



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume XLVII

THIRD SESSION

Number 13

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

Thursday

03 April 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi; the Member for the District of The Straits – White Bay North; the Member for the District of St. John's East; the Member for the District of St. John's South; the Member for the District of Burgeo – La Poile; and the Member for the District of Cape St. Francis.

Before I recognize the hon. member –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I want to acknowledge a special quest in our gallery this afternoon, Mr. Ernie Lundrigan, a councillor from the Town of St. Lawrence.

Welcome, Sir, to our gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

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

One of the great delights of my District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi is the tremendous variety of small businesses that thrive there.

One of the best known is Halliday's Meat Market, celebrating 100 years of operations this year. Three generations of Hallidays have run the popular store, which has been at the corner of Gower Street and King's Road since 1967. Before that, it was a little further east but still in the district, at the bottom of Signal Hill. William Halliday was just seventeen when he

opened the business, selling meat, milk and eggs from the family farm on Nagle's Hill.

It is not only the Halliday family which has a long attachment to the business – customers are loyal; some have been coming back for more than fifty years. I still go there myself. Halliday's sausages and streaks are legendary, as is their impeccable service.

I cannot forget the staff. A recent *Telegram* article says some of them have been there for twenty-seven years. Regular customers will tell you how refreshing it is to get a warm greeting from a familiar face.

I hope all hon. members will join me in congratulating Halliday's Meat Market, an inspirational small business, as well as enjoying their wonderful meat products.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate two winning teams from the Occupational Health and Safety Game Show, Who Wants to Save a Life? hosted in St. John's in March.

The 2014 senior champs came from White Hills Academy, St. Anthony, consisting of Coach Jade Gibbons, players Tiara Hillier, Jamie Green, Andrew Hicks, Bradley Warren, and James Rumbolt. They each received a \$1,000 scholarship and a \$5,000 prize for their school.

The 2014 junior runners-up came from Canon Richards Memorial Academy, Flower's Cove, consisting of Coach Lavinia Beaudion, and players Zack Applin, Blair Genge, Alyson Moores, Kierra Pilgrim, and Tia White. They each received \$200 and iPad minis, plus returning \$1,000 to their school.

Two young workers aged 15 to 24 are injured on the job each day in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I commend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission for reaching out to our youth through public engagement. This interactive learning experience is an important way to promote occupational health and safety.

I ask all members of this House to recognize these teams as leaders and role models that will empower their peers to take action and foster a culture of safety in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am so very proud of your accomplishments.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, I am privileged today to celebrate a woman who has been the welcoming face of this Province for thousands of new immigrants over the past three decades. Bridget Foster retired as the Executive Director of the Association for New Canadians last September, but her work in the thirty-four years she was with the ANC will not be forgotten by the many people that she helped.

Bridget immigrated to Canada herself in 1978, and started volunteering shortly thereafter. Her energy and determination built the Association for New Canadians to a vibrant organization which provides education, child care, advice and advocacy for people who are new to this Province and this country.

Last month, Bridget Foster was awarded the latest in a long string of honours when she was inducted into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have been privileged in my time as MHA to spend time with the Association for New Canadians and to see firsthand what Bridget and the organization have accomplished, what the ANC means to the people it serves, and how much love and respect they have for Bridget herself.

I ask all hon. members to join me in applauding Bridget Foster for her lifetime of advocacy and all the best in her retirement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to recognize the students from St. John Bosco School who participated in the DARE program this year. This is a very important program, as it encourages students to resist the peer pressure and temptations of drugs and other substances.

Before graduating from there DARE, the students gain confidence, learn how to stand up and say no to drugs, and learn about the pitfalls of substance abuse.

The students who graduated this year are: Brooklyn Bambrick, Faith Barnes, Janelle Bragg, Katelin Breen, James Brown, Holly Cantwell, Faith Chipman, Stephanie Croke, Parker Dooley, Winnie Druken, Brandon Earle, Brianna Hatcher, Steven Hayward, Sara-Jane Hunt, Mary Ann Nolan Reid, Mackenzie Power, Olivia Walters, Gloria Walsh, Toni Marie Vinnicombe, Logan Vinnicombe, Christian Starr, and it was headed up by Constable Nixon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I rise today to recognize the first annual David Stone Memorial Hockey Tournament, which was held at Port aux Basques this past weekend.

Last February 27, thirteen-year-old David, of Margaree, died in a snowmobile accident. He

passed way too young and the tragedy was felt by the whole area. It was a devastating time for the entire community.

David loved hockey and won a gold medal the year before his passing, something his parents, Mike and Wanda, said was huge highlight for him. This tournament was a touching tribute by the Port aux Basques Minor Hockey Association, which I was fortunate enough to be able to attend.

The tournament involved four Pee Wee teams from the Western Region and drew large crowds all weekend. David's parents, his teammates, and friends were also on hand to pay tribute to David's memory. Port aux Basques Minor Hockey plans on making this tournament an annual event.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join with me in commending Port aux Basques Minor Hockey on the creation of the David Stone Memorial Hockey Tournament and to remember David Stone, whose memory will live on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the 2013-2014 Torbay Business Award winners. On March 6, the Town of Torbay announced the winners of these awards.

The New Business of the Year was given to Prestige East Taxi. Their business began in February of 2012 with only vehicle and two drivers. Today they have three vehicles and a twenty-four seat shuttle bus and they serve customers in the Torbay, Flatrock, and Pouch Cove areas. Congratulations to Natasha and Donny Hanames.

Entrepreneur of the Year was given to Ashley Putt, owner-operator of Groomingdale Pet Salon. Her love and compassion for animals is one of the reasons why she is doing so well. Congratulations to Ashley.

Mr. Speaker, Business of the Year was awarded to Yvonne O'Brien and Donna Kinsella, owner-operators of First Steps Daycare. Both of these are tireless volunteers and active residents of the Torbay area. Congratulations to both of them.

I ask all hon. members to join with me in congratulating the Town of Torbay for recognizing businesses in their community, and also thanking the businesses in the area for putting so much back in their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to commend the winners of the 2014 Doug Wheeler and Cultural Tourism Awards which were presented last month during Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador's annual convention.

The Doug Wheeler Award is presented annually by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to honour the late Doug Wheeler, a long-time public servant who worked tirelessly to promote the Province as a tourism destination. The recipient of the 2014 award is Colleen Kennedy.

Ms Kennedy has been involved in the Province's tourism industry for eighteen years and has been instrumental in the establishment of significant tourism-related infrastructure on the West Coast of the Province, including her work developing

the cultural blueprint known as Creative Gros Morne. Along with her accomplishments, her enthusiasm, kindness and genuine friendly personality – which I have had the privilege of experiencing on numerous occasions – are well known throughout the Province. This past February, Ms Kennedy was named a recipient of the 2013 Order of Newfoundland and Labrador for her dedication and commitment to the Province and its people.

Mr. Speaker, the Cultural Tourism Award is presented each year by the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage and Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador. Cultural tourism is defined as the offering of an experience that celebrates the intrinsic value of a community's culture, heritage, and lifestyle. It is an opportunity to connect the visitor with a way of life, to make the everyday exotic, and to facilitate the encounters of people and place. The award recognizes efforts which result in an enriched cultural tourism experience for travellers to our Province. The recipient of the 2014 Cultural Tourism Award is the Shorefast Foundation.

Established in 2003, the Shorefast Foundation was established as a registered charity whose purpose was to develop a new model for economic and cultural resilience for Fogo Island. The foundation epitomizes the attributes of cultural tourism by creating informative opportunities that celebrate craft, cuisine, history, and art presented through various festivals, special celebrations, and a world-class inn. It remains dedicated to its pursuit of innovative approaches to creating tourism experiences in celebration of the Province's culture and heritage.

I invite all hon. members of this House to join me in congratulating both award winners for their incredible contributions to the Province's tourism industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I also thank the Member for Bay of Islands for permitting me to respond to this Ministerial Statement. Ordinarily, the critic would respond, but because the Member for Bay of Islands recognizes that Ms Kennedy lives less than half a kilometre away from my office in Rocky Harbour, and I know her well, asked if I would like to respond, and indeed I would.

Everything the minister has said is absolutely true regarding Ms Kennedy. She is a dynamic person, a great community leader. She has done an awful lot of good in our area and continues to do so.

What I said regarding Colleen Kennedy, the same applies to the Shorefast Foundation. When we see groups in our Province coming together in places like Fogo Island, when they are joining together with all of their strengths, all of their attributes, in order to promote community endeavours, that means the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador is alive and well, and is thriving. So I agree with the minister 100 per cent.

Thank you, Minister, for recognizing Colleen Kennedy and the Shorefast Foundation. Thank you to the Member for Bay of Islands for permitting me to respond.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. These awards reflect the pride of communities, and how wonderful to celebrate them.

I want to thank and congratulate the incredible Colleen Kennedy for her vision, her persistence

and determination, and thank her for the gift of creative Gros Morne.

The Shorefast Foundation has been nothing but steadfast in their vision to create an incredible model that supports the convergence of economic and cultural goals that is the pride of Fogo. Both these awards promote the treasures that are part of our cultural heritage, encouraging the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to participate and also opening up our Province to the world. Government must support these initiatives as they pave the way for cultural and tourism innovation. They represent years of work, years of courageous and informed risk taking, and that has paid off.

Bravo Colleen Kennedy, Shorefast, and all of those volunteers, employees and public sector workers who have helped make these innovations and initiatives happen. Thank you for your leadership. We look forward to more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the incredible contributions of our Province's volunteers. April 6-12 is National Volunteer Week, a time to celebrate the vital role that volunteers play throughout our communities.

Mr. Speaker, from the dedicated women and men involved in municipal governance, to those working with our most vulnerable populations, volunteers are essential to the continued social, cultural and economic development of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The theme of this year's Volunteer Week is *...for the health of it!* It is a theme that points to the significant part that volunteering can play as a component of an active and healthy lifestyle.

It also highlights the important role that volunteers play in making Newfoundland and Labrador such an amazing place to live, work and do business.

Mr. Speaker, as I have learned first-hand, volunteering has the ability to create a tremendous sense of purpose, while it affords significant benefits for our residents and neighbourhoods.

When I look at our municipalities, for example, I see over 1,500 women and men – many of whom are unpaid as municipal councillors – as they spend countless hours enhancing their communities.

I also think of our volunteer fire departments which are largely staffed by volunteers. We have over 5,900 volunteer firefighters who give so freely of their time to ensure they are ready to respond to emergencies in their region.

Speaking broadly about our community sector, we have organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, scouting and guiding movements, Easter Seals, and the list goes on. These are just a few examples of the ways in which Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are giving back to their communities.

Mr. Speaker, volunteering also inspires our young people – our Province's next generation of leaders.

In the coming weeks, the provincial government will introduce amendments to our municipal legislation, which will give councils the ability to appoint youth representatives so that young people can have even greater involvement in local government.

The work and contributions of volunteers – no matter how small – are making a tremendous difference for individuals across our Province.

Mr. Speaker, so much work happens through the tireless efforts of our volunteers; so this week let's celebrate volunteers of all ages *...for the health of it!*

I ask all hon. members to join with me in thanking volunteers for the valuable work they do each and every day.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. We, too, would like to recognize all the volunteers across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, I will just mention the fire departments. I am attending the Cox's Cove firemen's ball this weekend, and they are just one of the small groups that help out all throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I read in the minister's statement, "...for the health of it!" and "an active and healthy lifestyle." I ask him: Would he speak to the Minister of Tourism for the \$15,000 that was cancelled for McIver's for the kids. There are 100 kids out in McIver's and the Premier himself was going to help out for that upgrade to their playground. When you want to promote a healthy lifestyle, you should do it for all the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I, too, want to recognize all the volunteers in the Province, Mr. Speaker. There is one true spirit of volunteerism we are all proud of in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is Andrew Furey and Team Broken Earth, as we see what is happening and the difference they are making in Haiti.

