to do with behaviour, with social interaction and with ability to function in our society.

The minister knows that, and I was glad when the minister said they are working towards putting in place what would be needed to use the testing of functionality as the test that would determine whether or not a child on the spectrum would get services. But this is an urgent situation, and I really believe government has been dragging its heels.

I've been standing for years in this House talking about this, and certainly the Autism Society has been talking about it for years. So we have to speed up. We have to make things better. We have to make sure that the children in our society are able to be in school and have their needs met. That the children in our society get the services they need. That we –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. MICHAEL: I can't even hear myself.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was getting really difficult. I literally could not continue speaking. So I can imagine what it must be like for somebody who is on the autism spectrum, somebody who has a hard time with focusing, somebody who has a hard time with dealing with society.

Just imagine somebody in this room who just had to go through what happened here in this room. It's a very difficult situation to be in, and our children need everything that can be given them so that they can survive in our society. We have to speed up the issues around helping them, making sure that all children with needs have those needs met.

I do implore the Minister of Health to take as quick action as possible to remove the IQ 70 marker in the evaluation of the children on the autism spectrum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A petition 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* implemented a regressive tax on books in this province; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in the country to have such a tax; and

WHEREAS the tax will undoubtedly affect literacy rates in this province as well as negatively impact local authors and publishers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately cancel this ill-conceived book tax.

Mr. Speaker, I've risen time and time again, as have my colleagues on this side of the House sitting over here in Opposition, to oppose this tax which is really hurting the people of our province, in particular, our students, our children and our aspiring authors and musicians.

It's very unfortunate to see the regression that has occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador since *Budget 2016* and it continues to happen today. I think many of us in this province were

very hopeful that government would take measures to rectify some of the damage they caused with *Budget 2016*, but we didn't see it happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: And so I call upon government to consider it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time wasn't up.

MS. PERRY: Oh.

MR. SPEAKER: I'm asking Members to lower the volume of your conversations. I'm finding it difficult to hear the Member recognized to speak.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you.

Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes the House can get quite loud here.

Certainly we do call upon government to look at reversing this tax in particular and a lot of the taxes that you've brought in. You're hurting the economy, you're hurting our students, you're hurting our authors and you're hurting our book industry.

It's time to start turning things around and turn this into the province that we all know it can be. We all know that by lowering taxes you stimulate growth and you encourage growth. It's time for government to revisit its budget and start eliminating some of these taxes which are hurting us.

Thank you so much.

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

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

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

WHEREAS fisheries policy regulations link harvesting quotas to vessel length for several species; and

WHEREAS many harvesters own fishing vessels of various sizes, but because of policy regulations are restricted to using smaller vessels, often putting their crews into danger;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to make representation to the federal government to encourage them to change policy, thus ensuring the safety of fish harvesters in our province.

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

Mr. Speaker, as we speak this time of year, it's very important that a lot of harvesters are out on the water and there are many issues. I spoke to harvesters this weekend that were out. There's a lot of ice offshore and there's a lot of – and we all know what our weather is like.

With reduction in a lot of quotas – I know it has nothing to do with the size of the vessels, but we should be encouraging the Minister of Fisheries also to talk to the federal government about a buddy-up system, especially when it comes to the shrimp this year where a lot of shrimp harvesters are looking at a reduction in area 6. They're talking about half a load to go and get, and it's the feasibility of that alone. If they were allowed to buddy up, their trip would be a whole lot better for the harvesters because of less cost. So that's something the minister should be looking at also.

We have vessel size due to the crab that a certain size of vessel is used on the inshore, a certain size of vessel is used in mid-shore and certain size of vessel is used offshore. So if we have harvesters that are fishing three of those

different areas, they have to use three different vessels.

For the safety of people on the water, this is a regulation that I understand why it came in in the first place. It came in so the inshore fishery and the people that had those licences could go catch, because the small inshore fishery boats were what were designed to use in the inshore fishery. Now that this fishery is in full swing, people buy these licences, the policy doesn't make sense. The policy should be changed so that harvesters can use larger boats to fish these inshore and mid-shore fisheries. It's all about safety and it's all about ensuring that people get home to their families in the evening.

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.

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 government recently cut vital funding to many of the province's youth organizations; and

WHEREAS the cuts to grants to youth organizations will have a devastating impact on the communities, as well as its youth and families; and

WHEREAS many of these organizations deeply rely on what was rightly considered core funding for these day-to-day operations;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately reinstate funding to the province's youth organizations.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to present this over the last number of months because we continue to get petitions from every sector in our province. Particularly those who deal with youth organizations and not for profits, but from every corner of our province, because they see the importance youth organizations have and they see the devastating effect it's going to have with these cuts.

People must understand, and particularly government has to understand, it's not only the impact of cutting the core funding here. It's the 300 other fees and taxes they've imposed on the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador that they have had a financial impact on the financial viability of these organizations, particularly around their expenditures.

Obviously, when you lose your revenues you have to look at your expenditure cuts, but when you look at your expenditure cuts – things like insurance has gone up 15 per cent. When things like your additional fuel cost to heat if you have a furnace or something has gone up. Taxes are gone up in various sectors. All the other things that are relevant to it have an impact. If they operate a vehicle, then obviously that has an impact on their gas costs and these types of things.

The other part of it is most of these organizations rely on the private sector and particular fundraising to be a key component of how they finance themselves and how they fund particular projects and how they ensure security and feasibility. In this case –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I understand the importance of conducting business while in the House, but if you can't contain your volume to a level that I can hear the Member identified to speak, I ask Members to take their conversations outside.

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

MR. BRAZIL: As I noted, with all the additional costs that have been put on organizations and citizens in this province, it's

had an impact on the organizations ability to fundraise. People don't have as much disposable income because it's now going to pay extra taxes; if it's a levy tax, if it's a gas tax, if it's a tax on other services, if it's indeed additional insurances, if it's all the other fees and services that we want taken care of. If it's to deal with extra diabetic strips or the extra cost of health medicines that would normally be covered for an ailing family member who's in one of our health institutions.

All of this has an impact on when people want support, youth organizations or any not for profit in fundraising and supporting with a ticket draw, or a bid on a product or supporting a concert of some sort, that has a major impact. That impact has a bottom-line impact on these organizations that can't provide the same level of service and, obviously, then that has an impact on our society.

These organizations have leveraged sometimes 10, 20, 30 times as much money as being invested by government. The services they provide are fiftyfold when it comes to what it would cost the taxpayers to provide that.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to present this again and talk about the valued work and how important it is to reinstate those funding sources.

Thank you.

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

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

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

WHEREAS government has removed the provincial point-of-sale tax rebate on books, which will raise the tax on books from 5 per cent to 15 per cent; and

WHEREAS an increase in the tax on books will deduce book sales to the detriment of local

bookstores, publishers and authors, and the amount collected by government must be weighed against the loss in economic activity caused by higher book prices; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the lowest literacy rates in Canada, and the other provinces do not tax books because they recognize the need to encourage reading and literacy; and

WHEREAS this province has many nationally and internationally known storytellers, but we will be the only people in Canada who will have to pay our provincial government a tax to read the books of our own writers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government not to impose a provincial sales tax on books.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that most people in Newfoundland and Labrador know how important taxes are. They know they pave our roads, they know they build our hospitals, they know they provide schools. They know they provide teachers, that they provide nurses and doctors. They know in fact that taxes provide the salaries of each and every one of us here in this House of Assembly and the pensions as well.

People know that, and people know it's important to be able to pool our resources so that we can have schools, so we can have police, so we can have firefighters, so we can have teachers and nurses. People know that, and for the most part people willingly pay when they know it's a fair taxation system. We are all aware of the power of our collectivity, whether it's paying taxes, whether we're helping one another to build houses, whether we're helping one another by volunteer work in our communities. So people are not stupid.

People know the value of fair taxation. People know the value of taxation that makes sense. People also know when taxation doesn't make sense, and for the thousands of people who have signed this petition and who continue to sign this petition and send it in asking us to be their voice

here in the province, they know this taxation makes no sense whatsoever. As a matter of fact, it's a tax that flies in the face of reason. Taxing books is a bad idea. Taxing books has absolutely no benefit to anyone in the province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you –

MR. HUTCHINGS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I think it's Standing Order 47 that the last business day the Member speaking I don't think – if I remember correctly – adjourned debate. I think the clock at that point in time stops and you, basically, in accordance with the Standing Order, adjourned the House at 5:30.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

That is generally the case. In this particular case, as we all recall yesterday, there was quite a bit of confusion. This is a new rule that we're going by. There was quite a bit of confusion. I'd asked whether or not we had leave to deal with a point of order that had been raised and a counter to that point of order. In this particular case, I'm going to allow the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment to conclude his speaking time.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I see why they're trying to stop me from making statements about the hospital in Corner Brook.

Mr. Speaker, while I was defending yesterday the hospital and the lack of work done by the previous government, there was a tweet sent out by Sandy Collins and I just want to read the tweet. "The Eddie Joyce Side Show is on! High pitch rants of gibberish and insults with arms swinging. He's a clown"

I just want people to know that this Member, the former Member for Terra Nova, is a staff member of the Leader of the Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Just today, you cautioned Members of the House of using names of previous Members of the House of Assembly, and the minister is now standing, in his first minute of speaking, and he's using names of previous Members of the House of Assembly. You've already indicated that it's inappropriate, it's not acceptable, and I would ask you to have the Member rise and apologize for doing so.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I recognize the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, earlier today I did discourage Members from referring to former Members by name.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I did encourage Members to use caution –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Earlier today, I did caution Members to use caution when referring to former Members of the Legislature, as they are not in a position to defend themselves against remarks that are made by current Members of the Legislature. I ask the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment to caution himself in his remarks.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't use the name, but the former Member for Terra Nova, who's a staff member of the Leader of the Opposition, got on Twitter yesterday calling a Member of the Legislature a clown for standing up for the hospital in Corner Brook. I might add, to let the people know, during time paid by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, under direction by the Leader of the Opposition who allows this from his own staff.

The former Member for Terra Nova – I don't like getting into this but, Mr. Speaker, I'm a firm believer you have to defend yourself. I remember when the coalition of disabilities got cut \$28,000, there was a poll and we had the emails. The poll was stacked by the Members opposite.

Do you know one of the Members that got involved with stacking the poll with the coalition of disabilities? It was the Member for Terra Nova – the Member for Terra Nova. And he stands up behind some Twitter account, the Member for Terra Nova now calling a Member of the House for standing up, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Terra Nova, I know you stand behind your Twitter and I know you're out there now probably tweeting. The next time you see a person with disabilities, go up and say: I stacked the poll against you because we did enough for you, so I can keep my \$25,000-a-year job as parliamentary assistant to the minister of Health. Let's see how much courage you've got.

So if you want to go out on your little Twitter box and criticize me, let's talk about how you stacked the poll of the coalition of disabilities. Let's do it. Do you know what he'll do, Mr. Speaker? He will hide again. He will hide.

For the Leader of the Opposition to continuously disrupt me when one of his staff – and I can only

assume it's under his direction. I'll tell you why I only assume it's under his direction, Mr. Speaker. It is because he's doing it on his time while he's in his office and he's the boss. Then the Leader of the Opposition stands up so proper and prim, oh, we can't do that. Yet he got his staff out making statements like that, Mr. Speaker, after me standing up on many occasions.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't want to attack the former Member for Terra Nova. I don't. But I can tell you one thing; I was at a meeting, myself and the Member for Bonavista. We were at a meeting, and guess what? It was in Bunyan's Cove. Who was there? It was the fire chief and the mayor.

They sat down there, the chairperson of the LSD. They sat down and were talking about a fire truck. Mr. Speaker, we were there. He said: We were committed a fire truck. I said: What happened? Do you know what happened? The Member for Terra Nova, the great soul who hides behind Twitter box, who stacks the polls against people with disabilities, do you know what he did? The chair and the fire chief, they said: We were on the priority list, top priority list. I said: What happened?

Do you know what the former Member for Terra Nova did, Mr. Speaker? He said; When the boundary changed, our priority dropped; we could not get a hold of him to speak to him. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? I said: That couldn't happen. A former Member for Terra Nova, he would never do something like that. I came back to the department, Mr. Speaker, I said: Guys, look, here's an accusation that was made against the Member for Terra Nova, a good church-going man, a good man who's always around the community and everything else.

Do you know what I was told? I know you won't believe it either. Do you know what I was told, Mr. Speaker? You're right; it was a priority to be approved. The minute the boundary changed, the vote in the House of Assembly came back and said drop it off the list.

I ask the Member for Ferryland who was the minister at the time, how far off am I? How far off am I? When the former Member for Terra Nova wants to go criticize me for standing up

for the people in Corner Brook about the hospital, Mr. Speaker, be careful who you throw stones at because people may throw them back.

I never ever wanted to bring up this kind of stuff, but I'm not letting no one in this province to call me a clown for standing up for the long-term care facility and for the hospital in Corner Brook and radiation in Corner Brook, and I mean absolutely no one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: The Leader of the Opposition has to take responsibility for this because it's your staff. It's your staff, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I'm just going to get back – now that we know what it is truly like with the former Member for Terra Nova and if you don't believe me, go ask the chair and ask the fire chief and ask other people about their fire truck and ask about the coalition of disabilities, the poll that was stacked. We all know about that. The former Member for Terra Nova, stand up and see someone with a disability and apologize, which you should.

Mr. Speaker, I have two minutes left; I'm going to talk about the hospital. They were talking about yesterday the great work the former minister of Health and the Leader of the Opposition taking on about the hospital in Corner Brook. I am just going to read a few stats here, Mr. Speaker. I have a minute and 50 seconds left.

Contract awarded for the construction of the long-term care, 2007; 2008, progress made on the new Corner Brook hospital; 2009, Mr. Speaker, two years later, site announced – two years to announce the site. In 2010, the residents of the Western Region will benefit from health care funding – not a cent. In 2011, funding announced on the health care facilities in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, four years later.

Mr. Speaker, in 2013, the Premier announces \$227 million is for the new hospital in Corner Brook – none spent. In 2014, advancing health care is key for the long-term care residents – nothing done. Western Health received \$3.7 million for the enhancement of health care services – no long-term care, no facility.

In 2015 before the election, approximately \$2.5 million invested to enhance care services in Western Region – nothing done with the long-term care site or the hospital. In 2015, the provincial government plans for the extension of long-term care beds in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, eight years later. Here's the –

AN HON. MEMBER: Are we doing it?

MR. JOYCE: No, we're doing it. We're getting it done. Of course we're getting it done. Of course we're going to.

Mr. Speaker, here's a request under access to information from that government when they made seven, eight years of announcements, the Department of Health. Listen to this, we asked the anticipated size and scope including the cost, detailed cost of proposed facility to the Department of Health and Community Services. Do you know what we were told in 2013, six years later? Here's the comment back: The Department of Health and Community Services does not have any documents responsive to your request. There was nothing done on the hospital or the long-term care facility in Corner Brook.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: That is why I was such a fighter for the hospital and long-term care.