I know, Minister, that we, without volunteers, would not be able to be such a great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I want to thank all of the volunteers for all groups in Newfoundland and Labrador for their contributions to this society.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement and, at the same time, thank government for recognizing the volunteers. We join with government in this occasion, in celebrating Volunteer Week.

Mr. Speaker, just a couple of things that come to mind. When it comes to volunteers, we all know the role they practice, of course, with municipal politics; they do it for nothing. The volunteer firefighters, we do not know what dangers they are going to face when it comes to facing the immense fire.

As well, I will say this: They are also essential in practicing democracy, as we are seeing with in the by-election in Virginia Waters right now. We have to thank volunteers for their role in democracy and, at the same time as that, also let them know, and let the parents and the students who are watching, when I talk to small business owners and the large business owners one of the things that they look for on a resume is their resume of volunteerism, their record of volunteerism (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member that his time has expired.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over two years ago the former Premier said that it is our goal to improve our debt position over the next ten years to achieve the same per capita

debt as the Canadian average, but over this last year, this government has increased the net debt by over \$1,500 per person.

I ask the Premier: Do you still stand by your government's commitment and this goal to meet the Canadian average?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question.

Mr. Speaker, our government over the last ten years have had six surpluses, we have accumulated over \$5 billion in surpluses, and we have paid down our net debt by \$4 billion. Unfortunately, it has gone up lately, but it is still down about \$2 billion.

I have to point out that when the members opposite were in government, for the lengthy period of time they were in government, they did not pay one cent down on the net debt. That is the difference.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I remind the Premier, and I am sure he knows, he has spent some time in finance, there have been \$18.9 billion in royalties. Oil was at \$25 a barrel. A big difference, I say, Mr. Premier, than it was ten years ago.

Let's talk about that record. Budget 2014, every person in this Province will owe \$18,600; that is over \$5,000 more per person than the Canadian average, in your commitment. That is almost \$4,000 more than it was four years ago. There have been three Budgets since you set this goal and instead the per capita debt is increasing.

I ask the Premier: Why?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the government has run surpluses, and the way you reduce your net debt, based on the definition of net debt, is that you have to run surpluses. What we have done is that, when the oil revenues fell a number of years ago, we met with economists from Memorial University and we took counsel from them. You do not have to do everything at once. You have a plan, you put a plan in place – a long-term plan – you have your targets, and you stick to it. That is what we are doing, and the Finance Minister can explain that in a lot more detail.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, this government has delivered three consecutive deficits - and borrowing a billion dollars this year. Per-person debt has grown in the last four years.

So I ask the Premier: How do you plan to bring the debt down to the Canadian average when you have borrowed a billion dollars this year and plan to borrow upwards to \$400 million more next year?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last year we did release our 10-Year Sustainability Plan, Mr. Speaker, and that is a plan to do it over time. We cannot harshly either cut or spend more, given where the revenues may go each year. So, in consultations with economists such as Wade Locke, you have to do some of the things that need to be done.

We have listened to the people through pre-Budget consultation. There were serious issues

that were raised, and we have listened to them, bearing in mind that as we go forward we do need to be very conscious of where we are going with net debt. We have reduced on an overall basis of \$2 billion since coming into power. Our commitment remains the same, Mr. Speaker, because we need to ensure the sustainability of our finances for all taxpayers in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I ask the Minister of Finance: The goal that you set two years ago to meet the Canadian national average of per-capita net debt, is that still a goal of your government, and how do you plan to meet it?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, that certainly is still our goal. We set out that commitment last year, and it is a commitment that we seriously are committed to. The first step in getting to that goal is getting back to surplus.

Mr. Speaker, in the Budget next year we will be back into a surplus, the year after we will be into a surplus. We need to be conscious of our spending, which we have done this year with only a 2.1 per cent increase in program growth, and we need to look at the pension issue. We all know this year 74 per cent of our net debt is due to pension and post-retirement benefits, so these are some of the issues that we need to look at to get on the road to sustainability.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, last night in our Budget Estimates session we learned that government is now investing into the horse-racing business. They are using \$50,000 in taxpayers' money for a membership in a horse-racing association.

So I ask the Premier: Why are you using \$50,000 in taxpayer money to support a horse-racing membership?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Horse racing is a regulated industry. It is regulated through the Maritime Provinces. Standardbred did regulate it for the Province here. They have given us notice they will no longer be ensuring those regulations are in place. We have a responsibility, as well as the other Maritime Provinces to do that. We set an amount of \$50,000 in the Budget. We think it is going to be lower than that. We do generate revenue from that through taxes and we think it will come in somewhere around that amount. To be prudent, we did put \$50,000 there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I ask the Minister of Finance again – I understand the need to promote small businesses around the Province, but \$50,000 into a horse racing membership we do find that a bit puzzling. When you look at the cuts that were made last year in groups that we all know of, heard about, and listened to, these would be groups like the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities whose funding was cut, I say, Mr. Speaker.

Why the horse racing business and not some other business, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, this would be no different than our requirements in the provincial government to ensure that other regulations are enforced throughout different departments in government. In keeping with ensuring that regulations are adhered to, as do all other provinces, we are doing the same. As I said, it will be offset by the taxes we receive from this activity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since planning is an important part of any Budget document, I ask the minister: How much revenue will be generated by this \$50,000 investment?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, we have been given notice that Standardbred Canada will no longer be doing the regulation and enforcement of this. We set aside \$50,000. We are in negotiations with the Maritime Provinces to see exactly what that amount would be. We think it is going to be lower. We think it will be equivalent to the taxes we will receive from the activity.

At the end of the day it will likely be a wash, but it is something that we have to do as a government, Mr. Speaker. If we were not ensuring that the regulations were met, I suspect they would have a different line of questions. This is ensuring we adhere to our responsibility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, an advocate for our school system recently e-mailed the Premier about how he was mistreated, in fact bullied, by a Minister of the Crown in the lobby of the Confederation Building on Budget day. The e-mail points out how this person who represents parents, teachers, and students felt disrespected and bullied by the Minister of Education who is supposed to be a defender of those who are bullied in society. I say this is not funny folks.

I ask the Premier: Is he aware of this; and, if so, how has he addressed this very serious allegation of bullying and intimidation by one of his Cabinet ministers?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I did receive an e-mail making allegations of bullying on the part of the Minister of Education. I did respond to that individual. I had my Chief of Staff meet with that individual. They were gathering the information. They have met with the Minister of Education, and I understand as soon as I have the results of that I will take whatever action is appropriate.

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I say clearly the fact that this person feels like they were bullied by a Cabinet minister exposes the fact that this government has not changed the way it operates.

Mr. Speaker, given that bullying is one of the most serious issues faced by students, one too many students face and are victims of, and that the Minister of Education has been tasked by the Premier to lead the charge against bullying, I ask the Premier: Do you still have confidence that a minister accused of bullying a person who

represents the interests of students can still affectively lead your government's anti-bullying initiative?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, a fair question. People have made allegations. Allegations are not necessarily correct, so there is a process that is in place. It is a process that ensures that rules of natural justice apply and that there is procedural fairness. Allegations have been made. The Chief of Staff has met with that individual, the minister has met with that individual, and when we get the results of that review, I will make the appropriate decision.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, patients are waiting in emergency rooms for hours and sometimes days. According to Debbie Forward, Head of the Nurses' Union, patients are falling through the cracks. They are not getting the proper care they receive. Yesterday, government announced fourteen new nursing positions.

I ask the minister: How many of these will be allocated to the Health Sciences and Grand Falls hospital?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In Budget 2014 we did allocate 32 per cent of all new positions in the health entities went to nurses. I did have a conversation with Debbie Forward as well, as she made representation to the Department of Health, and we are pleased to say that there are four positions to attend to

emergency wait times at both the Health Sciences and Central.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order, please!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, patients in our Province are not being admitted because there are not enough in-patient beds. In February, there were 208 people in major hospitals that required alternate levels of care, tying up in-patient beds; 134 of them were waiting for long-term care beds.

I ask the minister: Why do we still have a bed-blockage issue in this Province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health has taken many measures over the past number of years to reduce wait times. I gave some of those stats yesterday. While the number of visits has increased by 16 per cent in the emergency rooms, assessment has decreased by 17 per cent and the stay has also decreased by 11 per cent. We recognize wait times are an issues and that is why recognized that in this year's Budget with a significant investment, particularly around emergency room wait times.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, highways and roads have been impassable for days on the Southwest Coast, including Route 480 to Burgeo, Route 470 to Rose Blanche, and the TCH from Cape Ray to Port aux Basques. Highway crews are doing their best with the limited resources they have available.

Emergency response has been put in jeopardy and schools have been closed.

I ask the minister: Why is there a lack of resources in this region to deal with this emergency situation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think this winter and the snowstorm we had the other day speak for themselves and the very strange weather we have been having. There were snowbanks in the areas the member from across the way spoke about that were fifteen to twenty feet high.

One of the things we have done, instead of not having enough resources, we have actually put out extra resources to deal with the highways on the West Coast. We have partnered with the City of Corner Brook to bring extra equipment and extra resources in to deal with the situation.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, we have to deal with the safety of the employees in my department who, I feel, are doing an excellent job in dealing with the situation. Once it was safe to put the employees out there, they were very quick to go out and deal with the situation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I say to the minister, I know full well the crews are doing everything they can; there are not enough resources and it has been going on for a week now.

Mr. Speaker, students from communities all along Route 470, Margaree, Fox Roost, Isle aux Morts, Burnt Islands, and Rose Blanche, have not been in school since last Wednesday because school buses cannot travel on the roads.

I say to the minister: This is unacceptable; what are you doing to ensure this crisis situation does not happen again?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, I have no control over the amount of snowfall that comes down. When it comes to the school children, I am not sure if the member across the way is suggesting that we take the school children and send them out in unsafe conditions.

The employees with the Department of Transportation and Works are working overtime, we have extra resources in there, and we will continue to do our best to deal with the amount of snow that is down; but when it comes to the safety, especially the school children, we will not jeopardize that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I say to the minister, it is absolutely shameful that you think we are talking about putting kids in unsafe conditions. I am receiving calls from parents who are wondering when their kids can get to school. I am sure parents are wondering about the safety of their children.

I say to the minister when will you answer this question: What are you going to do to make sure this stops? These kids have not been in school for seven days - or should I ask the Minister of Education?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Mr. Speaker, again, as I said, we will not jeopardize the safety – and I find it almost shameful that the member across the way would even suggest that when we are dealing with weather conditions as we have been this week, that we even think about sending school children out there.

As I said before and I will state again, Mr. Speaker, the employees in the Department of Transportation and Works are doing a phenomenal job in dealing with the weather conditions that we have. They will continue to work with the situations there. I feel that they are doing an excellent job. They will continue to do that, but we will not jeopardize the safety of anyone in the Province under my department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, two months ago government announced an operational review of Her Majesty's Penitentiary after an inmate was sent to hospital following a disturbance in the chapel. Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Decades of Darkness review made recommendations on improving safety, but still no action has been taken to address these problems.

I ask the minister: The status of the current operational review, when will it be released – the current one?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate, once again, the opportunity to speak to our government's commitment to Her Majesty's Penitentiary. I correct the member opposite. First of all, though, he is factually incorrect in suggesting nothing has been with Decades of Darkness. In actual fact, I think about 90 per cent plus of the recommendations,

perhaps more, have been implemented fully from that particular report.