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 am pleased to be able to stand again and speak to the budget. Right now, we are in the section, the sub-amendment to the main motion, and I'm very happy to stand and have more to say.

Once again, I want to focus on what the government is trying to do with this budget. The Minister of Finance said in her Budget Speech that government is taking an evidence-based approach to managing the province's finance. This evidence-based approach has become another mantra of the government, as it has been

a mantra of the Liberal government in Ottawa too, Mr. Speaker.

So it's very interesting when we use this phrase because, number one, one has to ask, well, what is the evidence we're looking at, and what is the evidence really telling us. I suppose we all can choose different pieces of evidence to make our case, but I want to talk to some of the evidence that I believe should have been considered by this government in putting this budget together, and I also want to look at some of the evidence that I think this government needs to consider as it continues to move forward. The evidence that I want to present is evidence that's based in the reality of our society.

Mr. Speaker, this government has moved itself in a direction that shows that it does not understand and fully support the public nature of government. They do not understand the role of the public sector, that we cannot have a strong economy without also having a strong public sector.

This government in the past, in its last budget, certainly attacked the public service sector and now everybody is waiting on tenterhooks to see what's going to happen with all the negotiations that – I don't even know if they are really going on yet. I don't know if government has gone back to the table with some of the unions; maybe they have. I'm not up on that, but I know they certainly have not been at the table. They say they have been, but they haven't been.

The concern is their lack of belief that a strong public sector means a strong economy. Economists will tell us that a strong public sector is an important economic stabilizer, especially when the private sector's going through a rough patch. Right now, in this province, we are going through a rough patch.

When I spoke first to the budget, Mr. Speaker, I pointed out how we are in an economic recession in this province and that we are going to be for the foreseeable future. So keeping a strong public sector, keeping people working, keeping services in place so that we have a healthy population, this is all part of stabilizing our economy and keeping it strong.

That's evidence, and that's what I call looking at evidence and talking about changes that one is making or directions that one wants to go in, based in evidence that is solid. This government doesn't recognize this evidence, apparently, because everything that they've been doing is weakening our economy. Everything they are doing is destabilizing our economy because they have been themselves attacking the public sector.

So that's one thing, Mr. Speaker. There's other evidence that we need to look at. When I look at the budget, especially the budget that started – because it started last year in 2016 – when I look at where this government is going, I have to ask: What are they thinking when they take away dental care from adults? What are they thinking when they take away the ability of people to be able to afford to even see their doctor, to go to medical appointments?

How can they be looking at evidence when we now have taxation on middle- and low-income people that are really affecting them negatively, that's causing greater burden on them – we have more people who are having to go to food banks. How can they be serious about evidence-based decision making when they have nothing in this budget substantially to deal with the homelessness in this province?

Why do I talk about all this, Mr. Speaker? Because all of these issues that I'm talking about are called social determinants of health. Being healthy is not just what you eat, although what you eat is determined by your income and determined by the society in which you are. Being healthy is not just going out for a good walk. Being healthy is also determined by things that we are part of in our society.

We do know that poverty drives up health care costs and poverty is one of the key determinants of health. Poor housing is a determinant of poor health. We have to look at the social determinants and we have to look at them from the perspective of that's the evidence. That's the evidence that we have to be looking at in determining what we're delivering in our health care system, in determining what we're delivering in our community services, in determining how we are taking care of people.

You see, Mr. Speaker, this is what this government has lost sight of, which I find surprising; I find very disturbing. They've lost sight of the fact that it's the people of the province; it's the people who have to be at the centre of decision making. It's the people and the good of the people in our province that have to be there, that has to be the evidence that they're looking at.

If we find that the income of people is going down, if we find that more people are going to food banks and if we find that we can't afford to put enough resources or are choosing not to put not enough resources into our educational system to make sure that it works as an inclusion system, if we're not doing that, then we are going to be hurting our people. Our people are going to become sicker. We're going to have greater costs and that's the evidence I can't understand that this government is not looking at. We will have greater health costs because of the kind of budgets they are maintaining in this province. That's the evidence that we need to look at.

Choosing Wisely NL is a health care advocacy group. It's led by Dr. Patrick Parfrey who is well known in our province, well known in the academic circles, well known nationally, and I would say he's known internationally as well. He says that fully 20 per cent of our health care budget is being used inappropriately, mainly through inappropriate and unnecessary testing. Now this is very interesting and I think it's something we want evidence to look at. This is some evidence we need to look at.

We don't have a health care system that is completely formed around prevention, helping people to not get sick. It's a model that isn't working. The model we are using is not preventing. The model we are using is dealing with illness as it happens.

Now I know there are lots of things that are going on that are good. I'm not going to say we don't have good things in our province and in our health care system, in our education system. That's not what I'm saying, but if we continue with a health care system that is not founded on primary health care delivery, that that's the basis of the model, that it's not founded on prevention and preventive measures, but we continually are

pouring so much money into dealing with acute health care issues, putting money into more and more tests, putting money into more and more medication that may be not necessary either, then we are going to continue to not have the money that we need to help people not get sick. That has to be seen as part of our health care system, and that's evidence we need to pay attention to.

So I was disappointed this morning in Estimates when the Minister of Health and Community Services didn't take seriously – I thought, he may disagree – the report of the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association. They proposed a systemic independent review of our health care system to try to make the best use of available dollars, and we support that idea.

This morning the minister more or less said well, there's nothing new in their report. Well, I saw a lot of new things in their report. I saw things that we need to sit down and pay attention to. We're not going to help our health care system by doing patch quilt things, by taking care of an issue here or an issue there or an issue somewhere else. What we need is a health care system, the very foundation of which shapes the health care.

If we have a health care system that is founded on a model of primary health care, community-based care, then we will have a health care system that will be preventative when it comes to keeping people healthy. We will have a health care system that will ensure that people are healthy and will actually save money in the long run, but it takes long-term planning. It takes looking down the road and saying it could be 10 years before everything is where we need it to be but if we don't start now we'll never get there. This government don't know how to do that long-term planning.

The long-term planning they're doing is going to be digging a hole deeper and deeper and deeper. We will have a recession that's longer than we would ever think could happen because they haven't got a plan to do otherwise. They think they have it, they talk about it that way but the evidence is not there. They themselves, last year when they brought in their budget, said that unemployment was going to go up. That it was

going to go up anyway but it was going to go up more because of that budget.

We know the budget is also causing a rise in our cost of living; the only two things that are moving upward in our province right now on the economic spectrum. They talk about evidence based. Well, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that came out this morning in Estimates was the whole issue of P3, the private, public partnerships that this government is starting to use and to promote and to push.

We all know the government has made P3 the route to take with the Corner Brook hospital and the long-term care home. We also know that we can't get all the information about what's going to be entailed, what that's going to mean for the province. They say they have the evidence that P3 is the way to go, but, Mr. Speaker, the evidence, both in our country and internationally, the evidence is there showing that P3 arrangements cost the public purse more in the long run – again, in the long run – than conventional government procurement.

Again, government is showing their inability to do the long-term planning. They're seeing the P3 arrangements – and the minister said this morning they're going to continue pursuing P3 as they look at other infrastructure that has to be created, that they are using the P3 as an easy fix. They see it as a way of dealing with their problems in the present but they're not looking at the long term. It's in the long term you find that the P3 is costing more money for the government.

The government – again, the minister said it this morning – is using the phrase value for money. We want value for our money and P3 is the way to go because we'll get value for our money. There's no proof of that. There is absolutely no proof that P3s are value for money.

One example, the private sector cannot get loans at the same interest rate as government. They can't, so more interest will have to be paid for the loans. It's not going to be the private sector that pays that, it's going to be us. It will be part of the money that this government will be paying to the private sector in the building of the infrastructure they're planning.

The bottom line for the private sector is making a profit. That's what the private sector is all about. They will determine in putting contracts together, any potential for loss is not going to be carried by them. We will be years paying out the money to the private sector and never knowing what's going to happen down the road. All because this government is looking for a quick fit, and it's not going to work.

The struggle against the P3s will continue in this province. I have no doubt about it, but this government seems unable to hear what's being said and refusing to look at the real evidence about P3s. It's really interesting the way in which they determine the evidence that helps them with their decision making.

If you're going to look at evidence then you have to look at all the evidence, not just cherry-pick the evidence you're looking at. They want an easy way out and if they want to balance a budget early down the road or earlier than they think they were going to even a year ago, then you go for the easy fix. But going for the easy fix is not the economic, smart way to go. It really isn't. And the proof is there for that. The evidence is there for that.

It's the same thing with the government's decision to charge ahead with the Muskrat Falls Project no matter what the environmental risk and no matter what the eventual cost to ratepayers. The part of meaningful evidence-based decision making involves making that evidence available to the public.

Unfortunately, I'm not saying – I mean government has said and the current head of Nalcor has said that the evidence was there that we couldn't stop, we couldn't slow down and we had to keep going with Muskrat Falls. But we don't know the full details of the documentation. We don't know the full details that they say is the evidence that was there for them to make this decision, just like we don't know the full details of the P3 decision-making process that's going on.

This government continues to make decisions which they say are for the good of the people of the province. They continue to make decisions based on evidence that only they are holding in their hands and they continue to make these

decisions while the evidence is there that people in this province are suffering from their decision making. Yet the people in the province are supposed to be taken care of.

Our educational system in terms of what's being offered in terms of meeting the needs of children is going backwards instead of forwards. My colleague likes to use the phrase that it's not the way forward, it's the way backwards. And that's what this government – there's evidence there for that. If they want evidence, look at their economic indicators that were in their book called *The Economy*. Look at the indicators and the evidence is there that we're not moving forward, we're moving backwards.

Let's look for the real evidence. If government really had the evidence that showed that Muskrat Falls couldn't be stopped, if they really had the evidence to show that the P3 agreement is the best agreement, then show us the evidence so that we can also see the evidence that they're using. Show us the evidence.

One of the things that are for sure – and economists around the world will say this – that there's plenty of evidence that austerity simply doesn't work in times of recession, yet this is what they've chosen, Mr. Speaker. Austerity is the direction which they've gone.

I only have a few seconds, so I want to quote the Nobel Prize winning economist, Paul Krugman, who put it pretty succinctly, and this is a famous quote from him: Every country that introduced significant austerity has seen its economy suffer. All of the economic research that allegedly supported the austerity push has been discredited. It is rare, in the history of economic thought, for debates to get resolved this decisively. That's evidence, Mr. Speaker, and I ask the government to look at that evidence.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak again now for the second time on the budget. I just want to recap a couple of things, first of all, that I did say yesterday, just for the record and anybody new who might be listening, at least my position on it.

First of all, I'm going to say that I can't support the budget. I know there will be Members that would say of course you're not. You're on the Opposition so automatically that means you're not going to support the budget. I would say that I don't feel that way at all. Quite frankly, I wanted to support the budget. I was hoping I could support the budget. But given the fact that this budget is really a continuation of the budget I couldn't support last year, how could I possibly support it? Really nothing has changed, other than the fact that we are going to see some reduction in the gas tax in June, but the levy, all the issues around the levy and so on are still there.

A senior who is struggling with increased home care, a senior who is struggling with not having certain over-the-counter drugs covered, home care supplies covered, all those things, a senior who is suffering like everyone else from the increased taxes, nothing has changed for that individual as a result of this budget compared to last year.

So, for that reason, I can't support it. Had there had been some more significant changes in terms of the degree of taxation and so on put upon the people, then perhaps I could have supported it, but we haven't seen it. That's unfortunate and, therefore, that's why I can't.

As I said yesterday, everything in the budget is not bad. There are some good items in the budget. There are some initiatives there that I support. I outlined them yesterday. I think they were good and nothing has changed in that regard, so there are some good things there. I'm not denying that and I'm glad to see some of the initiatives that have been taken.

As I said yesterday, I think the approach of zero-based budgeting is a good approach to take. It makes total sense to me that, year over year, you should have to justify the expenditures as opposed to simply saying because we did it last year or the year before, we're going to spend the same this year. Making it so that department

heads and so on have to justify their spending year over year, to me, is a positive thing and, as I said yesterday, I do support that.

Now, there are a couple of things. First of all, my colleague just spoke to the issue of P3s. While my colleague has said a number of things I have agreed with, in terms of the P3s I'm really not sure what the issue is, to be honest with you. I do understand concerns around P3s if we were going to be privatizing the services themselves. In other words, taking health care, as an example, removing public employees and privatizing it, I understand why some of my colleagues would have a concern with that. I would have a concern with that; I would not support that.

But in terms of constructing the infrastructure, which is what's being proposed here – simply constructing that infrastructure, if there is a value-for-money assessment done and it makes sense and it allows us to move forward because we don't have the cash, it still allows us to own the facility and to pay it out over time – granted, we may have to pay more. It's no different than not being able to pay for a house, cash down; you get a mortgage, you end up paying more. We all know that. But if it allows us to get what we need and what the people desperately need, and it makes sense and the cost is not outrageous, then as far as brick and mortar goes, personally I don't have a problem with it. I don't see anything wrong with that. That's how I see it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: But if we were talking about privatizing the services, that's another discussion altogether, and I would definitely agree as it relates to what my colleagues here have said, that I would not support that.

I want to put it on the record – as I said yesterday, Madam Speaker, I'll put out the good, the bad, how I feel about things, and I'm not taking one side or the other; I'm just looking at these issues from how I see them and how I believe my constituents see them. Knowing that no matter what you say or what position you take, it's inevitable that everyone's not going to agree with you, whatever position that is.

I think one of the things that I would have liked to have seen more of in the budget is some more initiatives in terms of economic development and how we're going to grow the economy. We realize that for a long time we've been dependent on oil and gas, and we still are. Quite frankly, the only reason why we're in a better position financially this year versus last year is because the price of oil went up beyond what it was forecasted and the production numbers went up. That was really it.

Yes, there was some – I'm not saying there wasn't a few savings here and there with zero-based budgeting. Obviously, we know there were services, as I outlined earlier, that were cut and tax increases that I think we went too far with. For me, it's not about people paying a greater share. It's the degree to which they did it. Beyond that, it was really our fortunes in terms of oil and gas that really improved our situation.

We are still very dependent on oil and gas. That's a reality. Do we need to diversify the economy? Absolutely! We need to lower our dependency on oil and gas revenues. I think everybody realizes that. Now, is there a magic bullet that will just automatically do that? No, there's not. It is something that's going to take time. It's government's job to create an atmosphere, if you will, to foster economic growth and development. That's government's role. I'm glad to see we have seen some moves here; I don't think we've seen enough moves.

Quite frankly, a year or two ago you will recall the LEAP program, the Liberal Economic Action Plan. At that point in time there was a group that went out all over the province and met with all these business leaders and captains of industry as they were called and so on. They had all of these great ideas, supposed to garner all these great ideas to diversify the economy. I haven't seen a whole lot.

I would love for the government to bring forward a document that says this is exactly – here is a document. Here's our LEAP document if you will. I've never seen a LEAP document and say here's what we heard, here's what we're doing, here's the results. I haven't seen it. I'd like to see that. We haven't yet, but we'll wait and see.

There are some things that have been done, some initiatives that I would agree with. I think the fact that we're going to take more agricultural land and we're going to develop that for farming, I think that was a good move. I would support that for sure. I'm sure the people that are involved in farming; they feel it's a good idea. I think there's a lot of opportunity there for sure and that's certainly something I support.

I think freeing open more Crown land for municipalities so they can grow their towns and their communities; I think that was also a good initiative. Hopefully we will see something come from that.

I think we have opportunity, as we all realize, I think, in the aquaculture industry. There's no doubt, that's an opportunity to grow the economy in a lot of areas, a lot of rural areas, create jobs and so on. Although I would just caution that as it relates to aquaculture, Madam Speaker, that it's important that as we're doing it, as we're allowing these projects to go forward, that we do them properly. That we make sure all of the proper due diligence is done in terms of the environmental legislation and so on.

That's why I was really surprised, and a little disappointed quite frankly, that we moved forward with the Grieg proposal without going through the full environmental assessment. I want to see these things happening if it makes sense and it's not going to harm our environment. Like I said, it's going to create a lot of jobs, a lot of wealth and we would all support that, but we do need to make sure, like I said, that we're doing the due diligence.

Depending on who you listen to, you will get different perspectives in terms of whether this is okay for the environment or whether it's not. There are two opposing sides, obviously. While we want the jobs, without a doubt, we can't just say because there are jobs, the heck with the environment. We cannot do that. We need to make sure we do our due diligence. So if there's an environmental process, we should take that process to the nth degree to ensure it's done properly.

I actually met –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

MR. LANE: I actually met with people from the aquaculture industry to try to get a feel for that and, quite frankly, I was surprised to learn – I was told by those people that they were surprised. On the Grieg project they were surprised that they didn't go all the way with the full environmental assessment. They were confident that had that been done it still would have shown that the project is a good project and no concerns. So they could not understand why you just simply wouldn't do it for the record, do all the due diligence, get it out there on the books that everything has been done and it's safe for the environment and so on. They were surprised that wasn't done.

As I said, I'm glad to see that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: I'm glad to see these types of initiatives, but, as I said, let's do the due diligence. That's all I'm saying.

It's amazing to me, Madam Speaker, that here I am actually supporting initiatives that are going forward and I'm still getting heckled for supporting it. It's mind blowing to me. I'm supporting it. I'm supporting the aquaculture project. I am supporting it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: The Member for Placentia West, he will have his chance –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

This is the third time the Speaker has asked for co-operation of Members of the House. If I speak any more I will name specific Members.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you for the protection from the Member for Placentia West. I'll name him.

Aquaculture, there's an opportunity. Certainly, the fishery – I think the fishery is something that over the years I don't think we've paid enough attention to it. We should have paid attention to it. I really think we need to put more focus on the fishery. It's important that we all work together to try to resolve some of the issues.

I did write the Premier and suggested perhaps an all-party committee to look at some of the issues. I would still maintain that that's something that should be done so that we could talk to stakeholders and come up with a united front on some of the important issues facing the fishery to advocate together, jointly to Ottawa on. I still maintain that as well.

Madam Speaker, as far as the Crown lands and the agricultural projects and so on go, as I said, I think that was a good move. I think one of the issues that I've heard in the past when it comes to raising our own beef and things like that, that the issue we've had, while that's not growing is because of inspection processes and the availability of federal inspection for meat and beef and so on. That's something I think that should be looked into for sure.

Of course, one of the biggest opportunities we have in the province for growth is tourism. I'm glad to see that we're continuing to go down that road to try to promote tourism. When I was out and about last summer, up around the Northern Peninsula area and Central Newfoundland and so on, there's no doubt, there's an awful lot there to offer, but there were three things that I noted, at least, from a tourist point of view, that we really need to be working on.

One was the roads. Now, we all know there are issues all throughout the province with roads. We know that apparently we have a new system in place now that's supposed to take the politics out of pavement or so on, whatever the terminology is. It's a matrix and so on. Madam Speaker, part of that matrix, if it's not there, needs to be tourism.

I will just use an example. We have Elliston – the Root Cellar Capital of the World is it, or is it just North America or whatever it is. Anyway,

it's on the Bonavista Peninsula; a beautiful spot. The Sealers Memorial is down there and so on, but the road to go down there is absolutely brutal, to say the least. The road is brutal.

If we're going to have an area like that, that's going to offer that experience for tourists and so on, then it is important that the road getting down to that particular site is in good condition and that has to be part of –

MR. JOYCE: That's on the list this year.

MR. LANE: The minister is saying it's on the list. Good, glad to hear it. The Minister of Municipal Affairs said that road is on the list – excellent.

MR. JOYCE: This year.

MR. LANE: This year – good, perfect.

I guess my point is part of this matrix for roads and stuff like that has to take into consideration tourist opportunities and so on, because people have to be able to get there and get there safely.

The second thing I noticed when I was around was signage. Signage to get to the various tourist sites is not always great. Sometimes there might be a sign when you actually get right down next to it, but there might be a bunch of roads – for example, you could see a sign on the highway or off the highway saying certain tourist attraction, turn right. But you go down right and there could be two or three turns, lefts and rights and everything else, to get to the actual site and when you get down there, you can't find it because of very poor direction. So another thing I think we really need to look is the signage.

Not from our perspective. It's fine for us to say, well, we're from Newfoundland, we know where these places are, but you have to put yourself in the mind of a tourist who has never been here, has no clue where these places, these sites, are and to look at it from their perspective.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: A lot of them, I am told by the Member, that were there are blown down, so they need to be maintained. That's obviously an important piece as well.

Someone really needs to look at the signage to our main tourist sites from a tourist's eyes, who doesn't know where they're going to, and ask themselves if I didn't know how to get here and I come to a fork in the road and there's no sign in that fork that says go left or go right, or whatever, well then if I'm a tourist, how am I going to know. I think we need to do that.

The other thing I noted was the maintenance of the actual tourist sites themselves. There are some really high-quality tourist destinations here in Newfoundland and Labrador and there are a lot of them that are kept up very well. But there are also a number of tourist sites, if you will, off the beaten path, that are in terrible condition. I found a number of those when I was going down different areas where you might see a sign or something and it said there was a sign or whatever to a certain location. When you get down there, when you get down to that site, you would note that perhaps the area – not just the road but the area itself, that the storyboards or whatever that were there were all marked up or torn down; or there was a walking trail or a little bridge there that was all beaten down; if there was a pull-in area with playground equipment, it was all rusty, falling down and so on.

Now, I'm not saying that we can maintain every single site in the province. Perhaps what we need to do is take an inventory and say what sites are the major sites that we can afford to maintain and make sure that those sites are in the best possible condition. If we have other small areas here and there that are not being used and are falling apart, then simply take down the sign altogether and don't use it, but don't have a tourist drive for a half hour down through some road to get down to something and it's all falling apart. There should be an inventory done of that, and I think that would be another thing to improve from a tourist point of view.

Madam Speaker, I'm pretty much out of time. Those were just some of my thoughts. I have 14 seconds left, so I'll say the other impediment to tourism is the ferry system and the cost of the ferry system. I think that's something as well that we need to all be lobbying to get those rates down so we can get people here to our beautiful province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to get up and speak on the budget. This is my first time rising on any part to speak on this year's budget, so that's always a pleasure.

I guess there are a lot of things I could discuss on the budget. It's almost like one of them things, where do you start. The most telling thing about this budget when it was first brought down – we haven't had a lot of time in the House to debate it since it was brought in, but a lot of people I spoke to, people were expecting the worst and the worst never came. Everyone was expecting a really harsh budget and, in actual fact, they never got what they expected.

In essence, that cushioned the blow –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask Members for their co-operation, to keep the volume down.

Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Basically expectations were high on a harsh budget. When it was delivered, people were generally pleased that it wasn't what they anticipated. Strategy-wise, I guess that worked for the public backlash that you saw last year, you never got it this year.

As the days went on and, like I said, we weren't here in the House, as you start asking questions and people were talking to it, the thing that came to mind to most people, a lot of people I spoke to, was this is the same budget that was delivered last year, with the exception of the reduction in the gas tax. Really, you had a continuation of the 2016 budget.

As time goes on and you talk to people, the more and more you talk about it, that's become the story. It is like fair enough, it wasn't what we anticipated; yet, it's still the same budget. So it's still not a good thing with the reduction – we have 300 new taxes implemented last year, fees and taxes, and this year we have a reduction one of those 300. So 299 are still there and one is reduced. Really, 300 of them are still there, with a reduction in one.

There's no doubt, from the public perspective, it wasn't what they anticipated but it is still not a good thing. Madam Speaker, I suppose I'll reference my own district. CBS is the second largest municipality in the province. I know that a lot of people sometimes don't realize that fact when they look at the two other cities around us – well, three, counting Lab City. CBS is a town, but it is the second largest municipality in the province.

For years, it was the fastest growing community in Atlantic Canada. I spend a lot of time in my district – obviously, I live there, but I do spend a lot of time out around. I know a lot of the people. I converse with a lot from all different walks of life. Everyone is telling me what they anticipated last year, this year is coming home to roost, is that the economy is slowing down.

I have a lot of contractors with the housing boom that was on the go, a lot of contractors now are starting to find the pinch. Some never made it through last year. A lot more this year are not sure if they're going to make it through this construction season. No doubt, a lot of it is cyclical with the boom, but a lot of it a direct result of the budgetary measures that's affecting each and every one of us. If you're building a home or if you're out buying a vehicle, any big purchases, there are a lot of people rethinking what they're doing financially, based on the added costs in the budget.

I'll throw one extra one out there too, and I guess a lot of people – it's probably a timely thing to bring up. The deadline for taxes was April 30. I've talked to ever so many people and they said, they heard about the levy. We talked about the levy for hours on end and around the clock, as we all remember, but this year when they started doing their income tax they actually seen the effect of the levy. Whether they did

their own taxes, whether they went to H&R Block, whether they went to an accounting firm, there's that separate form and it jumps right out at you. It's the line item for that levy.

It seems to me that, again, you say a lot of things and it doesn't resonate with people until it actually comes to the actual – they see it firsthand and they actually go: Oh my God, this is what they've been talking about for the last year.

I guess in comparison to it, it was a budgetary item but it makes – when I thought about that, the only comparison I could make was snow clearing, the 24-hour snow clearing issue. I brought that up last spring in the House. At the time there were some questions about it, debate back and forth and it stopped, but, as we all know, when the snow started falling in December – I was the critic and I was promoting it but the public were promoting it just as much as me. The issue was: Oh my God, this is what he mentioned eight months ago.

Well, the levy question is one I found interesting because in my other life I am an accountant, my background, so I do that on the side and I saw it firsthand. When I saw it I went – I seen it and I said it hurts when you're doing it and you can see it actually on paper, but then when I went around and I went to Tim Hortons and I went to various other places, and you run into this person and that person, they're meeting a deadline and they actually say – that's a topic they say: I didn't realize that. I would have got a refund only for the levy.

So this budget, again, no doubt, the way it was delivered and the people's expectations were where they are, but the actual fact of the matter is it was just a continuation of last year's budget. Most of the public are aware of that now. I guess they've complained, they've cried out to the hills in the last year. So that's why he's not hearing a lot about it now, but most of the public are well aware of what they're facing and what they have in store for the next year.

On that note, Madam Speaker, there are a few issues; there are a few areas I'd like to go, but I'd just like to, while I got this opportunity, before I go back into direct budget stuff, about my district. I know yesterday I heard Members

getting up, several Members getting up and thanking the volunteers for – last week being volunteer appreciation week.

In my own District of Conception Bay South, we hosted the 2016 Summer Games last year. I wanted to give a shout out to the volunteers from my own district. We had upwards of 600 volunteers step up to the plate and made the 2016 Summer Games the success they were.

Without volunteers, as anyone can attest to with those sorts of events, they would not be possible. Those events would not happen. I just wanted to be on record as giving them a big thank you on behalf of our district. Because what they've done and the work they've done, each and every one of them, not only what they do in other walks, all our community organizations, but for everyone to come together for those games it was great to see. I commend each and every one of them.

Madam Speaker, another budget item – and we hear about it, it was a news item two weeks ago – it's the Adult Dental care program. I know my colleague, the critic for Health, has brought it up on the floor many times and it's been talked about, but that's a tough budget item to – that's a tough issue to deal with. Because on one end of it your policy and the budget don't allow for it, the program is no longer there. On the other side of it you have some seniors that are struggling just to survive. They don't have that extra money to be able to get this work done. It's not cosmetic. Most of it is very essential.

It was two weeks back we saw it was a lady who was brought – it was in a local paper. She actually protested out on the parking lot. I was quite familiar with that lady personally. She lives in a neighbouring district, but me and my colleague for Topsail – Paradise, both of us had dealings back and forth with her. That's quite a sad story. She's eating puréed food, losing weight. She's in dire need of this surgery which costs \$20,000 out of her pocket. She can't afford it.

That was one of the casualties of the 2016 budget. Again, I understand you find savings but some of those savings you have to – a lot of it doesn't make sense unfortunately. Then you see people like that, our seniors, some of our most

vulnerable people who are in need of this service and the money is not available. I think that's a continuation. There's no change. That was 2016. Here we are in 2017 and those same issues are with us. That lady was only – the poster child for that issue was the bigger issue. I have had other people in my district come to me about that same program cut, same similar issues, and they're being denied. I think that was an ill-advised decision.

Madam Speaker, on the topic of budget – I guess on the topic of just a general consensus out on the street today. I sat in this House, and I'm a newly-elected Member in my second year. I heard the current Premier get up and say that oil is not a policy. We were drunk on oil. We depended on oil for way too many things. We overspent and the list goes on.

We referenced the 2016 budget as a download on the people of this province with the 300 taxes and the increase in the levies and the gas tax and you name it; yet, based on the fact of oil prices going up and production increase this past year, the province were the beneficiaries of an extra half a billion dollars in income, which was used to meet their targets, among other things. We haven't quite figured out where their targets are, but we're working on that. In one breath your actions have to match your words. You can't speak out of both sides of your mouth.

You're saying it's not a policy. You're saying the former administration was drunk on oil; they were spending like drunken sailors. You can't say that in one breath and then all of a sudden use that as your backstop on the other side. That's exactly what happened here in this budget with the extra half a billion dollars in oil revenues. It saved the current government some political capital from having to do what everyone anticipated they were going to do, but I guess the devil is in the details, Madam Speaker, because I believe what's going to happen down the road now is that to soften the blow and to gain some – again, it keeps your political capital intact, or some of it. You're going to see dribs and drabs; you're going to see 10 layoffs here or 15 here. You're not going to see a massive 400 to 500 people go. You'll see a few here and a few there, hoping along the way people will not pick up on this shock to the system, that it's going to happen in little increments.