I am not sure what particular organization or operational review he is referring to. I have announced no such operational review. There was a review instituted internally as a result of the last major incident regarding inmates and correctional officers, not an organizational review.

I can say that our commitment extends to HMP to the point where it is our government that announced we will move alone, without the federal government's support, to invest in a new penitentiary to support inmates and correctional officers.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, six weeks ago, I wrote the minister and asked him for an update on the seventy-seven recommendations of the Decades of Darkness. I still have not received a response to that request for an update to know where we are today. Since then, he announced they are going to be able to use pepper spray – that was in the 2008 Decades of Darkness recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, correctional officers identified sixteen concerns related to safety at Her Majesty's Penitentiary when they met the minister back in February. The minister identified that some of them may be budgetary items, yet the budget for adult corrections has been cut by a million dollars from 2013.

I ask the minister: Correctional workers requested an improved staffing ratio; why have you not followed through and provided the necessary funding in the Budget?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: As I said, Mr. Speaker, to continue the train of thought I was talking about a few minutes ago, we are the government that continues to invest in HMP.

I say to the member opposite, with greatest respect, if he has the permission of the correctional officers association, I ask him to table the sixteen recommendations that he claims were discussed in the meeting. I say to the member, he was not present in the meeting, and there were not – there were not – sixteen recommendations discussed. There were a range of topics –

MR. BENNETT: (Inaudible).

MR. KING: If the member would like the answer, he needs to listen, Mr. Speaker, not shout at me and heckle across the House.

There were a number of issues discussed, and we announced significant investment in that penitentiary, besides the fact that we are building a new penitentiary; and the leadership of the correctional officers are more than happy with what this government did in response to their concerns, I say to the member.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, not only has the Population Growth Strategy been downgraded in priority by its reassignment from a deputy minister to an executive director, that executive director already has a job – planning and co-ordination for the Cabinet Secretariat.

So I ask the Premier: Do you plan on appointing another deputy minister responsible, or an executive director for the Cabinet Secretariat; or, is this person expected now to do two jobs?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there were provincial consultations with regard to the Population Growth Strategy here in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are people who are working on this strategy whose credentials are absolutely impeccable. One, I understand, is a Rhodes Scholar, Mr. Speaker. I put that person's credentials up against anybody in this Province who can take on this type of work.

We have heard from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have very professional people working on the Population Growth Strategy. Once we are prepared to see that report and have it released, I think the people of this Province will appreciate the hard work that these people put into it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the member opposite that I did not question anybody's credentials yesterday – I want to be on record for that. I do not like people playing semantics with my words.

Mr. Speaker, the discussion paper on the Population Growth Strategy mentions the difficulty in attracting former residents back to the Province once they leave. We know for a fact that apprentices are being told by staff at the Industrial Training Unit that they are better off getting their hours in Alberta.

I ask the minister: When your own staff are going against the tenets of the strategy, won't you admit there is a gross failure of communication and co-ordination in your department?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, there is a communication problem here, and it is the hon. member who is asking the questions.

She posed her questions yesterday to make it sound as if the people who are doing the Population Growth Strategy do not know what they are doing. Mr. Speaker, their credentials are absolutely impeccable. The people who work at the apprenticeship division of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills are also very professional in all they do as well.

Mr. Speaker, if she thinks getting up and questioning their credentials here in the House and then trying to say she does not mean it, she is absolutely wrong.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, we not only have a communication problem but we have a serious hearing problem, because for the third time, I questioned nobody's credentials. The Population Growth Strategy was important enough for it to have a deputy minister, now we have someone assigned who is already in another full-time job. I am merely asking on behalf of the taxpayers' dollars in the Province for some clarification. I will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, there are people in Newfoundland and Labrador who do have hearing problems and they do not need to be made fun of or a joke of here in the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, our Population Growth Strategy is undertaken because we have serious issues with our demographics in Newfoundland and

Labrador. Mr. Speaker, we are serious about that strategy. We have the best people possible in this Province who will do it for us and when that strategy is released, the people of this Province will be impressed with that report.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government is abandoning the youth of our Province by straying from the forty-one initiatives in the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy.

I ask the Minister of Public Engagement: Why his office has failed to live up to the initiatives outlined in the strategy to retain and attract youth in our Province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy, formerly under the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, has been a real success story for our government. Many of those recommendations that came out of the strategy, many of those action items were implemented fully. Many have been incorporated into the work of a variety of government departments.

Through the Office of Public Engagement, which was created over a year ago, we have been very much focused on youth issues. We have regional planners through the Rural Secretariat who are engaged with youth in every single region of the Province. We have a very successful Getting the Message Out program. We provide millions of dollars in funding to youth organizations across the Province. Our strategy is working, and there is more work being done that I look forward to rolling out in the months ahead.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

As of January 20, 2014, according to government's own figures, there were fifty-one persons in Eastern Health waiting in acute care hospital beds for a long-term care bed, a key cause of people lined up in ER waiting for hospital admission.

I ask the Premier: What is this government's plan to free up acute care beds which are now occupied, of necessity, by patients waiting for long-term care?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment around long-term care is obvious. We built many long-term care facilities around the Province, including the one recently here in St. John's. As well, in Budget 2014, this year we have included funding to look at long-term care on both the Burin Peninsula and in Central Newfoundland, as well as eighteen long-term care beds in Corner Brook. Our commitment is solid.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: What is their plan for the people who will not fit into the new long-term care facility that will soon be opening? Because

it does not have an adequate number of beds for the waiting list or for the people who are lying in acute care beds now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that long-term care beds are an issue throughout the Province. We have invested in Corner Brook, we have invested in Clarendville, and we have invested in Lab West in this year's Budget – sorry, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in this year's Budget. We will continue to invest as we have for long-term care planning on the Burin Peninsula, in Central, and other regions as the need arises.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment is solid and we will continue to do what needs to be done for long-term care in the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An awful lot of people are not going to be helped by that answer.

In November of 2012, IOC workers expressed concern that silica dust levels in the Labrador West mines were eight times the acceptable level and called on government to enforce the legal minimum dust levels. Now the representatives are saying that dust levels are worse than ever.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Will he ensure that IOC is complying with minimum silica dust levels?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, occupational health and safety is a priority of our government. Service NL OHS workers are up there on a regular basis in Labrador making sure the dust levels are in compliance with the levels that are set, that are minimum levels.

We are monitoring the situation. We are on-site on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to do so in the coming weeks and months.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, after much pressure the government finally began the audit of medical records of mine workers affected by silica dust last year.

Will the minister provide an update on the progress of this medical silica dust study?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that information here in front of me today but I certainly will provide that at the appropriate time.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Workers in the Labrador West mines fought hard to get the Silica Code of Practice in 2006.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Why isn't his department strictly enforcing this code?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, Occupational Health and Safety officers of Service NL are doing a tremendous job in Labrador. They are monitoring the situation very closely. We are aware of the situation. We are aware of some of the dust levels that have been talked about in the public, Mr. Speaker. We are on the ground; we are doing the work that needs to be done. The safety of the workers in these mines is a priority for our government and will continue to be so, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, the 2002 Waste Management Strategy clearly states that unlined landfill sites are unacceptable. This year the department said that in order to keep costs at a minimum they would not construct a lined landfill facility in the western region.

I ask the minister: How is this meeting the goals of the Waste Management Strategy?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we are making great progress with our provincial Waste Management Strategy. We also acknowledge there is a lot of work to do, but I can say to the hon. member that 64 per cent of the Province's population is already disposing of their waste in a lined landfill.

We did a detailed analysis of the proposal to put a landfill facility on the West Coast of the Province.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible).

MR. KENT: I would ask some protection from the Member for Bay of Islands, please, Mr. Speaker.

We have investigated it fully. It will cost more. It will have a negative impact on the environment. Moving the waste from the West Coast to the Central Newfoundland facility is the right answer, and we have engaged the communities on the West Coast to arrive at that conclusion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, this strategy is already 60 per cent over budget so far. Mr. Speaker, given that the Auditor General says that the strategy needs a lot more work to meet its goals up to 2020 timeline, I ask the minister: How much more is this strategy going to cost?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that we dispose of our waste in a responsible way. A lot of work has gone into the strategy, and there is more investment needed. We have invested millions to date and there are still millions of dollars required to complete the work. We are well on our way to meeting the goals that are outlined in the provincial Waste Management Strategy. We have had a 60 per cent reduction in the number of disposal sites in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are on our way to meeting the target of 80 per cent, and there is more work to do. We are engaging communities through the regional service boards, and a lot of progress is being made.

In the case of the West Coast, to the member's original question, it makes environmental sense and economic sense to move waste to the Norris Arm site.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East, for a quick question.

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, what is the point of having a strategy for waste management if you are not going to stick to the principles of that strategy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, for a quick response.

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we are deeply committed to the principles of the strategy. We are making progress, it is working, and we look forward to working with communities across the Province as we continue to move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 49.(2) of the Financial Administration Act, I wish to table the attached list of temporary loans that were raised under section 48 of the act since the last report to the House on April 30, 2013.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 55.(3) of the Financial Administration Act, I wish to report that there were no guaranteed loans paid out by the Province since the last annual report, also on April 30, 2013.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS JOHNSON: In addition, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 55.1(2) of the act, I wish to report that there has been no guaranteed debt of a Crown corporation or agency assumed by the Province since April 30, 2013.

As well, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 5 of the Local Authority Guarantee Act, 2005, I wish to table the annual report of loan guarantees provided to local governments to enable them to arrange interim financing for capital projects. I am pleased to report there were no new guarantees issued on behalf of local governments during the fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, the last report under this act was tabled on April 30, 2013, and includes guarantees issued up to and including March 31, 2013. This current report covers the period from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

I remind members that anyone who is standing at the time I call Petitions will not be recognized.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand the rule that people should not be standing until they are noticed.

WHEREAS we wish to raise concerns regarding the recent delay of the construction of the new hospital in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to commit to the planning and construction of a new hospital in Corner Brook, as previously committed to, in a timely manner and as was originally announced without further delay or changes.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by people from McIver's, Meadows, Hampton, and all over Western Newfoundland. We have this petition again, and once again these residents of Western Newfoundland and Labrador want a review done of the decisions made by this government.

I hear what the Premier has said, that he is going to put \$500,000 into a study to see if there should be radiation and a PET scanner in the new hospital in Corner Brook. A lot of people have concerns about that, Mr. Speaker – a lot of people have major concerns.

First of all, the information that was presented to them from the Department of Health, is it accurate information? If it is accurate information, why is the Premier putting \$500,000 of taxpayers' money into doing a study after government already made the decision they are not going to do it and they are not going to provide those services?

The other thing I ask the Premier, who happens to be the Member for Humber East: What are the parameters of this study? Will you make all the findings of the study public? Will you provide the people in his own district and all of Western Newfoundland – give it to all of us – so we can have an open, transparent dialogue of the terms of reference of this \$500,000 we are spending?

The other question I ask the Premier, Mr. Speaker, and I know a lot of residents are asking me to ask the Premier through these petitions: Why are you presenting a study if you and your

government already made the decision on the hospital in Corner Brook? Is it because you do not trust the information you are getting from the Department of Health? That is the question.

People heard the decision from the Department of Health. They heard the decision from the government. Now we are going to do a study to see if we are going to change it. I ask the Premier to make all this information known.

I thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS there is a waste recovery facility being proposed by Eastern Waste Management in the Peak Pond-Reids Pond area; and

WHEREAS such a site will drastically impact the pond and general area in a negative way from an environmental perspective; and

WHEREAS there are many species of wildlife that will be negatively impacted by such a site such as moose, rabbits, loons, ducks, Canada geese, et cetera; and

WHEREAS such a site will result in litter and strong odours in the general area; and

WHEREAS there are a significant number of cabins and permanent homes in the Peak Pond-Reids Pond area, which will be negatively impacted by this site; and

WHEREAS Eastern Waste Management has many sites available to them for such a facility, including former dump sites in the area;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of

Newfoundland and Labrador to intercede in the matter and advise Eastern Waste Management to withdraw this proposal and find a more suitable location for this waste recovery facility.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again today to present this petition. Today, pretty much, almost every signature is actually from Whitbourne. I have one from Chance Cove and I have one from Bellevue, but the majority of them are area residents of Whitbourne.

Mr. Speaker, this certainly started out – as I have indicated before, for me, I first became aware of it as a result of residents of Mount Pearl who actually own cottages and so in the Peak Pond-Reids Pond area.

They were certainly shocked to find out – and it was interesting, they only found out when they happened to see something in a newspaper about it, because they were never notified by Eastern Waste Management that this proposal was even coming forward.

Certainly, there are lots of locations that such a facility could go. I certainly support the need for this facility, absolutely, but there are industrial sites, former dump sites, in the area where this could go. Again, to have such a negative impact on the environment, have a negative impact on the cabin owners, the residents of the general area in terms of issues with rodents, odours, environment damage and so on, it makes no sense. We should be looking to a site which was already a former industrial site; that makes a lot more sense to use. I call upon the government, as in this petition, to intercede with waste management.

They say they are doing an environmental assessment; there is no need for an environmental assessment. Even from a technical perspective if they say okay, it is possible to do it here; why do it here? Find another place to do it, which makes more sense.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand in the House to petition again on behalf –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: – of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: 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 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court provided a comprehensive approach to domestic violence in a court setting that fully understood and dealt with the complex issues of domestic violence; and

WHEREAS domestic violence continues to be one of the most serious issues facing our Province today and the cost of the impact of domestic violence is both great economically and in human suffering; and

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court was welcomed and endorsed by all aspects of the justice system including the police, the courts, prosecutors, defence counsel, Child, Youth and Family Services, as well as victims, offenders, community agencies, and women's groups; and

WHEREAS the recidivism rate for offenders going through the court was 10 per cent compared to 40 per cent for those who did not; and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: WHEREAS the budget for the court was only 0.2 per cent of the entire budget of the Department of Justice;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently going through Estimates procedures. For people who are not quite familiar with what that is, what we do is we look at the budgets of different departments, and the budgets that were allocated in the Budget last year. We look at whether or not they have overspent and why have they overspent, or whether they have not spent all the money they had asked for and that they had planned to use.

Mr. Speaker, it is a very interesting process. There are various reasons why departments go over budget. There are various reasons why departments go under budget. Yesterday, in response to a question from one of my colleagues to the Minister of Justice, he asked: Why did you close the Family Violence Intervention Court? The Minister of Justice replied: It was a budgetary decision.

Mr. Speaker, I gasped; @TelegramJames in fact tweeted that I had actually heckled. It is something that I do not do in the House normally. It was not a heckle. I gasped. I could not believe the Minister of Justice actually said that he was making a budgetary decision on the backs of battered women and children of \$500,000.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member's time has expired.

MS ROGERS: Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I present a petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled:

WHEREAS removal of midwifery services will leave rural and isolated communities at a disadvantage in terms of quality and service of health care being provided; and

WHEREAS Charles S. Curtis Memorial Hospital has been employing a successful and operational model of midwifery and has delivered outstanding care for over ninety years; and

WHEREAS privatization of midwifery who are waiting five to seven years for regulation has stated, government is an unreasonable time frame for those currently using these services;

We, the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly to urge the government to assist in preserving our midwifery services at Charles S. Curtis Memorial Hospital.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I presented a petition earlier on this matter which had over 600 names on it from across the district, and there were several as well from Quebec, who utilize this service. I received more from Quebec. I know they are not residents of Newfoundland and Labrador as required. This is an important service to women, to young families when it comes to what is happening right now. The midwives who are trained, who would be regulated in other jurisdictions, are now having their duties quite limited.

We saw here today where the Department of Finance is investing in a regulation for horse racing because that regulation is needed to promote horse racing in the Province. Yet, under the health act which was passed, the Health Professions Act in 2010, government knew then that it needed regulations for midwifery. It is three and a half years later, those regulations still are not implemented.

Mr. Speaker, it is all about priorities. We should be looking at the priorities of health outcomes, of how we can improve health outcomes, and how people can get better delivery of care working in a team environment. When you have a health care budget that is ballooning to almost \$3 billion, the implementation of midwifery that has been working in a public system should be preserved. Why is government dragging its heels on creating these regulations so that we can have midwifery retained at Charles S. Curtis Memorial?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Signal Hill-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 Centers for Disease Control now estimates that autism spectrum disorder affects one in sixty-eight 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 there are approximately 380 children on a two-year wait-list for an ASD diagnosis, which in this Province can only be

made by a developmental pediatrician, and there is only one available at the Janeway Children's Hospital; and

WHEREAS although Budget 2014 announced that another developmental pediatrician will be recruited, more must be done to reduce the wait-list for a diagnosis so that children can get the early treatment they need; 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to stand and present this petition on behalf of those who have signed it. I know there are going to be a lot more coming in because this is a major concern of people who, yes, have children with autism, of people themselves who have autism, but also, Mr. Speaker, of our community, because the community wants everybody to be taken care of.

Government can deal with the wait-list that we have of almost 400 children waiting for a diagnosis without having to bring in new personnel, Mr. Speaker. They are bringing in one new developmental pediatrician, but they could do what happens in other provinces.

For example, in British Columbia, people who are qualified specialists with regard to diagnosis is much broader than what we have here in this Province. A psychiatrist, a pediatrician, or a registered doctoral-level psychologist can all be trained in the ADOS, which is Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, to do diagnosis. So we do not need to have to bring in a lot more of developmental pediatricians. What we can do is broaden the group of professionals

in the medical profession who already are here to be trained to do the diagnosis.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS DEMPSTER: 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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Strait of Belle Isle is a very important transportation link between Labrador and the Island of Newfoundland; and

WHEREAS both commercial and residential traffic is continuously increasing because of the opening of the Trans-Labrador Highway and increased development in Labrador; and

WHEREAS the existing ferry service can no longer effectively handle the traffic; and

WHEREAS there have been many interruptions in the ferry service, especially during the 2014 winter season;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to complete a comprehensive feasibility study for a fixed link across the Strait of Belle Isle that would include a geological assessment and a full cost analysis.

Mr. Speaker, I have been up on this petition a number of times. The two closest points in the Strait of Belle Isle is nine miles. Yet, for a few minutes in the air, if you do fly, it is costing people almost \$600 return. If you have a family, a man and his wife, and they are on seasonal income and EI and a child that they need to get to the other side, you are talking almost \$1,000.

Just to put in perspective the high cost of travel in Labrador, Mr. Speaker, twenty years ago when I was here in university – maybe twenty-

five years ago – people were flying down South every spring for cheaper than I was flying into Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we just saw the tender go out on the new ferries again for the Strait of Belle Isle; \$10 million a year we are spending on ferry services – \$10 million. For a billion dollars we are putting a subsea cable through the Strait of Belle Isle, Mr. Speaker, and if we had had some vision and some planning from the members opposite I believe that subsea cable could have been running through a tunnel.

Nevertheless, it is not too late. We had a prefeasibility study that was done eight years ago. I believe the time has come for all of the people who are trying to move goods, commercial, and residential traffic in and out of the Big Land. We are connected now, we have people from Lab West, we have mega industrial projects, we have a heavy flow of traffic, and it is nothing short of a nightmare, Mr. Speaker, every day.

As I speak right now, the ferry service is once again disrupted. The *Larsen* had to go and help in another area; now we are waiting on the *Sir William Alexander*, Mr. Speaker.

So, I call upon the Minister of Transportation to move and urge his government to conduct a feasibility study that will include a geological assessment so we can determine if this is feasible. Mr. Speaker, once Route 138 is connected down the Quebec Lower North Shore, it is going to be much more difficult. We are going to be behind the eight ball again, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS we wish to raise concern regarding the recent delay on the construction of the new hospital in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to commit to the planning and construction of a new hospital in Corner Brook as previously committed to and in a timely manner as originally announced without further delay or changes.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is making its rounds in Western Newfoundland and maybe in other parts of Newfoundland, but for sure in Western Newfoundland. A question I was asked in Trout River on Saturday afternoon regarding the Corner Brook hospital – I did not go to Trout River for people to ask me about the Corner Brook hospital, but in fact a constituent was very concerned about the Corner Brook hospital. He says: We need the Corner Brook hospital. He is in Trout River. We need the Corner Brook hospital.

He said: Do you think they are going to build the hospital? I said: Well, what do you think? He said: Well, if they do not build the hospital now, they are never going to build the hospital; sure, the Premier is from Corner Brook and there are three fellows running for the PC leadership from the West Coast and for sure one of them must be in favour of the hospital; and you fellows have a guy from Deer Lake leading your party and he could very well be the Premier. If there is ever a chance to get a hospital in Corner Brook, for sure you are going to get a hospital.

He said: Well, what about all the members? Are they all on side? I said: Oh, yes, we are all on side. I named the members in our Opposition. He said: Yes, I know you guys are all on side, but what about the other members? Doesn't Corner Brook have two members? Yes, one is the Premier and then there is the Member for Humber West. What is he saying about that?

For sure, this must be important for Stephenville. Oh, yes, there are two members for Stephenville, and one of them in the Cabinet. How come they are not pushing for the hospital in Corner Brook? I said: Well, yes, my son, I am sure they pushing for the hospital behind closed doors. He said: Yes, that is what they are always saying when they are doing nothing. When politicians are on doing something, they are on their feet and you know about it; when they are doing nothing, they are quiet. He said: I do not think they are doing anything at all.

He said: Mr. Bennett, if they build a hospital, do you think it is ever possible they are going to put in that hospital and we are not going to get all the new stuff? We are not going to get all the new stuff we are going to need in that hospital for the next thirty, forty, or fifty years, he said, long after I am dead. He said: I cannot believe they are not going to build it, and if they do build it, we have to have all the new equipment in the hospital.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

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

WHEREAS hundreds of residents of the South Coast of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, including residents of the communities of Burgeo, Ramea, Grey River, and François, use Route 480 on a regular basis for work, medical, educational, and social reasons; and

WHEREAS there is no cellphone coverage on Route 480; and

WHEREAS residents and users of Route 480 require cellphone coverage to ensure their safety and communication abilities; and

WHEREAS the Department of IBRD announced significant funding to improve broadband in rural Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS the residents and users of Route 480 feel the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development should also invest in cellphone coverage for rural Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House to urge the government to support the users of Route 480 in their request to obtain cellphone coverage along Route 480.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition I have entered on a number of occasions this week. I did Route 470 earlier and now I am doing Route 480, and both are in the same situation. Both do not have cellphone coverage.

I have asked on a number of occasions to get some information on government's plans, or their strategy, or even if they have a map that shows where there is coverage or where there is not, but we have not gotten a single solitary answer on that so far. That goes along with what this government has done on a consistent basis, which is not answer questions or provide information. This past week has shown the true limitations in what we have.