I guess the point I'm making, connecting with the oil, without this half a billion dollars in revenue some of those decisions would have had to been made here and now when the budget was released. Based on that, and this zero-based budgeting that we're still working on figuring out, because a lot of it is still a bit uncertain, that saved the government some face in being able to deliver a budget that wasn't, again, as harsh as people had anticipated.

My point on that, I mean the moral of my story with that is you can't have it both ways. I sit here in this House and I listen to a lot of debate, I listen to a lot of commentary. Some commentary, from all sides, I agree with it if it makes sense, but a lot of it I just am left shaking my head. Sometimes I'm thinking you give them the benefit of the doubt. Then they turn around and this totally contradicts what they were after saying prior to.

I know we'll all do that in time, that's part of the political life, but I do hope to try to keep a bit of creditability. If you stand by your convictions and you believe in something, say it and stand by it. Don't say it when it's all right, the optics are good or it's the right timing. You need to say it and stand by it.

In saying this, Madam Speaker, I guess we'll go back. I want to touch on a couple of other issues, too, in my time. The current issue going on today with the former clerk, I guess, now. I mean I went around my district when that story broke last week and I'll be honest, I talked to the Liberals, I talked to NDPs, I talked to PCs, I talked to people who can't stand either one of us. Everyone said the same thing: What were they thinking? Everybody – I mean everybody and that's the genuine effect.

If we were in power and it was a PC premier I would have to ask the same question: What in the name of God were you thinking? To think that something like this is okay and get up and defend something like that, it just defies all logic. I've heard mind boggling. There's every type of analysis. Anyone you listen to in the media, anyone that's following this stuff, everybody says the same thing.

Most Members opposite are pretty rational thinkers and I think that they're in their own

right. They have to see what everyone else sees. To sit there in this House and to listen to the back and forth and to listen to the explanations being given and for anyone – and I mean anybody to think that that's good, that's proper. You have the most senior civil servant actually suing the government so he's on both sides of the table. I mean it just defies logic, it defies all common sense.

I guess I always use my filter. You go out in the general public and you ask people or people ask you. They want to talk, they want to have that topic, they want to have that discussion. That's what everyone is saying to me. I mean some people are almost like can you explain to me what the clerk does because not a lot of people – or I should say not a lot, there's a group of people who don't understand the work.

So when you explain to them who that person actually is their jaws drop. They're like what? How can that happen? And that sums it up: How could it have ever happened? Why would you ever do something like that knowing first-hand what the outcome could be?

Madam Speaker, I know that some Members opposite don't want to get up and speak but they'd like to heckle, so maybe they can get up when I'm done.

AN HON. MEMBER: See if they get up.

MR. PETTEN: Yes, really.

The thing is if you make a decision – and I learned this along the way from a lot of people that I had a lot of respect for coming up through and some of my current colleagues – as a minister in charge, you have to look down the road and see the worst possible thing. If something goes wrong how can I defend this.

I've been in the boardrooms with ministers when they'd say that, okay, this is a dicey one but how can I defend this decision? I heard that for years and I learned from it because they'd say if I can't defend this decision, I'm not making it. You always have an out and that makes sense in life, Madam Speaker. No matter what we do in life we should always be able to defend our actions. That's the moral of that story: Defend your actions.

When this decision was made to hire on this guy – and it's not about Mr. Coffey, I don't know the man but he has a stellar record as a lawyer. It's nothing about him and never has been, it's about the judgement of our Premier and this current government who knew about it and today thinks it's still fine to say that this is right.

It defies all logic how you can say we're going to do this. We know you're suing the government; you have a couple of potential cases. If anything comes up publicly, if we have to deal with that, we know how to deal with that. We'll just tell them we're just going to let him go and accept his resignation. We don't have an answer for you but that's your answer. That to me is totally wrong on every front, Madam Speaker.

Again, I'll allude back to Members opposite. They can catcall on certain things but if they really feel so strongly, I think maybe the people out there would like hear their views on this, too, because the people I'm talking to are totally at a loss.

I'll be honest, I'm at a loss. I cannot, for the life of me, see how any one of the Members opposite and the Premier, being the man in charge, to agree to that agreement, and then get up in this House, get up in front of a news scrum in the media centre and defend it.

Actually, as a matter of fact, he said he would do it again – he'd actually do it again. Now if that's not, I suppose, bold, brazen, brash, whatever you want to call it, that defies more logic tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Madam Speaker, it's interesting, you know. We've been on this side for the last two days getting up and debating the budget, trying to have sensible debates and Members opposite are sitting down, outside of one Member there. One Member got up, I believe, and they were over there catcalling. I mean, the floor is theirs if they want to take their turn and get up and defend what they're doing in this budget. No, they will not defend what's going up in that budget.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, I took the time yesterday morning and so have my colleagues to go down and listen to the Premier's answers on the current Bern Coffey fiasco. I said I'd like to see that live. Actually, we were the only ones – there was not a Liberal Member in the media centre, outside the Premier and the Minister of Justice.

That tells me everything I need to know about their views, so if they want to get up and defend what I'm saying here, please get up and defend it; give me some rational arguments to that decision. That's all I'm asking. I'm not saying – I just can't understand, for the life of me, these Members opposite can sit there with a clear conscience and defend and backup what's been done.

This is outrageous. It flies in the face of anything that's common sense, Madam Speaker. You can't put the fox in the henhouse. That's exactly what happened in this case. You can't have it both ways; you just can't do it.

Then the minister –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Then the Minister of Natural Resources who doesn't – one of the cases that are filed against Nalcor, we found out today she doesn't even know about it. She knew nothing about this deal. The Minister of Finance found out about it in the media. Now the Minister of Health knew because Western Health is getting sued. That's good to know. We're glad to hear that.

Before I finish up, Madam Speaker, we have a minister that wasn't allowed to get up. Two or three times she was asked questions, she wasn't allowed to stand up. The Premier got up instead of her. He kept her seated. He didn't want her views on it.

We saw it was all over the place; you almost need to keep a scorecard. But I tell you right now in the court of public opinion on this issue this government needs to come clean with the people because this decision was horrendous.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to acknowledge my colleague here for Conception Bay South who very eloquently outlined exactly the challenges that we have here in voting for this budget; the challenges that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have in supporting this budget; the questions that the multitudes, the thousands of people have around the inadequacies in this budget and how it's not addressing the needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; how it is very short-sighted and falls short of the testaments and the testimonials given by Members on that side and by their government about the great things they were going to do and the vision and *The Way Forward* plan.

Madam Speaker, when the Throne Speech first came down – and I said this before and I'll be as honest as anybody – the outline had me intrigued. It actually had me encouraged that we were going to move things forward. I felt that maybe we had turned a corner. Maybe the bad choices made last year by the Liberal administration and the bad decisions were going to be reversed in some way, shape or form, or they had a plan to get us back to where we needed to go to ensure that we continued to make things grow in this province; continue to keep our young educated, well-resourced individuals here; continue to support our post-secondary institutions; continue to support our primary and secondary institutions; continue to invest in proper infrastructure; continue to give pride to the citizens here so that they don't leave in droves. That they feel that they want to stay here and that they're willing to take – they'll take a few hits. They're willing to pay their dues if they know that there's some vision at the end of the day.

Last year, well, we know the devastation. I think it took 12 months for the shock to wear off on a number of people here, other than those who immediately saw and probably had some

political vision, realized then at the end of the day there was not going to be any solving the issue by the Liberal administration. There was no down the road they'd make a better life. There would be no way forward. Their way forward was to get out of Newfoundland and Labrador because they didn't see a future here, and that's unfortunate because we lost some real key citizens here.

We lost a real opportunity to do things here, a real opportunity to grow our economy, and we didn't do that. We didn't take advantage of it because rather than selling or explaining or engaging the citizens to say we've got some hard times here, there's a financial crisis and we admit that – I have no qualms; no matter what administration had been in, there was a financial crisis.

The difference between good leadership is how you deal with that financial crisis. The best way to do that is to find a way to ensure that people still have faith in what you do and people still understand it and people are willing to do their part. But that wasn't what this administration did at all. What they did was just take a calculator and start punching in some numbers and say here's the amount of money we're going to save, but here's the impact it's going to have on people – no, there was no evaluation of the impact it was going to have or what it would do to the economy, or what it would do to the population in Newfoundland and Labrador and what it would do for us for a credibility point of view on the national and international stage.

Obviously, that was the first nail in the coffin of looking at whether or not Newfoundland and Labrador was going to be able to move forward over the next number of years when we were facing some financial challenges. There was no doubt. Ontario were facing them. Alberta were facing them. Saskatchewan were facing them. There is no doubt people had to change their approaches, particularly those who were reliant on oil, like three and maybe four key provinces were here in this country.

What had to be done, there had to be a plan, a plan of action, a plan that was sustainable and didn't do the major damage in one year that would be irreversible for the future years, and that's what happened here. When you didn't

outline exactly the best infrastructure decisions that needed to be done around investing in education – you can't cut education. You can't cut health care. You got to be able to sustain certain things. So if it means you have a plan, a plan of action that says we know we've got some challenges here, we know we're being watched by the bond agencies and that, but we're going to go in with a plan.

Bond agencies are fairly open to say, look, it doesn't have to be done in 18 months or 24 months or 36 months; we'll give you a plan of action. We know you're sustainable. Don't forget where our ratings went from 15-20 years ago where we were to now having an A+ rating and people having the confidence in what we were doing here, and looking at us as one of the key provinces that were going to develop and have further growth. People were coming here investing. Financial markets, when they come here and the financial institutes start investing in your province, they have some vision; they know it's down the road. So they're not expecting everybody to pay their bills, pay their mortgage off in the next year or so.

But that's what the Liberal administration did last year. They figured, look, we want to be able to tick off something and say we're the greatest at financial management, so we're going to be able to show a surplus on the backs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador without realizing the minute you start imposing unbelievable, unacceptable and unobtainable tax regimes and hardships, you're going to lose part of your populace. You're going to lose faith people have. You're going to lose people who have some capital: the private sector, the business sector, who could invest in driving the economy.

That didn't happen. Our economy dropped on a mainstream that other ones that were reliant on the oil industry were being projected to do, but then ours dropped another percent or so because of the inactive plan and the inability to address some of the particular needs here, and the fear that it imposed on people.

It was never about how we find efficient ways of doing things; it was about cutting things. And we've already determined this and it's already been exposed that 90 per cent of the cuts they

made actually are going to cost more money in various areas: in education and in health care; in delivering programs and services within the infrastructure; within being able to drive tourism and drive business.

All the key things, the key pillars, the approach that was outlined last year of why they could justify the cuts that are being made were going to be the exact things that were going to save us for the long time. The opposite happened. Every one of those indicators went down. Everybody involved in those industries have said they faced not only hardship, but they've gone backwards: reversing their ability to invest; reversing their ability to promote their produce; reversing their ability to be able to attract new investment here.

Again, that goes back to a simple concept of not listening to what people were telling you. There were people – I went to some of those consultations last year. I won't talk about the ones this year; I'll get into last year, where people were giving you particular outlines. I remember some of the outlines were around post-secondary education, our college system, about efficiencies within the college system, about doing proper training in the areas where we knew there would be a demand, so that we could get back again to ensuring that our tradespeople and our people who are skilled are employable, and that maybe we can develop another offset type of industry. It could be in manufacturing. It could be in research and development. It could be in the technology world. It could be in IT. It could be in anything of benefit that there's a market for in this world.

Don't forget, we're 20 years ahead of where we were 10 years ago because we had made such an impact on the national and international market by our investments in the oil industry and our use of technology, what our institutions, Memorial University and CNA and even our private schools, had done in training. What the Newfoundland and Labrador worker had done by travelling all over the world, by showing their work ethic, showing their skill set, showing their innovation and their ingenuity.

We had already – those doors were open. We just needed to find a way to tap into that, and what better time to sit down and really analyze what you're doing, when you're in a financial

crunch, and be able to tie into all those other potential avenues that are out there, by having a full analysis, by really looking at it. By not just sitting down and saying, do you know what? Cut, cut, cut and not realizing the impact. Then saying: cut, cut, cut, but do you know what? We're going to be okay down the road because all these cuts will solve that. No.

As the budget has indicated, all those cuts showed that what you were talking about revenue in a particular area has not only dropped 10, 15, 20, dramatically. Some industries now are teetering on surviving in this province because of the impact that it has had on them.

I talked to some people – I'll just give you an example – who bring in vehicles in Newfoundland and Labrador, Harvey's and them, the car carriers that go around. They're down 45 per cent. That's because people don't have faith in this administration to be able to make sure that the economy grows. They don't have faith in the fact that there's stability here and you can have investment. One thing about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I give credit, they're smart enough, they always put away for a rainy day.

I think that was inbred in us. Particularly if you come from rural Newfoundland and Labrador, you always saved because you never knew what was going to happen and you didn't want to be reliant on your neighbour or another family member or the government. You wanted to be able to stand on your own ground and do it. People in Newfoundland and Labrador always still have that mindset and there's a few dollars put away.

In times when things were down, people didn't mind spending that to help us get over the hump. They didn't mind spending a few extra dollars. They didn't mind investing to keep a business afloat. They only did that because they knew they'd have a chance to replenish that in a year or two because they had confidence the government would set out a plan.

The government would find a way to drive the economy. The government would find a way to ensure their quality of life increased, didn't decrease, but what's happened in the last 18 months, everybody has lost that confidence. As a

result, the few dollars they have, because don't forget, that's already got depleted, not by their design or not by them living a lavish lifestyle or spending, but by the government putting their hands in their pockets and taking money out, and justified it by saying this is our approach to driving the economy. If it's on gas tax, if it's on insurance tax, if it's a change on our income tax process, if it's tax on fees and services for everything else that's done, all of these were things that took away from being able to drive the economy.

Do people realize, yes, there was going to have to be particular investments made by the general population? I think people were pretty happy – I can't say happy, it's not the right word. They're never happy with increased taxes, but they were pretty understanding to say, look, we're in a financial crunch. If you have to increase my taxes by a per cent or 1½ per cent across the board, well that's fair, because people who live on a fixed income at a certain level and a person who has a middle income, a higher income, and an extreme successful income would all pay in accordance.

That would be fair; fair taxation, purely fair taxation, but that wasn't the approach taken here. It was let's try to come up with 300-plus fees and services. Let's try to kick at everybody. Let's try to do things that at the end of the day will make so much confusion, people won't really know how much it's costing them until it comes. So let's change when we implement some of these.

Insurance tax, people won't know until they renew their insurance. That might be eight, 10 months down the road. So they won't see that. Their income tax, they won't know that until they do that. Their levy, we're going to do that a year down the road, so people will after be forgetting about that. The gas tax, well, we'll spread that around. Let's pray that gas doesn't go up too much. That won't be an impact, but that didn't happen. You saw the outcry, you saw the outrage people had and you saw the impact it had on businesses. I've talked to businesses who have taken two of their vehicles off the road because of the increased cost on their insurance.