I already talked about the gentleman who was stuck in his car overnight. In fact, I have had contact with workers with Transportation and Works who had difficulty providing updates about the condition of the roads because they could not use cellphones.

I have already mentioned in Question Period here today the number of phone calls and e-mails I have received from parents and teachers along Route 470 about their kids who have not been in school in a week. The Minister of Education has said nothing. The Minister of Transportation answered some questions today and accused the parents of not putting the safety of their children as paramount. I find that absolutely amazing.

What I would like to do here is call upon the government to do the right thing. We have been putting this in; it is time for the government to make a move. The residents along Route 480, the communities I listed, Burgeo, Ramea – and I get the people from elsewhere, from the Premier's district, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. They have come to me to sign these petitions because they cannot put a petition in through the crowd across the way. They cannot get their concerns across.

Cellphone coverage is a necessity for the twenty-first century. Let us hope that this government catches up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Order 2 under third reading, I move, seconded by the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador, that Bill 5, An Act To Repeal The Printing Services Act, be now read the third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time.

Is it the pleasure of the House the motion be adopted?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Repeal The Printing Services Act. (Bill 5)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill is now read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Repeal The Printing Services Act", read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 5)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I am going to call Order 4. I move, seconded by the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador, that An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009, Bill 3, be now read a second time.

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

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Bonavista North, that Bill 3, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009, be given a second reading.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 3, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009, be now read a second time.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009". (Bill 3)

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

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, the Vital Statistics Division of Service NL is responsible for the registration records for births, marriages, and deaths and issue certificates to certify these events for various purposes, including identity management. Many of the provisions that Vital Statistics operates under are governed by the Vital Statistics Act, 2009, which lays out the

legal processes for the registration of births, marriages, and deaths.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments recommended in this bill relate specifically to Part III of the act, which pertains to the registration of deaths. The proposed changes are minor in nature and will ensure the legislation is consistent with current administrative practice and with the Fatalities Investigations Act, which is administered by the Department of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, after working with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to review the legislation, we have determined that these amendments are necessary to match the legislation to current practices to allow the Vital Statistics Act to function in tandem with the Fatalities Investigations Act. The bill will repeal section 15(5) of the act to accurately reflect the authorities of the Chief Medical Examiner as they are currently outlined under the Fatalities Investigations Act.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, in the event of death the funeral director is required to notify the Chief Medical Examiner when the death is classified as a reportable death. Reportable deaths are defined in sections 5 through 8 of the Fatalities Investigations Act. They include: death by violence, accident, or suicide; unexpected death of a healthy person or a person not under the care of a physician where the cause of death is undetermined; death as a result of improper or suspected negligent treatment; certain types of death that occur at a treatment or care facility; deaths in institutions such as correctional facilities, psychiatric units, or while in custody; and employment-related deaths.

Mr. Speaker, currently the Vital Statistics Act, 2009 requires that notification be provided under the same circumstances described in section 5 of the Fatalities Investigations Act, but does not include the other circumstances for reportable deaths that are detailed in sections 6 through 8 of the act. As such, this bill will bring the Vital Statistics Act, 2009 in to line with the Fatalities Investigations Act by adopting the same array of circumstances when the Chief Medical Examiner is to be notified of a reportable death,

as are outlined in the Fatalities Investigations Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also aligns the Vital Statistics Act, 2009 with the Fatalities Investigations Act by allowing a funeral director to issue a burial permit after the body is examined by either the Chief Medical Examiner, a medical examiner, or an investigator. Currently, the act only permits a funeral director to issue a burial permit once the Chief Medical Examiner has examined the body. These amendments will allow for other medical examiners and investigators to perform the required examination of the body, as it is already ready permitted under the Fatalities Investigations Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will also align the Vital Statistics Act, 2009 with the Fatalities Investigations Act by allowing medical examiners, or with the consent of the medical examiner, a medical practitioner, or nurse practitioner to sign the medical certificate portion of the death registration form indicating the cause of death, which is already provided for under the Fatalities Investigations Act.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, these amendments also clarify that when the cause of death is unknown and further investigation is ongoing, the death certificate is to be submitted to the funeral director as pending. When the investigation is completed, the medical certificate portion of the death registration form will be updated and forwarded directly to Vital Statistics.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that these proposed amendments aim to bring the 2009 vital statistics legislation in line with current established practices and the authorities of the Chief Medical Examiner, as outlined in the Fatalities Investigations Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me stand in this hon. House to speak to Bill 3, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, there is really not a whole lot of substance to what we are doing here, it is really housekeeping. It is just keeping in line with what the current practice is. I attended a briefing with the minister's staff, I thank him for that. I have no concerns around any of the amendments being made and I support it. That is really all I have to say about it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista South.

AN HON. MEMBER: North.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed great to stand. I am only going to be here for a moment or so because this bill, Bill 3, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, 2009 is being amended for two main reasons. One is the repealing of section 15(5), because that is already dealt with in the Fatalities Investigations Act; and, we are just repealing and replacing two sections, 17(2) and 17(3) as it deals with burial permits, helping to make things a bit more expeditious and not have investigations when we do not need to. I believe, Mr. Speaker, support for this is inherent.

Thank you for that time.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will only take a minute here to address this piece of legislation. I am quite pleased to speak to this, particularly on the part of families because I think while government is making a good move here when it comes to bringing – I guess you could say modernizing this piece of

legislation, too, and I guess we can also look at it as a reduction in some red tape. It also alleviates some of the workload that the medical examiner is going through by designating more responsibility on the part of the people he is also working with.

One important point, I guess the only point that I really want to make on this and probably came to mind when we were doing this was when you are signing off on a death certificate, or the duties of a funeral director, for example. I have to commend government on pointing this out, too, when it came to this piece of legislation. Families have to begin a time of mourning. I think what this does is bring some finality to one particular situation you are dealing with so that the mourning process can begin. I think that is going to be good for families, when it comes to that, who are dealing with any kind of a death here.

I just wanted to bring that point out. Again, I see it as a piece of red tape reduction here. We will be supporting this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: If the Minister of Service NL speaks now he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, obviously we are all aligned on this amendment. Again, it is relatively minor in nature. It is something we have to do from a legal perspective. The Chief Medical Examiner was engaged and involved in making sure this happened. It was on his recommendation that we are doing this, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure he will be pleased when we enact this new amendment.

I will close debate there now.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is it the pleasure of the House that the said bill be now read a second time?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009. (Bill 3)

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

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

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009", read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 3)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 9, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act, Bill 10.

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

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Member for Bonavista North that Bill 10, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act, now be given a second reading.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act". (Bill 10)

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

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, the Buildings Accessibility Act is vital to ensuring that residents of Newfoundland and Labrador who have physical disabilities have necessary and safe access to public buildings and facilities.

The act and its regulations outline accessibility requirements for public buildings in the Province that were constructed since the legislation came into effect in 1981, or any buildings which are undergoing substantial renovations.

These requirements include codes and other requirements to ensure proper access and safety such as the width of entrances, hallways and accessibility ramps, parking lot requirements for blue zone signage and curb cuts and access to public facilities such as washrooms, public telephones, service kiosk, elevators and lifts, building links and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

The Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board advises the Minister of Service NL on matters concerning the Buildings Accessibility Act and regulations. The board provides insights and advice on matters that have very real impact on the daily lives of those with physical or sensory disabilities across the Province.

As the board is currently structured, there is no specific designation of a vice-chairperson. By allowing for the designation of vice-chair, there is the ability to have an individual to serve as interim chairperson should the chairperson resign or otherwise be unavailable or unable to perform his or her duties at a given time. This would ensure the continued smooth functioning of the board.

Mr. Speaker, we feel that amending the Buildings Accessibility Act to allow for the designation of a vice-chair on the board is a

necessary and responsible action. In addition, in the event that a member resigns from either the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board or the Buildings Accessibility Appeal Tribunal, there are currently no provisions that allows a replacement member to be appointed to fill the vacancy for the remainder of that person's term of office; however, we can currently appoint individuals for two or three year terms.

As such, Mr. Speaker, we are proposing amendments to the legislation; firstly, section 18 of the act would be amended to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to appoint a vice-chairperson of the Building Accessibility Advisory Board and to establish that, in the absence of the chairperson, a vice-chairperson will fill that leadership role.

Section 18 would also be amended to allow for the appointment of a replacement member for a member who may resign from their position on the board for the remainder of the unexpired term.

In addition to these amendments, section 20 of the Buildings Accessibility Act will be amended to allow for a replacement for a member of the Buildings Accessibility Appeal Tribunal for the remainder of an unexpired term. The continuity of the appeal tribunal is essential in ensuring the rights of individuals who appeal decisions of the director responsible for buildings accessibility regarding orders issued by inspectors of the department.

Mr. Speaker, by making these changes we can ensure continuity of both the advisory board and tribunal in performing their important functions. I respectfully move these amendments to the Buildings Accessibility Act to ensure continued support of accessibility objectives for everyone in our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to stand again, this time to speak to Bill 10, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act. Once again, as was the case with the last bill, we did receive a briefing on this. I thank the minister and his staff for doing that.

There are not a whole lot of changes here and I am not going to repeat what the minister said. It makes sense to be able to appoint a vice-chairperson in the case the chairperson is not available. Obviously we want to make sure that we have mechanisms in place to replace board members as needed. That is all good.

Certainly the committee itself, Mr. Speaker – I think it is a great concept to have a committee of people who have disability. I am assuming the people on the committee would be people who actually have disabilities to be able to make commentary on the legislation and on the enforcement of the legislation. I certainly hope they make some commentary to the minister soon on blue zone regulations, but that is a positive thing.

I did ask at the briefing when was the last time there was any kind of a significant change to these regulations, which would be I assume based on the work of the committee. I was told 2006, which is eight years ago now. I am not sure if there are other things in the act and regulations that need to be updated; I would suspect there probably is. We would like to see that happen.

Mr. Speaker, the only other point I just wanted to make, particularly as we talk about openness and transparency and so on – and this does not apply just to this particular committee, but I will just this committee as an example to make the point. It could apply to any committee because we know government has many committees across a whole bunch of departments.

Some of the committees and boards and so on that the government has, the people actually receive remuneration for serving on the board. Then there are other boards which are basically

volunteer, but there would be travel involved and so on. Sometimes there is a per diem and sometimes there are different rates of per diems and so on.

In the case of this particular committee – again, a committee which I do support – I was told that basically there would be a per diem involved. There are people from throughout the Province – I assume maybe from Labrador perhaps, and all around the Province, and typically they would meet two or three times a year. That is what I have been told. That being said, they have not met for a full year. That is an issue, and, hopefully, that will change; but they typically meet two or three times a year. When they meet obviously there are per diems involved; there is travel costs involved. I guess if you are from out of town there would hotel costs involved, and so on, I would assume, for accommodations.

That is all well and good; but if that is going to happen with this or any committee that government has, and if the taxpayer is going to pay that cost – because ultimately it is the taxpayers' money that is paying for the cost of every committee throughout government, in all departments – then what I would like to see, which does not appear to be happening now, is I think it should be made public

It should be made public as to who all of these committees are. Government talks about putting stuff on their Web site, in the name of openness and transparency; that is all good. So on the Web site, we should be having committees, such as this one, so the public knows who all the committees are, when the committees met, what was the cost associated to these committee meetings, what are the minutes of the meeting, I would like to see the minutes of the meeting, what are the recommendations that were made to the minister, whether in this case –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the member to make his comments relative to Bill 10.

MR. LANE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am trying to draw it all in here because we are talking about chair to co-chairs –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I have given the member some latitude, but I cannot see where the member's comments are relative to Bill 10. I would ask him to make his comments relative to Bill 10.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I will just conclude by just saying that if we have this committee, which is does talk about this committee, it talks about the vice-chair of this committee and so on, if we are going to have it, I think that in the name of openness and transparency we should know what the committee is doing, the public should know and what the recommendations are, and what the government is going to do with those recommendations. That should be made public and placed on some sort of a Web site for the public to see, seeing as how we are paying for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista South.

MR. CROSS: North.

MR. SPEAKER: Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Two out of two, Mr. Speaker.

As I said a few moments ago, it is indeed a pleasure to stand here to first speak to Bill 10, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act. It is something I pay very close attention to, and always have and will. Most members of this hon. House know for what reason that is, and I am sure most people in my district and around the Province probably appreciate that by this time.

This particular act, it is not just a housekeeping chore right now, Mr. Speaker. This committee is very, very important to the functioning of people in our Province with accessibility issues

because of physical or other impediments. When the committee is not working, then these individuals are not represented and their advice is not garnished and given to the minister and to the department.

We had a wonderful briefing today. Like the member opposite, some questions we did ask, and a couple of questions I asked at the meeting will probably answer a couple of the questions that he posed a moment or two ago. First being that all of these people on this advisory committee to the minister are afflicted with disabilities. They are members of that community. Even though it is not intended or was not intended, the committee is pretty diverse as far as gender and geography is around our Province.

As well, none of the people on that committee are representing – let's say there was a person who was actually a member of the Independent Living Resource Committee, they are not there to represent that committee. They are there in a general case for all disabilities, and to speak and advise in all areas. That way the membership, which totals seven at this point, can speak in general to all disabilities. So no one is there particularly like we are here as members for our district.

We are here collectively fighting for our Province, but we also have, like in my case, Bonavista North – and the Speaker might think that I would want to represent Bonavista South too, sometimes. It means that we have a special interest in our district, but we also talk collectively for everyone in the Province. That means all of the members on this committee speak for that.

There was no stipulation to allow if the chair resigned to appoint another chair, or there was no stipulation that there was even a vice-chair nominated to this committee so that in the interim case, as it is right now – the current committee was refilled or re-slotted in July, 2012. The chair resigned recently, so until July, 2014, no meetings are able to be held because there is no mechanism by which you can call the group to order.

By having it stipulated that there would be a designated vice-chair who assumes office in the event that a chair resigns, then, Mr. Speaker, it makes sense that you have continuity. This assignment would mean the group can continue to advise the minister. Right now, I am saying the minister is still getting good advice from his officials, but at some point he also needs the input from this committee. That is the reason why we are putting this amendment forward.

As the member opposite said also, some people volunteer pretty well for these. They might get remunerated for their expenses in attending sometimes, but they volunteer or they are appointed for a two-year term. Things can happen in the two years. Someone who has a disability, their life may change as their degree of disability increases and they may not be able to finish out their term.

Health reasons, for completely different reasons, can affect that or, again, they may just not wish to continue because they are not paid officials. They have a right to leave this volunteer position. With no procedure or mechanism in place to appoint in the short term, it does not allow for meetings to take place and hence the continuity of advice is affected.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure all hon. members would accept that we are speaking today on behalf of this committee or this group, and we would like to make sure all of the advice that could possibly be given to the department, the good advice that comes, can continue. In doing this amendment, we are allowing that to happen.

I ask all members for their support, and I am very pleased to second this amendment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I take pleasure in standing up and talking to Bill 10. Like the Member for Bonavista North, I

think he said some eloquent words when it came to the committee, so I commend him on that.

I know the situation he goes through on a daily basis when it comes to family, as do I, because I have a handicapped brother-in-law who I love dearly, very much. Walter is forty-three years old and I can appreciate the opportunity right now, Mr. Speaker, to take myself for a minute, speak to this piece of legislation and put myself in his shoes.

Sometimes it is hard to relate to, I guess, for somebody who is able-bodied who does not have a family member, for example, who is disabled but I look at this as being a very important piece of legislation for that reason. I commend government in this particular case for making these changes so that these meetings, first and foremost, of the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board can continue, number one. Number two, that they would be – I guess while they will be meeting a little bit more because they will have a vice-chair position, I would hope that they will also be able to approach government with more timely advice and everything as time goes on.

I look at this as being a very positive move. If I could just add a couple of more thoughts to this, Mr. Speaker, and probably consideration too for the minister at future times, while he is making this small change I am wondering about the representation on the board itself. I know the names that are on the board there now, some of the names are quite familiar and well-known names in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think there is a good dichotomy that has been captured here with the board presently as it sits.

At the same time – like I said, just a couple of thoughts – because there was no chair, and the chair had to resign for one reason or another, we know there was no vice-chair, so the vice-chair position is put in. The last time they actually met was basically last year. So it has been a year. A lot can happen to disabilities, for example, the whole issue in less than a year. We saw some changes, for example, to this building in construction that is happening here. We know

that awareness. We are a little bit more sensitive to the awareness and the needs of those people.

The advisory board members are chosen by government, and at times they have been members of disability organizations. I would like to see a little bit more representation that represents the dynamic of what we are seeing happen in the Province, the demographic if you will.

For example, I do not know about the representation that some of the present board members have but just as an example, I would like to see somebody from the CNIB or the Seniors Resource Centre because we have an aging population. There is a chance for government to actually renew this board too and probably have a few more meetings and address some of the seniors' issues that we are going to be dealing with in the future when it comes to building accessibility.

Hopefully, government may be able to get this board to meet a little bit more often because I think we have to become more sensitive to the needs of the disabled as well as the other demographics like seniors, for example. We are getting older and the demographics, the statistics, are saying that we are going to have an older population as we go on. I hope the government would take that under consideration as well.

Other than that, the last time in my research that they actually met to conduct a review of the legislation, as far as I know – now like I said I could be wrong on this and maybe the minister can correct me. The last time that they actually reviewed the legislation was in 2004. A lot has changed within those ten years.

I will leave those facts with the government. Here is a time when they can get in there and get better representation from the groups like the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, the CNIB as I said, the Seniors Resource Centre, and have them play an active role in helping to grow the Province and improving the overall way that we look at disabilities in this Province.

Mr. Speaker, we are in favour of this legislation. There are a lot of things here that they can change too. Hopefully the minister and this government will come back and have a look at the overall legislation as we look at disabilities and make some future improvements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador speaks now, he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is great to see that everybody is supporting this bill. It is obvious that it is a good piece of legislation. Like the Member for Bonavista North mentioned, it is not just housekeeping; it is important that we keep this committee functioning twelve months of the year.

It has met two or three times a year in the past. It should be meeting at least two or three times a year going forward. I am committed to doing at least that and more. I agree with the Member for St. John's East; the more the better, for sure. I take him under advisement for sure with regard to his representation, the demographic shift in our Province. I will relay that.

I know that the appointments are up in June again, Mr. Speaker. We will certainly be talking to the people who are on the board, seeing if they are willing to stay, what their plans are, and how we are going to populate that board in the future. I will keep that in mind for sure.

In regard to a legislative review, Mr. Speaker, in 2004 there was probably some legislative work done then. The spring of 2006 is when we brought in a broad sweeping bunch of legislation around this. Also, in the fall of 2012 and winter

2012 we brought in some minor legislative changes as well.

The board has been active in the past and have contributed to what the legislation is in place today. They have done some very good work. We need to continue to make that happen.

Just a couple of other notes before I close, Mr. Speaker. I just want to thank the Member for Bonavista North for his comments. His knowledge of the work and challenge of the disability community goes far beyond most of the people here in this House. I thank him of his comments, and his understanding of the importance of the bill as well.

The Member for Mount Pearl South, I will certainly take his recommendation under advisement as well. It does have some merits, especially when it comes to posting expenses of these boards. They can be sought and found and provided – I know that for a fact – but posting it, hey, we are all about that. We will certainly look into that as well. So, we are okay there.

I have just one last comment, Mr. Speaker, before I close the debate. Last spring was the last time this board met; it has been awhile. The previous chairperson had to step down for some reasons, and, unfortunately, they have not met since then. This legislation will ensure that board will continue. That is the purpose of this legislation. We will have a vice-chair that can step into the role of chair while we search to either backfill another vice-chair or appoint that vice-chair as the board chair. It is good to see that happen.

I am happy to say and announce in the House here today, that we have identified a candidate who is known to the disability community, who actually sits on the board right now that has agreed to chair that board. We are going through the process now of all of the approvals. I had a great conversation with this individual. She is like-minded. She would like to see this board sit more often.

She is also very dedicated to the role of what this board can do, and certainly in an advisement

capacity, we look forward to her – she is passionate about what she wants to do. We had a great discussion and I think she is going to be a great board chair. In the next few days and weeks, we will make that announcement known to everybody. I suspect this board will be up and running very, very soon.

Mr. Speaker, I will close debate and leave it to the floor of the House to decide.

Thank you.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act. (Bill 10)

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

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

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act”, read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 10)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1. I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, to move that this

House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, the Budget Speech.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a pleasure, indeed, to rise in this hon. House today to speak on Budget 2014. First of all, I would like to thank the people of Baie Verte – Springdale district for their ongoing support. It is certainly an honour and a privilege to represent them wherever I go, not only in the House of Assembly. As MHAs, we are all cognizant of our responsibilities to represent our districts to the best of our ability. We take our job seriously, we do it with pride, we do it with humility, and we do it with passion, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to commend the Premier and the Minister of Finance and her department officials for carving a Budget that reflects the needs and the concerns of the people. The pre-Budget consultations and the dialogue we had from MHAs, Cabinet ministers, community groups, individuals – all stakeholders – yielded fruit. Budget 2014 reflects these consultations, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Premier and the Cabinet for listening and responding accordingly, carving out a Budget that promotes the sharing of our wealth, a fair society, and balancing economic sustainability with caring for those who need our help the most – such as seniors, such as children, such as youth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: To me, Budget 2014 reaches beyond social justice, it reaches beyond a fair society, and it reaches beyond the sharing of wealth. Budget 2014 is a Budget with a big heart, Mr. Speaker.

Picture this for a moment: A strong, vibrant, healthy heart pumps blood and, therefore,

oxygen throughout the body to all parts of the body, to arteries, veins, capillaries, tissues, organ systems, enabling the body to perform as a whole, a complete unit, Mr. Speaker. No heart; no growth. No heart; no life. No heart; no oxygen. No heart; you have an empty, lifeless shell with no function and no purpose in life.

So, Mr. Speaker, I liken Budget 2014 to the human heart, biologically speaking. Just as the heart sustains life and supplies the life-giving blood to the body and oxygen, Budget 2014 supplies that essential funding to communities, to groups, to individuals, and to the economy, and to people who are in desperate need.

As a society we have that responsibility, to help those in need. That is how we were raised. It is part of our culture, neighbours helping neighbours, families helping families, community groups helping community groups. Of course, as a government we foster, we culture that attitude, Mr. Speaker, and we promote that in Budget 2014.

Budget 2014 keeps the economy vibrant. Budget 2014, a big heart, keeps the economy thriving. Budget 2014, with a big heart, keeps the economy robust. Budget 2014 keeps the economy firing on all cylinders, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: I was on a roll, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, when the economy is firing on all cylinders it is evidence that the segments of our society are performing very well. In fact, what did the Conference Board of Canada say about Newfoundland and Labrador's economy? It says that Newfoundland and Labrador will outpace, by a long shot, all other provinces for this year and next, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Now that is nothing to be ashamed of. That is awesome and that is good news, Mr. Speaker, number one in Canada.