Don't forget, there was another tax. There are all kinds of hidden taxes out of those 300-plus, the

hidden tax. There was an insurance hidden tax put in there that insurance companies have had to pass on. I spoke to people in the industry who said well, we have a line for our expenditures and a profit margin process. So that extra 2½ per cent, we're going to have to pass that on. So that's another added 2½ to the 15 per cent. If that 2½ being added has to be calculated in another way or there's a more administrative cost, well that's another cost to your insurance company, and you know who they're passing that on to, to the consumer.

Now there are other taxes, all these other hidden things that are part and parcel of what you do. When we hear some of the ridiculous things about the few entrepreneurs – and I give credit – the creative entrepreneurs who are out getting ice off icebergs to be able to promote their products and do specialized things around water and distilling of products and all this. We're increasing their tax space there and their permit costs tenfold, fiftyfold, a hundredfold in some cases. It doesn't make sense.

Somebody could not have sat down and said let's think about this because if somebody had sat down and said, you know what, not only let's keep it where it is, if that's sustainable, or let's reduce it in a way, let's find a way to market. So now it's not five or six or eight people paying that permit fee to do that, there are 500, and 500 of them are producing products and that, that can be sold all over the world to promote Newfoundland and Labrador and create jobs in communities like Twillingate, or Hant's Harbour, or Baie Verte, or the Burin Peninsula, or anywhere else that they feel there are opportunities, people where they can harvest these types of things.

Instead, the ones that we have who are marketers – don't forget, when they're also marketing that, they're marketing our tourism industry because they're using their websites. They're using their international abilities to go to trade shows and that to sell their product. When they're selling their product, they're selling Newfoundland and Labrador. That benefits everybody here. It benefits every other industry. It benefits the taxpayers here and particularly, if I was government, it benefits government because they're going to be the receivers of any tax paid.

One of the pillars was around tourism. Well, if you're going to promote tourism, would you not try to promote the organizations and the industries that are unique and are going to sell why tourists would come here? If we're talking about bits of iceberg, if we're talking about iceberg water, if we're talking about unique things that people can't get in an Asian country or they can't get in Saudi Arabia or they can't get on the Prairies in Canada, well then, I think that would be our approach.

When we put in hindrances and stumbling blocks, and basically when we say we're going to try to drive you out of business, it's not a good approach to improving the economy and ensuring that we're ready for when we move to the next level. The next level is the pillars they had. We're going to be innovative; we're going to be creative. We're going to drive industries in a different way.

We all bought into tourism. We've seen tourism flourish. Tourism was always around but the last 10, 15 years, particularly the last 10 years it flourished as an industry, with investments that the previous administration had made, but particularly of people working in the industry.

This wasn't just about money being given by government. That's an add-on, that's a necessary support, but it's the great work that was done in our rural Newfoundland communities. It was the great work done by our entrepreneurs. It was the great work in promoting who we were. It was the great work in having our ambassadors go out and sell what we do in this province. We've had hundreds events over the years, and they come back from musical backgrounds, to acting, to athletics, to comedians, to writers, to performers in every sector, to average citizens who go out and promote the great things that are in this province of ours. So we started to move that forward and we've gotten to a point where we're at a billion-dollar business.

It is amazing. I remember going to one of Hospitality Newfoundland's AGMs and sitting around, and the spirit that was there, the hype. Because not only was it something that was flourishing, but it was on their dime. It wasn't government just throwing money at something, an industry, to see if it goes because we feel

we're obligated to do that. It was a partnership and that partnership was to move forward.

When I heard last year that first when this new administration took over one of their pillars were going to be, yes, we're facing some financial crisis, we're going to diversify the economy away from oil and here are one of the things we're going to take and really move forward, I said great. No problem, great. I know the minister gets up and sells that and great for him. I've been at a few functions where he gets up and plays up all the positive things that are being done. But words are one thing, actions are others too.

You've got to be able to support industries, and to do that, you've got to give them supports. Supports come in financial ways, they come in training ways and they come in other partnership developments. They don't come in putting up roadblocks, putting in hindrances, taking away from their financial ability and making it more encompassing for them to not only operate as a business, but to flourish and move forward.

That's where the biggest challenge I have with this budget is. I mean we all know what the challenge last year with the last budget was. It was just so many fees and taxes it was just impossible for people to be able to sustain a quality of life and it was impossible for young families, people who just graduated from an education institution, to be able to move forward.

It was impossible for businesses to grow their business. It was impossible for the average person to take the few dollars they had and reinvest into the economy by buying a product they needed, or doing something of benefit for them and their family. It's unfortunate when we're pressured to a point where everything is about let's not do it, can't do this.

How many people – I heard this in my district – say: No, I told the kids we can't do this, or I told my partner we can't do this, or I told my employees unfortunately, guys, we can't do this. That's the negative. That's what we're getting to, we can't do this. We can't do this because we don't have the supports in play or we don't have the faith anymore because there's no plan of action, there's no vision. There's no

communication, there's no integration and there's no consultation to ensure we find a way to move things forward.

When you start hearing things about the infrastructure, our school systems, about parents – not only that, we didn't move beyond just the structure of building Coley's Point or Riverside or St. Bernard's and all these, we've moved to instructional programs within the existing ones. A lot of them – some of them are overcrowded. Thank God some of them are going to be addressed over the next number of months because of the schools that were in play prior to this administration. They're going to be continued and finished.

They're talking about basic rights: inclusion education for kids, kids with hard of hearing, kids with visually impaired, not having proper instruction because the teachers don't have the ability, time wise, because of the caps on classroom sizes. These are challenges.

You know what, we've moved beyond just how much money's coming out of our pocket and moved to the point where people are now fearful of some of the services that they need to sustain a quality of life not only for themselves any more but for their children.

They talk about some of the challenges in health care, talk about particularly seniors, what's been cut. When a senior living in one of our homes needs BOOST so they can have energy to get up, even if it's in a wheelchair, to go participate in some social activity within that home or within that hospital and when that's taken away from them, family members have to scramble to try to come up with the money to ensure they got that. People are doing without that.

Certain basic things that people would have for quality of life, ensuring a bit of dignity, these types of things. Those things are not being thought of. When there's nickel and dime stuff, if you really want to sit down and come up with a master plan, you find out what it is you can do, you find out through integration on existing programs. You find out when is it we can meet our targets.

You know what, we can't at this point – we can't crucify our own clientele and our own

citizens at this point right now at the expense of being able to tick off that we balanced the budget. We'll worry about that down the road.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: At the end of the day we need to take care of our own people.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, I'll have a chance to speak to this again in the near future.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon. As the Leader of the Opposition I get a bit more time – not a bit more, but a fair bit more time than other speakers in the House.

I have a number of topics that I'm going to raise and talk about this afternoon, some that have been front and centre in the provincial media. Not only in the media but front and centre on the minds of people over the last week, since late last week when the people starting grasping an understanding of it and so on.

I want to talk for a few minutes specifically about some items and some discussions, events and so on that's happened in my own district and also similarly around the province. Members have referenced last week being Volunteer Week and a week to recognize the hard work and dedication that volunteers do throughout our province. I want to join other Members in offering thanks, appreciation and congratulations to the thousands and thousands of people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador who volunteer their time in the best interests of others.

I think that's the best way you can describe the benefits of people who do volunteer, is they do so in the best interests of those around them. They benefit their community. They provide assistance to sporting groups, to groups for non-sporting organizations, for youth, teenagers, young adults and adults of all ages as well, and provide significant value and quality of life to the people that live in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We owe all of them a debt of gratitude. I attended two events in my district specifically for volunteers; one in Paradise. A big, big crowd, I think probably the biggest crowd I've ever seen to a volunteer event. It was held in the community centre and the town laid out a social.

An interesting way they did it, Mr. Speaker. They have a social where they have finger foods, coffee and cold beverages and so on at the beginning and a chance for people to socialize and have a chat, because we know that when they do that at the end of the event – you do the formal event and then you have a social after – people are running out the door and have to go and so on. They do it beforehand so people can have a cup of tea or a cup of coffee together and some 'pickies' as people quite often to them as and a chance to chat and say hello to others from their community and their neighbourhood.

Then they had a formal event and gave out a long list of awards that were presented to people who contribute to their community including some sporting awards, but those who give to their community, citizen awards, volunteer awards and so on and highlighted some of the great contributions those people make. It was significant; it was impressive. What was also impressive was the number of young people who provide opportunities in our community.

As well, I attended an event in Conception Bay South on Thursday night with my colleague for the District of Conception Bay South. I should back up about the event in Paradise because my colleague for the District of Conception Bay East – Bell Island, who also has Paradise in the district, I know he attended an event in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's on the same night. I was pleased to be there on his behalf in Paradise on Tuesday night.

Then on Thursday night, the Member for Conception Bay South and I, councillors and also a very, very large group showed up for the event held at the Manuels River Hibernia Interpretation Centre. It's a beautiful facility in Conception Bay South. It was actually similar to the community centre in Paradise, the Rotary Paradise Youth and Community Centre in Paradise. Both those facilities were really put there as a result of the work of volunteers. I think they're both good facilities, worthwhile and appropriate facilities to hold those events at. But if it wasn't for volunteers, neither one of those facilities would likely exist today so hats off to them.

The Manuels River Hibernia Interpretation Centre is a first-class facility. It's busy from morning until night. Lots of people attend for different reasons. There's a beautiful coffee shop there which I know many, many people who go to that coffee shop quite regularly. There's the exhibit on the Manuels River – what Manuels River has in fossils and the history of Manuels River. As well, there's a theatre and there are meeting rooms; there's a gift shop and so on. Plus, there's multi-use space as well that is used for everything from events like I attended last week, to smaller meetings, to weddings that are held in what is a beautiful facility.

One side of it is full of glass overlooking the river and T' Railway there. It's just absolutely a gorgeous facility. So if anybody is looking for a different place to go for a cup of coffee, it's worth the short drive to go to Manuels and enjoy the view and the landscapes.

As well, Mr. Speaker, in Paradise and also in Conception Bay South in recent years, a tremendous amount of work and effort put into development of outdoor spaces and T' Railways. I use them regularly, regularly in both Paradise and in Conception Bay South; absolutely beautiful first-class facilities. The Johnson foundation has been instrumental in contributing and supporting the development of some of those facilities as well, but first class.

So anybody who's an outdoor person, who enjoys a walk, and I'll go back to Manuels River because I know quite often people will park at the building, there's T' Railway access on both sides of the building, one for the Manuels River

trail and one for the T' Railway itself, and you can walk, literally, for kilometre after kilometre.

I think right now in CBS, and I turn to my colleague for Conception Bay South, there's over 20 kilometres now in Conception Bay South that's completed or nearing completion. I think it's close to 20 kilometres and some of it goes through heavily treed areas, while others actually go right along the coastline. It's the old railway bed. It's now non-motorized. While there was a transition period of a couple of years where people didn't like the fact they couldn't use motorized vehicles on it, it's pretty much now completely a non-motorized facility and it's become used as a great facility for families, for individuals.

So if it's a cool or windy day and you want to stay amongst the trees, you can do that. If you want to use a section along the coastline, it's beautiful. In the evening, as the sun sets across Conception Bay, it's just an absolutely beautiful place to enjoy the outdoors and some exercise. As I said, you can always park at the Manuels River Interpretation Centre, when you finish your walk, you can go back for a cup of coffee and a warm up or meet with friends or whatever the case may be.

Again, it goes back to volunteers who make these facilities available. I think it goes without saying that the significant efforts by volunteers throughout our entire province, throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, deserve a great level of gratitude.

In this year's budget, we're still trying to understand and get specifics.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

Trying to get specifics of how these types of groups and organizations may be impacted by this year's budget. The details are not yet available. We're going through the Estimates process, but we still are trying to understand how groups and organizations will be impacted.

I've talked to many myself and had calls initiated from organizations who are a little bit worried. They know that core grants are being maintained, but it's the other grants, the one-off grants and specific grants, that organizations don't know about. Quite often, they're the grants that allow them to keep their staff in place and program deliveries and services that they provide for all kinds of reasons in the province, so hopefully before too long organizations will get a better idea.

We know there's a tremendous amount of roadwork. Members opposite have talked about some of the roadwork needs. There's a tremendous amount of roadwork needs in our province today. It's been a particularly long winter; we respect that. It's the winter that won't quit, and we know that we have more freezing rain forecast for tonight. We know that's going to create some difficulties and challenges for people who are travelling, the motoring public and so on. Also, there are some areas where significant roadwork is needed.

Again, right in front of the Manuels River Hibernia Interpretation Centre there's the Manuels River Bridge, an historic bridge; it's been there for years. The current bridge hasn't been there a very long time but there's been, since the beginning of time, a bridge to get across Manuels River of some sort, for decades and for a very long time. But there's a section of roadway there right now that's in terrible condition. I hear from people every single day. I know that the cold patch method of filling potholes – it's more of washboard than it is potholes right now – doesn't work, it is a very temporary measure but I can tell you it needs significant repair.

My colleague for Conception Bay South and I have been having those discussions as well about some of those areas that really need work this year, and we look forward to hearing about the plans from the Minister of Transportation and Works.

We know they talk specifically about identifying and addressing roadwork very, very early but these are some of the areas that we haven't heard about yet. We don't know what the plan is, but we know that Conception Bay South is a town now of over 25,000 people. Route 60, Topsail

Road, runs right into Paradise which has over 20,000 people – that's 45,000 people – and runs right into Holyrood, which is the Conception Bay centre area which is another highly populated area. There's likely up around 60,000 people who travel through that area on a fairly regular basis at some point of Topsail Road, Route 60. So a heavily used road I would say, other than the Trans-Canada Highway and these Tier 1 highways; one of the busiest roads in the province that needs work and attention. We look forward to hearing more about that in the coming weeks – hopefully not too long, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are interesting comments and discussions going on in the province this week and recently raised by the minister responsible for post-secondary education, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills – interesting comments. We heard some commentary earlier from one of my colleagues across the House and he was taking shots about Twitter usage and so on. That's fine if he wants to do that, but the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour who represents Corner Brook has been talking on Twitter and social media about Memorial University.

I saw there was a note on Twitter a short time ago where a reference was made. It was kind of an interesting reference about the position that was taken by the minister because the minister has come out quite hard. What I heard and what I heard reported through the media was to suggest an allegation that Memorial is fudging the books. He stood here in the House today and he talked about that and gave his lengthy explanation for it, but he was certainly given the opportunity today to clarify. I don't think he's clarified it. His comments today probably raised further questions.

They're very serious allegations. Very, very serious allegations for a Member of the government, not only a Member of the government side of the House but a Cabinet minister. A Cabinet minister in the government of our province to make allegations against the decision-making people at Memorial University and suggesting they were fudging the books in some way is pretty significant statement to make.