So let's examine some of these economic indicators and look at their performance to just see if we have reasons to hang our head or can we stand up with pride. Economic indicators, number one, in 2013 Newfoundland and Labrador was the strongest among provinces in economic growth at 5.9 per cent. That is referring to the GDP, the Gross Domestic Product. Next year there is going to be a slight increase.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Number two, with respect to employment growth; in 2013 the average employment in the Province was 232,800. A record high, Mr. Speaker. A slight increase next year, 2014.

Number three, with respect to the unemployment rate, in 2013 it was the lowest it has been since 1973 with more people working in the Province than ever before in our history.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: In 2014, it is going to be stabilized.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to household income, average weekly earnings increased by 2.6 per cent to \$951 in 2013. We were second highest among the provinces, only to Alberta. Alberta was number one. Four percent above the Canadian average. In 2014, we will grow 3.4 per cent to \$22.8 billion – with a great, big capital B, Mr. Speaker.

Number five, disposable income, a growth of 3.5 per cent to \$17.4 billion for 2014.

With respect to retail sales, Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland was second among provinces in 2013 in retail sales growth, driven by new car sales, which rose to the highest level ever recorded in the Province. In 2014, retail sales will grow by 3.5 per cent.

Finally, with respect to capital investment, in 2013 capital investment was \$12.3 billion, a

record high. Now, with respect to 2014, it will grow 2.4 per cent to \$12.6 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to hang my head and be shy about these economic indicators. These economic indicators are based on hard, cold, bare statistics – factual. It is not based upon my opinion or anybody else’s opinion. These indicators show that we have a robust economy. A vibrant economy enables both government and the people to enjoy a real good life, a quality way of life, what we all strive for.

People are working. People are spending money. People are vacationing. People feel good about themselves. They have a positive image about themselves, Mr. Speaker. We have a lot to be positive about and nothing to be negative about, as such, when we look at the picture as a whole. We are a have Province, able to stand on our own two feet, and we are able to pay our own way. We now have a big say in determining our own destiny, instead of relying on other people or Ottawa to map out or carve out our own economic future.

The umbilical cord has been cut, Mr. Speaker. We are now adults. We have come of age. We have now matured. We can stand on our own two feet and we can walk by our own selves. No monetary figure can be put on that amount of pride. No amount of money can be put on us having a positive image about ourselves, a can-do attitude.

You remember, Mr. Speaker, as educators we always remind our students about attitude. What did we say about attitude? Attitude determines – you fill in the blank. What is it? Attitude determines altitude. I will say it again, attitude determines altitude. That is a very important phrase that we can always keep right across this Province, not only as educators, but as government officials and as ordinary citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a great message for our youth to carry out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Now, Mr. Speaker, getting back to Budget 2014, a Budget with a big heart.

Why do I dub Budget 2014 a budget with a big heart, Mr. Speaker?

It pumps funds into infrastructure that was and is aging throughout the Province and is unsafe; upgrades in roads; upgrades in ferries; upgrades in bridges; construction of new schools; upgrades to schools; long-term care facilities; I could go on, the acquisition of new water bombers, all create jobs, Mr. Speaker, all create employment. Not only that, but it also leaves a legacy for modern facilities for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to enjoy long after we are long gone.

As an example, the \$81 million injected into the Provincial Roads Improvement Program this year. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, right across the Province people are all excited and pleased. That is a very significant amount put into the Provincial Roads Improvement Program this year.

People in my district, for example, are delighted with the roadwork to be done on Route 410 which leads to Fleur de Lys, and Route 414 which leads to La Scie, and Route 392 which leads to Little Bay, St. Patricks, Beachside area.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Minister of Transportation and the Premier for getting the job done, for getting the tenders out early to take advantage of the short construction season. We hope the snow goes by August and the ice goes because we will not have that advantage if the ice and snow is still on the ground. The tenders, I might say, Mr. Speaker, closed April 1 for Route 410 and Route 414.

Mr. Speaker, people appreciate the \$200 million pumped into municipalities to address the water and sewer needs, recreational needs, projects, and safe drinking water demands by the communities. I commend the Minister of Municipal Affairs for expediting the process and getting the multi-year capital and municipal capital works out early, or allotments out early so that the work can be done early. I say keep up the good work Mr. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the Town of Baie Verte and the Town of Fleur de Lys are pleased and they will be excited to hear that funding will be forthcoming to move their project along. Both towns have been working with government since 2011 to obtain a new fire hall and a fire hall complex or a town hall complex in that regard. We see our dream fulfilled or become a reality.

Also the people of Green Bay will be delighted and pleased to learn that Budget 2014 will continue to advance the advancement of a new hospital to be constructed in Springdale, which was announced in Budget 2011. On that note, Mr. Speaker, on all these municipal capital works projects I want to thank the mayors, councils, local people, and leaders of the community for their patience and for their support for having the vision to carry out projects to meet the needs of the people of their communities. I salute them today. They are leaders and they are visionary people so that they can help the people who they serve on a daily basis.

As a former mayor, Mr. Speaker, I have served as Mayor of Springdale for four years, I can certainly understand the challenges that small communities have in trying to meet the demands of their people, trying to deliver programs and services, address the aging infrastructure, and address other needs that they may have as they come up on a shoestring budget due to a declining tax base. Any help from government is greatly appreciated, as you know.

I know that the mayors and councillors out there do appreciate any help that the government does give them on a daily, a monthly, and a yearly basis. Just the mere fact that we have increased the MOGs and the 90-10 cost ratio has helped the small communities a great deal, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the government for doing that.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to talk a little bit about rural broadband which communities in my district are concerned with. We have made tremendous progress on that, expanding access to broadband right throughout the Province. Since 2003, we have invested \$29 million

leveraging \$115 million to serve 500 communities. What is the result of that investment? I am proud to say that 95 per cent – not 90 per cent; not 85 per cent, not 80 per cent, but 95 per cent of households have coverage today.

Is that enough, Mr. Speaker? Not really; we have some more work to do. I am pleased to see that another \$4.9 million is in Budget 2014 to continue to work with industry, to work with communities to partner with the stakeholders to make further improvements to access to rural broadband. I am sure the small coastal communities in my district such Fleur de Lys, Nippers Harbour, Shoe Cove, and Ming's Bight will be happy to know that government is still investing in rural broadband.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot sit down without referencing seniors, the backbone of our community. With this year's Budget 2014 we are giving the fourth increase since 2003 to the Seniors' Benefit. As a result, the maximum payout seniors will receive in October 2014 will be the highest ever.

In Budget 2014, the \$40.4 million for the program is more than five times higher than Budget 2013; 42,000 seniors – I repeat, 42,000 seniors will benefit yearly under this program. As I said earlier, seniors are the backbone of our communities. You cannot go anywhere in any community right across this Province without conversing with, talking to, or banging into a senior who is volunteering. They have carved out our culture, they have carved out our values, and seniors have shaped us to who we are today. I commend them for continuing to carry out their volunteer work.

I always liken volunteerism to the oil that lubricates the engine parts so that the engine can fire on all cylinders. Without these volunteers, seniors, there would be a lot of friction, there would be a lot of damage, a lot of 'disjointment'; but volunteers in our communities, especially seniors, holds everything together and they make things run smoothly in our communities. I think of people in Middle Arm, the senior groups in La Scie, the

senior groups in Baie Verte, the senior groups in Springdale such as the Life Unlimited for Older Adults, they are dedicated to their cause, and they have a vision to help their community and add quality to the life of their communities. I just want to applaud them today, Mr. Speaker.

Why Budget 2014 with a big heart, Mr. Speaker? There is funding for Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association. There is funding for child care. There is funding for Child, Youth and Family Services. There is funding for an Early Childhood Learning Strategy. There is funding for autism to increase the access for assessment so that wait times could be decreased. There is funding to expand the Medical Transportation Assistance Program. There is funding to expand the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program. There is enhancement of cancer care for those people who are stressed, and those people who are suffering from that dreaded disease.

Now, you can understand, Mr. Speaker, why I dub Budget 2014 a Budget with a big heart. Look at the youth, Mr. Speaker, post-secondary education – we are committed to accessible and affordable post-secondary education. For our youth, we are going to continue the freeze on tuition in MUN and the College of the North Atlantic. We will eliminate the loans and replace them with grants. As a result, we have the best student aid package in the Nation of Canada, Mr. Speaker. We are proud of that. Talk to any youth, talk to any in post-secondary education across the Province – those who are studying – they do appreciate the support that they get from this government.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, another good example of a big heart: pumping over \$5 million into the firefighters who serve our communities very, very well. They take care of our communities. They provide safety and security for us. I want to thank them today as well.

So, in conclusion, Budget 2014: a big heart.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

It is an honour to stand up and speak for the first time to Budget 2014, and it is an honour to follow the member across the way. I was going to give him credit, but he did that himself during his speech.

Anyway, it is an honour to follow – and he always speak with such enthusiasm and gusto that you have to give the man credit. He is obviously passionate about it, and I can appreciate that.

Now, not us let get that confused with me agreeing with what he is saying. I have a number of notes here on what I was going to say as I speak to this non-confidence motion in the Budget, firstly. I guess the member across – I have to speak to this, it was not planned, but he talked about this was the Budget with a big heart. I did not know should I go back and say, well, last year it was the Budget with the stone heart, or is this year the Budget again where the government – and I think I actually heard the phrase: tough love. I guess that is good news for the people out there listening, knowing that the government is practicing tough love.

The member said it was the Budget with the big heart, and it reminded me of the old cartoon The Grinch. It is a government that is trying to make us believe they have – we all know the heart is too small, but all of a sudden we are trying to convince everybody the heart is so big that it cannot be contained within its chest.

We could speak about a number of things. If we are using the analogy of the heart, I could talk about how the \$1 billion borrowed was the defibrillator that pumped up this government. The \$1 billion is the defibrillator that makes the heart go around that this government talks about.

This first time when I am speaking, I want to stick to probably the biggest component of the Budget, which is health. Health routinely makes

up the biggest aspect of the Budget. It is about 40 per cent of the spending.

What I want to talk about, I have notes made here. I want to go through some different aspects that were brought in this Budget, and I want to make some comments to each one. What I am going to do is I am just going to go through them in no particular order of importance. They are each very important.

The one thing I think that applies to many of them, what they have in common is that a lot of the things in this Budget were issues that the Official Opposition, the Liberal Party advocated for. We spoke up for the people. We asked the questions. We did the research. We pressed government, and government reacted to our questions. I am glad to see that advocacy works.

I think we have to give credit to a lot of the advocates who are out there in the community. Whether it is advocates for autism, advocates for CF, or advocates for smoking cessation. I think they all need to be congratulated for the work they have done on behalf of those they represent, whether it is family members, whether it is people within their community.

One of the things we talked about was medical transportation. Medical transportation was expanded. There were questions from the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair in the last session asking about improving on this system. Her questions were answered. I am glad to see that her work has not gone unnoticed. There were a number of changes there.

These are all very positive to the people out there. As someone who lives a significant distance away from St. John's, this is something that my office and my constituency assistant see on a very regular basis. It is something we have had to deal with, and we are glad to see that the questions we have asked have been answered.

Now, there is a difference between the promise being put out and the promise being followed up on. I will get to that a little bit later, because one of the things about medical transportation is going to relate to something I will talk about

after, which is the Corner Brook hospital. I will get to that; I do not want to get ahead of myself. The good news is government has changed their mind, enhanced the program to be more reflective of the needs of the people. Those needs which were spoken out by the Official Opposition.

Autism, we all know that yesterday was World Autism Awareness Day. In fact, we have had some troubling news in the last week, in that the ratio has now gone from one in eighty-eight children to one in sixty-eight. It is a staggering number, and I know it concerns members on both sides of this House. I know everybody here is concerned.