In the House of Assembly here we know that you're very much protected by what you say. But when you go outside the House and you start saying those things outside the House, it opens a completely new door to make allegations against individuals who have very important roles and to suggest that somehow there's something occurring that is inappropriate. If there is, then he should provide that evidence and information to do so and if there's not, he should correct the record.

It was interesting that he was talking – I know he's suggesting about high-priced dinners. It was on April 10 – and, again, some of this I saw on Twitter today – that the minister was under fire here in the House of Assembly, and from the public as well, when he decided to open Marble Mountain. I think it was \$10,000 or \$11,000 a day was what he said the cost was going to be to open Marble Mountain.

He talked about it was going to grow an opportunity. That's what he said, Mr. Speaker. Growing an opportunity when we asked about it and questioned and called him out on it and said this is a significant expenditure at a time when I'm sure the Minister of Finance would say we've got to watch every dollar we're spending and be very careful and we have to measure it. The government likes to use words of evidence-based decision making but it seemed a very quick decision to open Marble Mountain.

Many have suggested it was a political decision. The Member comes from Corner Brook, represents Corner Brook himself and there was some suggestion it was even done without the knowledge or approval of the Minister of Finance. Anyway, he announced at a chamber of commerce dinner in Corner Brook, I hear, that Marble was going to open for free for anybody who wanted to attend. Free to go there, no charge, free rentals and so on.

When he was called out the minister said: Well, you got spend money to make money. I believe, actually, he said it here in the House and he said it several times: You got to spend money to make money. It's an interesting comment. He also said to give stuff away free is to incentivize future gains. It's an incentive for future gains. To give stuff away for free is for future gains.

It was okay. It was his district. He was promoting Marble Mountain. By the way, I lived in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, and I believe you did, too, for a period of time. When you moved out, I moved in. There was a period of time when I lived in Corner Brook and I was an avid user of Marble Mountain. It's a fantastic facility, no two ways about it. I remember it was kind of sad when the spring came and the mountain was moving beyond its best-before date for usage and so on.

We know that when Marble this year announced they were closing, it was because it was going to cost \$10,000 a day to keep it open, was the answer given. The Minister of Business had supported it and knew exactly what was taking place. The Minister of Business actually said later he was given bad advice by the board; threw the board under the bus. They do that a lot over there, Mr. Speaker. They throw the board and the volunteers under the bus and said they were given bad advice.

Then along came the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills on his white horse and said: We're going to open it, we're going to open it for the people. And now this week we're going to do it because you've got to spend money to make money and there's going to be an incentive for future gains.

Now this week the very same minister is criticizing Memorial for doing what sounds like a very similar thing, if not the exactly the same thing. He criticized them about high expenditures for dinners because they use dinners – and I don't know all the figures and I don't know if there were 10 people at the dinner or two people at the dinner. I don't know that. He criticized them for spending money on a luxurious dinner to invite, utilize, or held – to invite future potential staff people, academics and so on to come to Memorial to meet with them and try and bring them to Memorial.

He criticized him for doing that when he says you shouldn't spend money to bring people in here to – I guess to incentivize the future gains or spend money to make money, but when it was Marble Mountain in his own district it was okay to do that. To say MUN fudged their books, to say MUN shouldn't be spending money to create

gains on one side, and then the other side it was okay when he did it with Marble Mountain.

Mr. Speaker, that's what people get concerned about. Again, I got this off Twitter today. This came off Twitter today I saw this type of commentary. I know I'm being more general than what was said on Twitter, but this was put on Twitter today. And Twitter, that's where people express their viewpoints. No matter who they are, if they're media or general public or commentators or whoever, this is where they express their viewpoint. It was an interesting comment, that it's okay to do it on April 10 but it's not okay to do it on May 1.

The minister had a very lengthy media availability this afternoon where he talked at some length about it and he talked about MUN – anyway, he talked about it at some length. Mr. Speaker, it's the type of things from a government that cause the population to lose faith in their government. We've seen this over and over. We've seen it many, many times. We saw it back when they promised the world.

There's a commentary today in *The Telegram* about the election in Nova Scotia that's going on. It was about the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia. They were promising the world when those campaign promises can't be kept, and we saw that. No job losses, no tax increases – wham, that's exactly what they did. They did contrary to what they promised. And then they said, well, we didn't know. It's not our fault, we didn't know. They always say that. It's never their fault, Mr. Speaker. Never, never, never is it their fault.

Now we have this conflict of interest matter which is not their fault either, but the Premier says he would do it all again. So as I talk about this this afternoon keep that in mind that the Premier said he would do it again. Actually, I think his word was absolutely that he would do it again.

Conflict of interest is not a difficult concept. It's not complicated. In our society – and especially when you're talking the highest levels of government, the highest political level being the Premier and the highest bureaucratic level being the clerk of the Executive Council – it is seen to be unacceptable and unethical to have the

interest with respect to both sides and both parties, to have an interest in both sides and both parties on a file, if it's a legal file, a lawsuit, or it could be any number of any files. It is seen as unethical if you have a personal interest and there's a government interest. It's seen as unacceptable.

There are times when, yeah, there's uncertainty about, well, I have an interest in something or I was involved with that organization at one point in time and those types of things. But the clerk of Executive Council and the Premier, being the two highest levels of both sides, the political side and the bureaucratic side, it's a significant level. It's a very, very, very careful – or place to be where all parties should be very, very careful. We still don't know how this happened, and we still don't know the details of it.

On April 21, allNewfoundlandLabrador.com published a story. Now, allNewfoundlandLabrador.com, I have yet to subscribe to it. It's not broadly seen by people. It's a news service that has to be subscribed to. It's not broadly seen. It was published in several days before there was any greater public discussion on it.

What's interesting, Mr. Speaker, as well, is that the clerk was interviewed by allNewfoundlandLabrador and in his interview said the government is aware of all his cases. He told them, he said government is aware of all his cases and he said that he had an arrangement with the government; he had an arrangement with the Premier to allow him to continue his law practice. That's what's in allNewfoundlandLabrador.

It's interesting to point out that the Premier has said he didn't find out about this until it hit the media, the mainstream media last week. So the clerk knew about it back on April 21 or earlier because he had been interviewed, but still the Premier didn't know about it. He didn't make him aware of it, and the Premier stands by and says he'd still do the same thing again. I just make that point, Mr. Speaker, that he'd still do it anyway, even though it appears the clerk didn't make him aware of it.

A conflict of interest is a very serious matter to be considered in government. As I said, it's not

complicated. There was a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest can be real or perceived. It can be an actual, factual matter of conflict or it can be perceived that there could be a conflict. What some people would say, it doesn't pass the smell test. It smells bad, it looks bad, sounds bad, it shouldn't be. It causes people to lose trust in the relationship that exists. It causes people to wonder and question what the reality is and what the truth of it is when it comes to a conflict of interest when one is raised.

No one is questioning – it's a very important point, because a couple of times today in Question Period and over the last couple of days the Premier has said we shouldn't be questioning the integrity of Mr. Coffey and so on. Mr. Speaker, this is not about Mr. Coffey himself. It's about decisions the Premier has made. Mr. Coffey was a Liberal leadership candidate a few years back. He's a known Liberal supporter. He has financially contributed to the Liberal Party. For a long time been a solid known and public supporter of the Liberal Party, and has engaged in public discussion on policy items and political items and on himself.

He's done that for the last number of years and he gets appointed as the clerk and is reserved as a non-partisan. Non-partisan means you don't have an attachment or an allegiance to any particular party, to any particular political values. You don't have an allegiance to any kind of particular values.

Mr. Speaker, I know people who are deputy ministers and in significant positions who've told me they don't even vote because they don't want to be seen as being partisan or even participating in it. They want to keep clean, away from the politics of it.

So we have a clerk who was a formal Liberal leadership candidate, financial contributor to the Liberal Party, spoken public on government policy matters, and also has a private law practice, which he had a number of files. The Premier says there were seven. We don't know for sure because we've never seen the list. The Premier says there were seven, and we know at least two of them were directly related to government.

The clerk of the Executive Council becomes the boss of all staffers in government. The clerk of the Executive Council is the most senior staff person in all of government. So any government department who's touched directly or indirectly by either one of those law suits becomes a conflict issue. It becomes a conflict issue.

Mr. Speaker, think of it this way, let's use Western health as an example. We heard the minister say it's an autonomous agency. Today, he said health authorities are autonomous from government and so on. Well, government provides them with their funding. While they're supposed to be autonomous, government has control over their funding.

We've heard it from the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour about Memorial University. We've heard it quite clearly from the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour who has said: If they don't do what I want them to do, I'm going to cut their funding. So ministers do have control over these autonomous organizations or a level of control. While they can't direct specific line by line, they hold a big hammer over those agencies. If it's a health authority, if it's Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic, if it's Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation or Nalcor, they hold a big stick over those agencies.

The Premier fired the CEO of Nalcor, even though they are a separate agency run by a board of directors. The Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour has a hammer over Memorial University. So they all filter back to the clerk.

Every minister over there, Mr. Speaker, has some kind of relationship with the clerk or would have had some kind of relationship with the clerk, because the minister and deputy ministers deal with the Premier and the clerk. A deputy minister going to the clerk is the same as a minister going to the Premier, and lots of times, I'm sure, they all meet together to discuss matters and issues. So they all filter up to the clerk. So we have a problem here. We have a problem. The Premier said there was walls put up. Mr. Coffey said there was Chinese walls erected, as he called them. I think it is an old

legal term. Not appropriate these days, but that's what Mr. Coffey referred to them as.

They're ethical walls. Yet, he's not been able to give a single example of how a wall, a Chinese wall or ethical wall, call it whatever you want, was erected. He's not able to show any kind of written direction that was given to say this matter, this matter and this matter shall not go through the clerk's office. I'm directing you, Minister of Natural Resources, to make sure that a matter involving a lawsuit against Nalcor doesn't filter up to the clerk's office. When it comes to you, Minister, the deputy minister should be hands off because the deputy minister reports to the clerk. It just creates a conflict that's unavoidable, Mr. Speaker.

At the same time that the former clerk was suing an agency in which the minister has control over – the Premier himself had control over it because he fired the CEO there last year, so he does have control over it. It's a conflict of interest that shouldn't have happened.

Now, the Premier will talk about transition periods. The Premier likes to talk about transition periods. He talked today about me and Members over here, he said they know it over there when you become a Cabinet minister there's a period of transition, you put things in a blind trust and so on. The clerk is not a Cabinet minister, Mr. Speaker, and I suggest they are different.

The clerk was hired, employed to do a job, which should have been clear of conflicts in the first place. But that couldn't have happened because he should have not been the clerk in the first place. Not because he wasn't a good lawyer or doesn't have a good track record as a hard worker and he's smart and educated and so on, not because of that, but because he was politically involved.

In the very first place, he was politically involved with the Liberal Party. So, the first step, he shouldn't have been there. Second step, when he has his existing conflicts, there was a very capable clerk in the position prior to him. She wasn't dismissed or fired; she was given a different role and responsibility within government. He could have kept her in place – very talented and hardworking, educated, very

focused on giving best advice and so on; never gives political advice, always gives best professional advice. He could have kept her in place and said to Mr. Coffey, I'm going to give you the job in two months or three months or six months or eight months. Once you've cleared all your conflicts, I commit to giving you that job.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the clerk of the Executive Council is the only person in government who has access to everything. The clerk has access to Cabinet documents. He has access to our Cabinet documents. The Premier doesn't. At least the Premier is not supposed to have access to other ministers' and other premiers' Cabinet documents, but the clerk controls those. A partisan appointment appointed by the Premier of the province, the Liberal Premier of the province, and has access to every document.

The clerk approves all briefing notes before they go to the Premier. The clerk organizes Cabinet meetings. The clerk approves the agenda, and all of the Cabinet papers that go on the agenda go through the clerk's hands. It's significant. There's no other position in the province like it, and the Premier saw fit to appoint this person.

It was interesting; I was down yesterday in the briefing room downstairs. When the Premier held a briefing, the Minister of Justice was with him and he held a briefing for the media. During that it was interesting to listen to some of the comments that he made and he talked about. He obviously knew the significance of this role. He obviously did. He knew that there were files that Mr. Coffey had. Mr. Coffey is quite clear and said the government was aware of all of his cases. The Premier said these were the only two – I'm pretty sure yesterday he said the only two that were remaining, but what are the other five?

I think the reason why you have conflict policies and a belief there should not be a conflict of interest is to ensure the public and the government and the best interests of the province are protected. What we had happening was the clerk, in the daytime, responsible to protect the government and the public and their government and protect the province and, afterhours, suing that very same government that in the daytime he protects. I mean, it's bizarre. It's absolutely bizarre, unprecedented, never seen before.

One of the items that came up yesterday was who knew about this. We refer to it as a secret arrangement because none of us here in the House knew about it. Or at least the best we can tell, we know the Minister of Justice knew only because the Department of Justice was consulted. By the way, the Department of Justice employees report to the deputy minister, reports to the clerk and they're asked for an opinion if the clerk is in a conflict. I just raise that because that's what happened, but the Minister of Justice knew.

So today we asked in Question Period what other ministers knew. The Premier said the Minister of Natural Resources didn't know. The Premier didn't know the lawsuit was filed; he only found out about it through the media is what he said. He says the Minister of Natural Resources didn't know.

AN HON. MEMBER: He knew it was seven cases.

MR. P. DAVIS: He did know it was seven cases, yeah. He said he didn't know the lawsuit was filed but he would hire the clerk again. He said he'd do it all again, but he wasn't made aware that it was filed.

We know that the Minister of Justice knew about it. We know that on Friday past the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development was on radio, public radio, defending the decision of the Premier but he only found out about it through the media; we know that.

We know the Minister of Finance told us today in the House when asked that she only found out about it through the media. There were three other ministers asked today in Question Period. The Minister of Business, the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources and the Minister of Health were asked when they became aware of it and neither one of them said; they put it off on deputy ministers as their responsibility – not all of them, but generally we've heard that from the Premier as well, but none of them would say when they found out about it.

The Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, I asked her three times today and three times she was not allowed to answer. The

Premier got up and answered. The third time she did rise, but the Premier rose in front of her and answered the question again. When it becomes difficult to get straight answers on such an important matter, the only thing that happens, Mr. Speaker, is it causes us and the people of the province to wonder more what happens.

My colleague here, the Opposition House Leader, asked the Minister of Justice if he would release the list. The Minister of Justice pointed out the principle in law on solicitor-client privilege. We understand solicitor-client privilege. We understand that, but we also understand the rights of people to know the facts. Access to information – we have legislation that specifically allows for the solicitor-client privilege to be waived by the minister. The minister can waive that right, which means he could decide if it's in the best interest of the public to share that information.

The minister could say this is a pretty serious discussion that's happening here, people are very concerned about it, people are questioning how it happened or how it could happen, national media are talking about it, bloggers are talking about it, local media is talking about it, the people of the province are talking about it and asking questions about it and are beyond, for the most part, understanding of how something like this could be allowed to happen.

So it's a pretty significant item, a matter for that government, in protecting their own integrity and best interest – and maybe if they released the list, it would cure all the concerns about any other conflict. That's not difficult to understand. If they released the seven, the full seven files, cases, or what they were, how they were, some information about the seven, maybe they would clear up any suspicion, thought or idea that the other five – because we know about two – in any way presented a conflict of interest.

When the minister stands firm and just says solicitor-client privilege, we're not going to release it, no commentary about I respect the public's desire and I know this is a big issue and this would solve the problem. He never said any of those things. He just said, no, solicitor-client privilege; we're not going to release it.

I would suggest he would, especially when we've got four ministers who didn't know about it or won't say they knew about it. We have one minister who wasn't permitted to answer. We have two ministers who said they found out about it through the media, and then they beat us up by saying it wasn't a secret arrangement. Well, if people aren't told about it or know about it, then it was kept confidential or it was kept secret. It was not shared with people.

There were discussions. The Premier said that the clerk went to the deputy ministers affected and had a discussion with them, yet the minister didn't know. That's what we heard today. The Minister of Natural Resources didn't know but the Liberal-appointed Deputy Minister of Natural Resources did know, but the minister wasn't made aware. Now, the Premier spoke to that.

On Health, the Health Minister today, I haven't had a chance to look at *Hansard* yet and I stand to be corrected, but my understanding of what he said today was that it was a meeting – it comes under health authorities but there was a discussion with the deputy minister. The Minister of Health wouldn't say when he became aware of it or what he knew about it.

What if the Health Minister was sitting in the waiting room of the Premier's office someday and the clerk came in and they had a discussion about Western Health or doctors at Western Health and so on, because that happens. It's not unusual for health authorities to brief ministers on issues and matters that are happening at the health authorities. We have a backlog here, we have a shortage of doctors here, we have a conflict with a particular doctor who's important to us, or whatever the case may be and here's the issue.

Sometimes it's talked about because it may come up as a political question. Lots of times we'll ask questions about matters that belong to those agencies, boards and commissions and the ministers know all about it because they've been briefed about it. So there is not just a simple divide. There is an overlap that exists between agencies, boards and commissions and the Ministers of the Crown.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that potentially the decision by the government, by the Premier, not to share this with Cabinet could have easily gone to Cabinet ministers in a Cabinet meeting and said: I have something to inform you of now, Mr. Coffey's coming to work as the clerk. And he's still winding up, is the words the Premier used.

Mr. Coffey said he was – an arrangement to allow him to continue his practice. The Premier said he was winding up his practice. He could have gone to Cabinet ministers and said: I want you to be aware that he has some conflicts. There's a conflict with Health and there is a conflict with Natural Resources and I want to make sure that all ministers are aware that if any of this comes to your hands that there's a conflict.

He could have issued a memo to Cabinet ministers or a directive to say here is an issue and I want to make sure that the best interests of the province are protected. The only document – and I even asked him today if there are any other documents – available so far dealing with this matter was the employment contract of the clerk which doesn't include any reference to June 30, which is the date the Premier has thrown out as the date that he wanted it wound up by. It just talks about, it's a general contract that is much like any other contract that people have when they're in these types of positions and they have a contract with government.

Mr. Speaker, it's not the first time that people of the province have questioned the judgment of government. At this point in time we've heard words from the media such as mind boggling, referring to lack of judgment. I think the *National Post* – Andrew Coyne is seen on CBC as a commentator on a regular basis. I think he writes for the *National Post*. He's written for other national papers. Highly respected and highly regarded. I've seen him many, many times on CBC in the nighttime. He's always very calm and very methodical and understands.

I think the word he used was 'wackadoodle.' Was that it, 'wackadoodle'?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah.

MR. P. DAVIS: Yeah. He referred to this whole circumstance as ‘wackadoodle’ I think, is what he used. People asked across the country, and here in Newfoundland and Labrador: How could this happen? How could the Premier allow this to happen?

The Premier could have easily said, could have come forward and said, I made an error. I shouldn’t have done this, and we’ll work together to develop policies to make sure this doesn’t happen again. Mr. Speaker, I think the matter would have been over. I wouldn’t have used my time here today talking about it as long as I have this afternoon, because the Premier would have (inaudible). I’ve done that in the past, where I’ve said I made a mistake and I shouldn’t have done it and I should have given it more consideration, considered it further or I never thought it through or I should have done something differently, but the Premier said he would do exactly the same thing again.

While we’re talking about a conflict of interest, he likes to divert the conversation to other matters in other areas. Today, in Question Period, I know he went after the House Leader for the Third Party on an unrelated topic and it doesn’t do anything to change how people feel about it.

Mr. Speaker, I don’t know of another topic since I’ve been in Opposition. We had a budget last year that solicited fast and harsh reaction from the people of the province; protests out here, people were upset. Three hundred fee increases, 50 new fees. Three hundred fee increases, all still in place with the exception of half of one of them and people were really upset.

This one is very different. This one is different than that because people are not angry. They sound – well, they’re angry but they also sound disappointed. They also feel and sound like they’re let down by it. Instead of saying I made a mistake, we’re going to move on and do better the next time, he and his Cabinet – all the Members over opposite, over the last couple of days, we’ve watched them over here. We’ve watched the responses to Question Period and the Premier’s commentary and so on. They’re all over there applauding and cheering and defending the Premier in what he’s done.

I’ve had people call me from other districts besides my own and say: I’m afraid to call my MHA or I’d like to call my MHA, but is everyone supporting what the Premier has done here and so on? We see that. We see people over there supporting the Premier in the decision he’s made and how he’s handling this, and I don’t get it. I just don’t get it. The people of the province, the people I’m talking to are saying that they don’t get it either, and the media is saying they don’t get it either.

There has been lots of opportunity to sort this out and to allow this to happen. I really believe, Mr. Speaker – the opportunity to sort this out and to find a better way forward. I believe that what’s taken place here has potentially compromised ministers, because ministers – there was a conflict of interest that ministers weren’t made aware of when they’re in a very significant role. They didn’t know about it, they weren’t told about it so they could protect the public from that perception or believed conflict of interest.

Now the Premier has said, yes, he filed a lawsuit but he wasn’t going to follow up with it. He gave him his word that he wasn’t going to follow up with it. Well, that may be the case. We don’t really know. That could be the case but the Premier should have taken action on this in the first place. There was a mistake when he appointed him.

When there was a conflict – the same day he became the clerk, he filed a lawsuit against Western Health on the very same day. He didn’t pass it off to anyone else. That conflict continued, the Premier has said. Then in April month, filed a new lawsuit against Nalcor, an agency of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Premier didn’t know about it. Still nothing was taken, or ministers weren’t advised and warned that we have to make sure we protect ourselves from any conflict of interest, because conflict of interest looks after an interest other than the one we’re all here to do, the job to do, that’s to the best interest of the province.

I went through *Hansard* last night and I had a look at *Hansard* from yesterday because I asked a number of questions in Question Period yesterday. All of Question Period was consumed

with it yesterday and, for the most part, most of it again today. I went through how many times we asked a question and we just simply didn't get the answer.

I asked the question: Was caucus and Cabinet made aware of it? The Premier never gave an answer. He gave an answer. He got up and talked for 50 or 60 seconds, but he never gave the answer.

I asked: Did he seek any ethical or legal advice before hiring? He didn't answer. He talked about political appointments. He says he wasn't appointed because of any political affiliation or anything like that, a good guy and all the rest. No doubt, that wasn't the issue, as I said earlier, if he was a good guy or not or a capable lawyer or not.

We asked question after question which he just didn't answer the specific question that was asked. The Conflict of Interest Advisory Committee was talked about. It was talked about again today here in the House, earlier in the House today, and whether the Conflict of Interest Advisory Committee was convened and they weren't. So it looks just like a lapse of judgment, the work wasn't done to protect the province and the Premier is defending his decisions, defending the appointment of Mr. Coffey and defending the decision to allow him to be clerk and to continue with his law practice at the very same time.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it was unexplained back last Easter when we had – some people call it the flag flap. The Premier said there was no policy on the courtesy flag. We said, well, yeah, there is a policy. I've seen the policy myself when I was premier. No, no, no policy and then ATIPP, access to information. A few weeks later, everything calms down and goes away and we find out, well, there was a policy and he had a policy.

We saw the fiasco that happened with the former CEO of Nalcor when he was terminated. The Premier argued that he resigned. The Auditor General said no, he was terminated and the Premier says no, that's someone else's fault. That's the AG's fault; he doesn't understand it. Ed Martin quit; he wasn't fired. Not only that, before he was fired or before he was quit, if you

ask the Premier, he already had Mr. Stan Marshall lined up to take over the role.

We've asked for information and details on any conflict of interest on Stan Marshall and the Premier has been very clear to say that is the responsibility of Mr. Marshall. I don't agree with that, Mr. Speaker. I do not agree with that. Fundamentally, I don't agree that it's Mr. Marshall's responsibility – for someone to say just trust Mr. Martin because it's up to him.

Quite likely, maybe there's no conflict. We don't know. Maybe there's no conflict of interest. But when we ask if there's a conflict of interest and we can't get the answers, that causes people to be concerned. People immediately will think are they hiding something. Is there something being hidden they don't want us to know about? We didn't know there was a conflict of interest with Mr. Coffey, but is there something that we don't want people to know about?

The resign signs last year – the Premier publicly stated, look, no one in my office did anything to have those signs removed. Access to information, and guess what we find out? Someone in his office did make efforts to have the signs removed. I don't think it resulted in the signs being removed, but they certainly contacted Memorial University to see if they were responsible for the polls, with the intention of having the signs removed. So there was steps taken by his office, even though he said there wasn't and stood by that.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very important matter, longest standing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, very important to rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

Very important, most important, longest standing industry in the province and some have called it, referred to it as the largest, longest megaproject in Newfoundland and Labrador. I

think that's a fair commentary on what the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery is.

We know right now that there's a considerable amount of unrest in the fishery. We know that ice is a problem. We know that the most recent assessment on the stocks of a variety of species in the fishery is of concern and the science that's been utilized and the conclusions reached are of concern and are a matter of debate on the accuracy of them.

I'm not in a position to say they're right or wrong; I'm saying that in Newfoundland and Labrador today there's discussion about the appropriateness or the reality of the results of those assessments. Pricing is an issue. Processing, for people who work in dotted communities, remote communities all around Newfoundland and Labrador, whose communities rely on the fish plant, whose families rely on the fish plant, children who live there rely on the fish plant, people rely on the fish plant for work and income, there are a lot of unknowns this year, Mr. Speaker – a lot of unknowns.

During the Easter break over the last couple of weeks, there was a lot happened in the fishery. We saw protests. We saw Mr. Gillett down on the hill in White Hills. We saw protests at offices and so on. We saw a lot of people who were upset with the lack of answers and the lack of unity in the fishery.

I think that's probably the fairest way to describe it, because there are different forces within the fishery that right now are fighting against each other. Mr. Speaker, they're settled by leadership. It's a leadership that settles those. I wrote the minister during the Easter break and received a response back from him today on it – received it from him this morning, and I appreciate the response I received from the minister, and that's fairly quick – only a week or so, 10 days before I got the response back from the minister, and that's fairly quick. I appreciate the fact of getting a response from the Minister of Fisheries and Lands. But still, people want to see – leadership is not just about what you do behind the boardroom door and discussions and plans you're laying out. It's what you tell people you're doing. It's about people feeling like that's my guy.

My colleague for Cape St. Francis, when I saw him speak on the funding announcement a couple of weeks ago, when I saw him there – I watched it; I wasn't there. But I saw it on the news that night and I thought to myself, if I worked in the fishery, I'd say that's my guy right there. That's the guy right there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: That's my guy, because he talked very matter of fact and he talked about the importance of the fishery and he talked about the need, and he's talking about it numerous times about the need for leadership.

I was down in his district on Saturday and paid him a visit on Saturday down to his district. While I was there, we talked about the fishery. We talked about people actually out on Saturday fishing. Talked about ice and the risk to gear and equipment and so on to ice. What happens if their gear is torn to shreds, ripped up because of ice, and destroyed because of ice, or lost because of ice? Then they have to replace it. Is anyone or is government doing anything to support or assist them on their risk?

We had all those discussions. I tell you, I call him when I got questions about the fishery, because I'm by no means an expert on fishery. I'm a townie and I'm certainly by no means an expert on the fishery, but I'll talk to that man right there, the Member for Cape St. Francis, when I want to talk about fishery.

His own family relies on the fishery and he's fished himself. I heard a story – he can tell it himself, but I'll tell you the story. How old were you when you first started?

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible) 13.

MR. P. DAVIS: He was 13, his first job in the fishery, carting fish, lugging fish and carrying fish – 13 years old. He worked in the fishery and has been attached to the fishery ever since – my hat off to him.

But it's a time for leadership in the fishery. In 2014-2015, there was a lot of work being done on the fishery fund. My colleague for Ferryland here was front and centre involved with that. We wrote the prime minister in 2015, and I have it

here somewhere. I asked the prime minister, because the federal election was coming – I asked the prime minister what his position was on the fishery fund. He was in the Opposition at the time. He wanted to be prime minister at the time.

The prime minister wrote me back and committed that Newfoundland and Labrador would get that fund. That Newfoundland and Labrador was giving up a long-standing policy in the best interest of the country, and being compensated for giving up that policy. He wrote me and he committed to it. He committed to it in 2015. I don't know what happened since then. We've asked questions on it many times. We've asked questions here.

We've had ministers get up opposite and say we're negotiating, we working on it. We didn't know what there was to negotiate because the plan on the fund was clear, but we suspected and we felt the fund wasn't going to come to Newfoundland and Labrador like was committed to by the now prime minister. It wasn't going to come here and we worried about that, and I know the fishery worries about that.

The fund was very simple. It was built on five pillars, and they were all about rebuilding the fishery. If there was an issue that was going to impact communities and rural parts of our province, the fund could also be used to help that out. Something has gone astray since then, because instead of a 70-30 fund, \$280 million from the federal government, \$120 million from the provincial government for a \$400 million fund, there's a lower level fund now being shared along Atlantic Canada.

Newfoundland and Labrador gives up its long-standing policy on MPRs, minimum processing requirements. It essentially says – I've had people say, what's MPRs. Minimum processing requirements are when a boat lands at the dock in a small community in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, what's aboard that boat is processed in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's the policy.

The European Union wanted Newfoundland and Labrador to give up that policy in order to enter in the CETA agreement, the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement between Canada

and the European Union. They wanted Newfoundland and Labrador, of all the provinces, to give up that.

Other provinces had deals, too. There were agreements on wine for Quebec; cheese and dairy.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Lumber in BC.

MR. P. DAVIS: Lumber in BC had their own one-off deals to protect those industries that were important to them. The wine industry and cheese and dairy industries are very important in other areas. The lumber industry in Western Canada is very important to them and they were protected.

It was interesting, the minister responsible, Minister Fast, who I've had discussions with since then as well – Minister Fast of the day was the minister responsible for the federal government. He's from BC and they protected forestry in BC. In Newfoundland and Labrador it was to protect the fishery, but there was opportunity for new markets, for industry development, for infrastructure development.

I've been in lots of fish plants around the province. I tell you, they're not easy places to work. I only visited there but my visit there, it wasn't hard to conclude they're not easy places to work; cold, concrete, damp conditions. People work long hours and overnight. Quite often they work 24 hours a day and so on overnight, very, very difficult.

That's what the fisheries fund was supposed to be. We suspected very early that something on the campaign promises that were made by the Liberals was going off the rails, and it turned out to be right. It turned out to be right.

MR. HUTCHINGS: What happened, I wonder?

MR. P. DAVIS: Yeah. Well, that's a good question: What happened? Yes, what happened, because we're finding out more as times goes on, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you one thing that's becoming clear, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the current Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the current Liberal Government of

Newfoundland and Labrador certainly didn't fight for that fund for the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery. That's becoming very clear.

MR. K. PARSONS: I think the premier of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick did.

MR. P. DAVIS: Yes, I think you're right. There's no doubt, we know now that other jurisdictions were lobbying hard for Newfoundland and Labrador not to get that fund and there was work underway for Newfoundland and Labrador not to get that fund. We're not sure what Newfoundland and Labrador was doing to protect the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a result, if it was, Newfoundland and Labrador lost. Newfoundland and Labrador has lost.

I've heard commentary to say, look what we're doing for search and rescue. Search and rescue wasn't part of the fund that Prime Minister Trudeau had committed to. Search and rescue is not part of that. Development of wharves, small harbours, small –

AN HON. MEMBER: Crafts and harbours.

MR. P. DAVIS: – small crafts and harbours funding was always separate from that. That was funding beside the fishery fund that was happening. It sounds to us now like some of that funding is being mixed in with, well, look what we're doing for you, look what we're doing for the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery when they were supposed to be separate.

Mr. Speaker, when we come to work every day as Members of the Opposition – during the Easter break we had numerous discussions and so on. We come to the House of Assembly here and we have limited opportunities to talk about what's happening in the province and to talk to government and question government. In Question Period we have 25 minutes to question government. We have opportunities such as this to talk about matters that are important.

We know government has the benefit of doing announcements, and has the power and thrust and financial ability of government behind them to do – that's the way it works. In government you make announcements. You roll out announcements. You have numerous resources

available to you as you do those announcements. We had them when we were in government. They have when they are in government, but we come every day and prepare for the House of Assembly.

One of the challenges we have faced in this year is there's so much material. There are so many things of concern for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. What matters do we bring up in Question Period? We get emails and messaging from people all the time. I got several today before, during and after Question Period about what we should be asking. Suggesting, ask them this? Don't let them – they didn't answer the question. We get those commentaries from people all the time.

So we're going to continue to do our job. I know all Members come to the House of Assembly, elected by their constituents to represent them and to do their best in the House. Sometimes you fall off your way there, but you should always try to find your way back.

As an Opposition, I'm very proud of the team we have over here. I'm very proud of the staff we have working for us. I'm very proud of the people that support us throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We'll continue to question the government. We'll continue to be the Opposition that we were elected to be. We'll do our job in questioning government to ask for details and explanations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: And, Mr. Speaker, we will be an Opposition for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

What a pleasure to rise and to follow the eloquence of the Leader of the Opposition, much appreciated for the opportunity to rise in some rebuttal to some of his remarks but to refer of course as well to some of the expenditures of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The hon. Member took great time and pains to rebut and to dissuade against any advantage or benefit from the marketing initiative of Marble Mountain. Well, I don't know, and then he swayed into a discussion about MUN and sort of fused the two together. That Marble and MUN, I guess where they both begin with the letter M, must have some similarities. Well, Mr. Speaker, when you have to kind of sort of grasp to find an argument about MUN and Marble you've already lost the debate I think, because you really don't have a whole lot to offer.

Let me give a little experience about what we did with Marble Mountain. To put it in perspective of some of the things that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Canadians generally can also enjoy this year besides an opportunity to participate for the very first time in some skiing and to understand what a wonderful sport, what a wonderful activity that is and how good it is not only for themselves but for the economy.

Really, what this debate should be about is whether or not the hon. Member feels as though it's totally appropriate, as clearly the hon. Member does, that MUN raise revenue, additional revenue, on the backs of students before ever considering any of their own expenditures.

That's the real debate here, Mr. Speaker. It's not surprising that the hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition, wouldn't want to necessarily engage in that debate because, as we know, in 2015 when he was premier, he made a very, very profound, direct statement: This could be the last year of the tuition freeze. When he was premier, he said that the tuition freeze from here on in must be considered on a year-by-year basis. There are no guarantees for the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government, despite many of the fiscal challenges that we're left with, what did we do as our value? We kept the tuition freeze for Memorial University of Newfoundland students.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: But at the same time, we asked MUN to do something – something I think that's quite reasonable. We asked MUN to look at its expenditures. They did not and now of course they're examining what they will call opportunities for revenue increase, tuition increases.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's get back to Marble Mountain. The hon. Member, after 13 years or 14 years of running Marble Mountain, had no problem whatsoever with operating Marble Mountain under a subsidy. Now, all of a sudden says that subsidy, b'y, that has to go. That's a wrong thing.

Now, they had no problem with it, but do you know what? I can understand why they would want the subsidy because of course it is a great economic generator. Do you know what else is a great economic generator? Pippy Park. Pippy Park with its 27-hole golf course – it does receive a subsidy, but it's a great economic generator for the City of St. John's and surrounding.

They don't have a problem with Pippy Park, but they do have a problem with something on the West Coast. Let them figure that out and when they come for the next election, sometime soon, if they ever come out to the West Coast, they can stand up and say: By the way, we're against Marble Mountain. We're against the long-term care. We're against the new hospital. We're against a whole lot of things. We're against the new land office, the headquarters coming to – they can explain that to the electorate in the next election; best of luck to them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I want to talk about as well, how outrageous was it to actually offer one weekend where those who did not already have a pass, where one weekend they could get an opportunity for some free skiing to experience Marble Mountain and to decide whether or not they wanted to buy a pass?

Well, if it was really ridiculous assumption, what I'd ask is – and they are dead set against it, and I'm sure the people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, who are watching the House of Assembly right now, following the proceedings of the House of Assembly, are saying where is he going with this. Well, here's where I'm going with this. It's not unique.

Did you know that right now throughout all of Canada in the national park system the Government of Canada is offering free park passes, not for one weekend but for the entire year of 2017? Right up until December 31 any Canadian can go to any national park free of charge because it's offering free passes.

Do you know what? That's going to cost \$6 million in lost revenue but why the Government of Canada is doing it is because they feel there's a value to it. Let's bring people back to our national park system. Let's get people to re-explore our nation's treasures: our national park system. It makes sense. So instead of one week, or one weekend, for the entire year people can go and attend, go to a national park free of charge.

Do you know something? Right here in St. John's, The Rooms – fantastic institution – regularly offers free admission to The Rooms. I think, right now, it's on occasion of the first Saturday of every month, sometimes they do it for an extended period, but they have regularly offered free admission to ensure that everyone can gain access and so that everyone gets an opportunity to explore its marvels and wonders.

Lost revenue, not a problem for the Progressive Conservative Party, not a problem with that – and that's good because they understand a little promotion is a good thing. But they have a problem with one weekend of skiing a year.

Well, there's another organization that offers a freebee right now. It's called VIA Rail. Did you know that in Canada – if anyone has any constituents who have anyone between the age of 14 and 25, did you know you can get a VIA Rail pass, a 60-day pass, which you can use to go on any train anywhere in the country for 60 days straight, back and forth, back and forth, any route you want, no limit on the number of trips you take for \$700 – a loss of thousands of

dollars per pass but \$700. VIA Rail sees this as an important opportunity because they want to get people back on the trains. So for \$700 anyone between the age of 14 and 25, for 60 straight, consecutive days, you can go on any train in the country, back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. Fill your boots. What a great offer, Mr. Speaker. It will cost some money to do it, but it's a smart thing to do.

Now, the Conservatives, they haven't said that they're for or against it; they just don't really mind. That's okay, but as long as it's not a Newfoundlander who benefits, they're okay. Do you know what? There are no trains, except for in Western Labrador, on the Island of Newfoundland. So of course we don't necessarily get to take full advantage of that. My hon. colleague always reminds me of this, that we do have a train system in Labrador, don't ever forget, and a passenger service. But of course that's not part of the Via Rail, so they don't get it.

But Marine Atlantic – now, here's an example. Come on, listen, listen, listen; don't huddle, listen. Marine Atlantic, this summer, is offering anyone who does a return fare booking for the summer gets a \$50 gas certificate. No problem with that, that's a great thing, that's a good investment, that's a great investment in our province, a \$50 gas certificate. I think it's a great investment. It's going to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to give out \$50 gas certificates. They don't have a problem with that, but they got a problem with one weekend of free ski rentals and one weekend of free passes. That's a big, big issue. And that is why I should not talk about MUN, according to the PCs, because they seem to have absolute comfort in the fact that \$700 suppers are the norm there.

Why would the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills speak up about \$700 suppers? We asked Memorial University of Newfoundland to consider their discretionary spending and before they impose additional costs, tuition hikes on students, before they ask for more money from taxpayers, that they simply consider their own costs, their own expenditures and, in particular, their discretionary expenditures.

We know that from an academic point of view there are tenured professors, there are relationships and arrangements that cannot be altered, nor should they be, but there is significant amount of funds that are spent on travel and hospitality. There is significant amount of expenditures on a number of different items. We asked Memorial University of Newfoundland to consider examining those expenses, before raising costs on students, before raising revenue on the backs of students, that they lower their cost first. That makes a lot of sense.

They don't like that. They think that's a wrong attitude to take. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's the right attitude to take.

Now, they would like to suggest that this is ridiculous because you're interfering; you're meddling with the affairs of Memorial University of Newfoundland. They're suggesting that something about autonomy is being broken here. Well, there's been a great discussion about autonomy at Memorial. It was spawned from a particular incident.

In 2008, the office of the presidency was brought into question when a former minister of Advanced Education and Skills decided that the selection committee for the president was incapable of doing the job and rejected the two applicants, or two nominees that the selection committee had brought forward. Mr. Eddy Campbell, who was then acting as the president I understand, was rejected, left Memorial, went on to become elevated to the presidency of the University of New Brunswick. And claims of undue interference rang true.

There are two words that describe this situation. I think the words are Joan Shea. I think the words are Progressive Conservative interference. From those –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. minister that he shouldn't use proper names when discussing someone who is not – former Members of the House who are not here to protect themselves.

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

I'm a firm believer that rules should be followed and that when you break those rules, there are consequences. I withdraw unreservedly. Unreservedly I withdraw those remarks.

Now, there were rules that were broken all right when the PC government decided they were going to choose the president, when they were going to interfere in the entire process and scrub all of the nominees from the university.

Here's the thing, from that came a very lengthy discussion within MUN and within government as to what exactly is the definition of autonomy. It became very abundantly clear the office of the president, the senior positions and the selection of the chairperson of the Board of Regents: these are things that must remain within the autonomy of the university. That's what the discussion followed.

What was really interesting is that scholars and experts came forward and said: The role of the university within the province, within our society, it's so important, it is so embedded in each and every one of us, the government – this is what the university said: The government has an important role to play, the people have an equally important role to play and all stakeholders should feel comfortable about voicing opinion.

In fact, the discussion went ever further. It said: Tension between the government and the university on matters of administration is healthy. It's actually warranted and desirable because it means in the spirit of a university, in the spirit of free expression, in the spirit of debate, tension promotes ideas.

That was the conclusion of the governance review of Memorial University of Newfoundland and the scholars that came forward, in response and in reply to the absolute undue interference of the former PC government in the selection of the presidency. They said that matters of utmost importance of the governance of the university must be maintained within the autonomy of the university, but matters of administration, which sometimes create a source of friction, should indeed be encouraged because it leads to a better result.

Now, I would not do as one of the hon. Members did today and sort of begin a discussion about whether or not the government should start dismissing senior executives. Mr. Speaker, this is not 2008. This is 2017. We respect Memorial University. We have a disagreement. We have a serious disagreement about whether or not Memorial University of Newfoundland should be considering raising additional revenue from students, from parents, when they have not fully examined their expenditures.

The university has come forward, and it's vice-president of academic in particular, and said: We have. There is absolutely not a dollar left to be able to spend that's discretionary. There's not a dollar left to cut. And then it came forward at the town hall session, well, what about the \$700 supper that you hosted? It came back to say, well, if we can't have a \$700 supper, what do you expect us to eat, a peanut butter sandwich? Do you know what? That's the words of the vice-president academic. I could make great hay about that, but really, really what that speaks to is there seems to be a culture of entitlement that really needs to be addressed.

When you're raising money, guess who is paying for that \$700 supper event ultimately? It's either the taxpayer or the student, or both. So we simply asked the university to consider, before raising revenue on students, that they consider their own expenses first. Exactly the way government departments have done, exactly the way other agencies, boards and commissions have done. We understand the university is different. We understand that with the position of tenure, with the whole notion of academic freedom there are certain things that the university must indeed stand pat and firm on, absolutely, but there is a huge amount of administration which has nothing to do with the academics of the institution.

This is not a debate about nature versus nurture. This is not a debate about evolution. This is not a debate about Euclidean geometry versus the merits of Descartes mathematics. This is a debate about whether or not the university is spending the funding that it has available to it as efficiently and as effectively as possible. That's what this is about.

Now the PCs, after standing up in 2015 and saying the future of the tuition freeze is in doubt, it will be handled on a year-by-year basis from here on in, we cannot guarantee anything. We on this side said, you know what? One of our values for Newfoundland and Labrador students, there must be a tuition freeze. We had put \$56 million on the table to be able to encourage a tuition freeze.

We supply, today, more money to Memorial University of Newfoundland from taxpayers than the Government of Nova Scotia provides to all 10 of its universities combined. That's how much this government values post-secondary education and higher learning.

We value Memorial University of Newfoundland. It produces greatness. It produces great scholarship. It produces great students. It produces great graduates. It produces great research. It produces great value to our economy, to our social well-being, to all of our society, but we also understand that it's an expensive institution. To get that value you have to spend a little money to make a little money, but at the same time, when you're spending a little bit of money you should also always consider whether or not that money is being spent as effectively and as efficiently as it can.

It turns out a \$700 supper is A-okay by the university, while they're at the point of raising revenues on the backs of students. That is an examination each and every one of us as Members needs to examine that question and determine whether or not it should hold past.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Noticing that it's 5:30 in the afternoon, this House now stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.