Actually, what is even higher numbers, one in forty-two boys in this Province will be on the spectrums, and that is a staggering number. I am glad to see there was an investment in autism. It is something I have personally asked about, I have personally pressed on.

When you have advocates like the Autism Society, and you have advocates like the group FEAT that are out there, they are pressing. They were happy to see this announcement. I have some press releases here they have put out since the Budget, saying: Do you know what? We are glad to see it, but I have to caution the government on two things. Number one, we cannot just put the money there and think it is all going to go away.

I actually talked to an advocate once before who referenced a meeting they had with a government minister who said: What is going on here? We have thrown all this money at it, what do you want us to do? That is the problem; you cannot just throw money at the problem. We have to identify the problem, work with everybody and try to identify the needs, the solutions to that. The investment is good but let's just not sit back there.

The other problem is that this is something we have been asking about for years. In fact, I was very proud yesterday when the Leader for the Official Opposition stood up and said we need a provincial strategy for autism. We know it is

getting a lot of attention across the country. There is a need for a national strategy. We are saying there is a need for a provincial strategy, and we are very happy to put that out there.

However, the investment that comes and the new positions that have been created, they were in response to a wait-list that is around 400 people. They were in reference to when the ratio was one in eighty-eight, now it is one in sixty-eight. So we are just catching on here. We are barely keeping up. We are obviously not keeping up. There are two issues here. There is the diagnosis, and then there is the treatment after diagnosis.

I am sure I will be speaking about this again. I am happy with this investment. I cannot take that away, but this is a government that has been recognized for getting the worst value for investment in health care. So let's not just talk about investment, let's talk about health outcomes. What is the point of the investment if we are not changing things? We need to change what is going on here.

I am very proud to say, I also have to recognize the work of the Member for St. John's North who has also asked a number of questions on this, especially with the educational component, about occupational therapists in school. Actually, they are not there and we need them. We need to have them there. I am not saying government is not concerned about this, but I am saying we need to work together to make this happen. We are happy to provide answers where possible and work with the advocates, work with the parents.

I would be remiss – I have so many things to talk about. I want to specifically recognize the group AIM, Autism Involves Me. It is a group back in Port aux Basques that works with parents and family members of children with autism. They have just recently been formed. That group is going to get bigger. You look at the ratio; we know it is going to get bigger. These are the groups we need to work with.

I want to move forward to an issue, again, another Liberal initiative that has been pushed.

We have asked questions. We have done press releases. That is smoking cessation. It was announced in the Budget, and I am happy to see that government recognized the need. We have asked for it. The NLMA has asked for it.

Here is the point I want to make. The announcement was there would be funding, and I think it is around a cost of \$700,000, which will be for low-income persons in this Province. That is a start; however, I put this out there for consideration. The Province takes in \$135 million yearly from the sale of tobacco, which was increased in this Budget. The cost of cigarettes went up last week, I believe it was.

We have advocated for this; the NLMA has advocated for it. The cost for this program is \$712,000. The Budget increase alone will see an additional \$17 million in revenue. Seventeen million dollars in revenue would cover smoking cessation for all the smokers in this Province five times over – five times over.

When we talk about the health system and the investment we are making, what we are saying is that if we had gone the extra step we could have covered smoking cessation for everybody in the Province, the Province still would have had extra revenue from this additional income from the raise in the price of tobacco, and we could have covered everybody. If we can get just a few people to quit smoking, to cease smoking, we are going to see improved health outcomes in the long run. We are going to see those improved outcomes. We are going to see less COPD, heart conditions, and people within the health system.

Good move, but not far enough. I think we could have gone farther. I think the revenue alone from this one tax increase could have covered it for everybody. All people across the Province would have had access to it.

I want to move on quickly to personal care homes and community care homes; two groups that have been very vocal in the fact that their needs are not being met. I have met with them and I have talked to them. I know members of the government have heard from them. I know

they have. The problem is, number one, they are being lumped together and both have very different needs.

The interesting thing is that if you look at Progressive Conservative press releases from the late-1990s, they criticize the government continuously for not doing enough for personal care homes.

AN HON. MEMBER: You are not going back far enough.

MR. A. PARSONS: I say to the member opposite, you will get an opportunity to speak and you can talk about what you have done for personal care homes then, by all means.

AN HON. MEMBER: You need to go on back (inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: By all means, you can talk about it then what you have done. I have to quickly say, refrain for a second, this is a government that the answer to every question is what we were left with twelve years ago, what we were left with.

Personal care homes: You look at the press releases that the government put out there. I think actually the Member for Exploits may have been there; he may have been a part of that criticism. Here is the problem: They got in government and did not do what they had to do.

It is funny, you say it, you are in for a decade and the complaints are there from these personal care home operators. The problem is now what we are seeing are personal care homes closing in a number of areas. We are seeing community care homes that just wrote actually last week to the Premier and said we need help, but they are not getting it. These are our most vulnerable. When you talk about seniors, when you talk about persons with disabilities, these are groups taking care of those individuals crying out for help and they are not getting it. I put that out there for consideration.

I move forward to something I was very proud to see. I congratulate a number of people.

There was actually one young man in the Province who is well known for his advocacy on that and that is John Bennett whose son John Bennett Jr. has cystic fibrosis. He is a big-time advocate for it. We have seen him on the news; we have heard him on the news.

That was something that after meeting with John, meeting with physicians, and meeting with CF Canada we in the Official Opposition ask questions. We pressed the case, and we did the research. We said what is going on here is that we have a lower or worse standard of care here than in the rest of Canada and most of the Western world.

We are taking credit for bringing it up here in the House, but we have to congratulate the advocates out there, the families, who are dealing with it and who advocated and came to us, and came to government, and said we need to do more and newborn screening is the start. We have to give these children and these parents the best health care right from the moment of birth, and the best way to do that is have newborn screening. We asked the questions and do you know what? Government listened to what we said.

I know there is no one out there prouder than John Bennett. John Bennett is very proud to know that now his son – and again, I saw a TV story; his son is running around, having fun. He is a really smart kid; he cheers for the Montreal Canadians – really smart kid. Do you know what? John knows that he does not want any other parent in this Province – I do not want any other parent in this Province – to not have access to what they would have if they were in any other province in Canada. I am glad to see it now.

I do have questions that I will bring up in Health Estimates because there is \$158,000 allotted. What my questions will be on is: How it is allotted? Where it will go? These are things that will be taken care of in Estimates, and the minister and the department will have ample opportunity to explain what we are doing now and what we do in the future. I am glad to see

action on an item that we brought up, the Official Opposition.

Now, I want to talk about the dental plan. The dental plan is one that was interesting; it got a lot of notoriety last year. It was announced actually, I think, a couple of years ago. I know that there are a lot of individuals, low-income people, who were so happy about it. I talked to dentists and denturists out there who said:

Andrew, this is great; I am seeing people who need this health care. We can do the link, when we talk about health care outcomes, the fact that poor dental care can lead to very serious health implications affecting quality of life and raising the cost of health care. It is an investment here that is going to save us money on the back end.

The plan comes out, and the problem was the plan was not really a plan. There was nowhere near the amount of money necessary allocated to do this. Before April 1, 2013 there was no cap on funding under the dental plan. In March, last year, government announced it was putting a cap for low-income patients of \$150 per person per year and \$750 on denture care. Now, two things; number one, when you talk about open and listening, the dental association of this Province, those professionals, they condemned this. They said, number one, you did not talk to us and you did not listen to us; you did not even come to us. They said: Patients are now going to end up in hospital emergency rooms.

That is something we brought up a number of times: the situation in ERs our hospitals. Now, two things; number one, this year they increased the cap from \$150 to \$200. So that is great for those individuals, but there is no increase in the amount of money, so there is actually less people who are going to get the help they need. Here is the other thing: Dentures cost \$1,200 to \$1,300 for a set. So if you get \$750 a year, you are only affording one half. These people are low income. Where are they going to come up with the other half of the money? How are they going to do this?

So I say to you, Mr. Speaker – we have actually asked these questions in the House – your program is effectively saying people can afford

one half of a set of dentures per year, which sounds ridiculous, and quite frankly, it is. It is completely ridiculous. Where are these people going to come up with the money – they cannot. So what is happening – and again, without getting into the science of it all, you usually need both sides of the dentures at the same time. Waiting a year for one half does not generally work.

So again, I say to government, you tout your dental plan, but I would suggest two things. Number one, listen to the people who are putting forward these concerns; number two, listen to the professionals who never were listened to in the first place. There can be more done.

Now, at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move a sub-amendment. I want to move, seconded by the Member for Bay of Islands, that the amendment that was previously presented, the non-confidence motion, be amended by changing the period at the end thereof to a comma, and by adding immediately thereafter the following words: and that this House also condemns the government for its failure to present a Budget that reflects the possibilities which exist in terms of addressing the needs of the people of this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Burgeo – La Poile has proposed a sub-amendment, and the House will take a brief recess to consider whether the amendment is in order.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We have considered that the amendment is in order.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I am happy to hear the amendment is in order. I will continue speaking to the Budget.

Now, I have been talking mainly about health, and I think I am going to continue on in that trend. It is a huge part of the Budget. It is a huge aspect of daily life for every single one of us in this Province. I will continue on. I have touched on a number of issues.

Let me see. Mental health and addictions; I was glad to see there was \$380,000 allotted for a second methadone clinic in St. John's. There was a nice re-announcement for the adult addictions facility in Harbour Grace. That was something from Budget 2010. I am glad to see it. It is necessary, but you have to get the value out of your announcements, certainly. You can redo them and redo them, and it sounds great.

I know there are a number of other facilities in this Province that are under construction, whether it is in Paradise or Grand Falls-Windsor. Right now, it sounds like they are not on track. They were supposed to be open by now and they are not. I have some concerns over that. I would like to see why this is the case.

I want to continue on. Mental health is a huge issue and I am going to devote some time to this later on because the stats are troubling, one in five suffers some form. To see there was not as much mentioned about mental health in this Budget under the health aspect, I was disappointed to see that. I will continue on here because there are so many different things to cover off.

One of them is something I have brought up, and unfortunately there was absolutely – there was one thing in the Budget about it, which was good, but I will explain my issues with it, and that is the ambulance service in this Province. To provide some background for people (a) the private operators and community operators in this Province have been without a contract, operating on the same contract for two years.

What has gone on, there was an ambulance review that was commissioned, which is good.

Actually, the operators acted in good faith. They said: Do you know what? We will refrain from negotiations while you get your report, because this report is going to figure out what the issues are. They acted in good faith and did it. The problem is they are still at the table, they are there but the government is not there.

It is still no further ahead, and what you are going to see – mark my words – is a reduction in emergency services in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what is being proposed. Do the same amount of work but with less funding.

This was with a group that is already struggling to compete with the public operations, the RHAs. Again, higher funding, higher amounts of money. They have issues too, do not get me wrong. We just had a rally out in front of Confederation Building because of the number of red alerts in this Province, which is scary to think of. This is a service we all, hopefully, do not need but certainly we know it is there and we appreciate that it is there.

In this Budget, what did we see? Did we see some kind of good news announcement? We saw \$400,000 for a study I think it was, on central dispatch. It is going towards central dispatch. The \$400,000 is there, which is for Budget 2014. The problem is the government consultants said (a) you can have this up and running by spring 2015 and it is going to cost \$5 million. If you are spending \$400,000 in Budget 2014, there is no way you are going to get this done on time, there is no way.

Again, I hope I am wrong. I hope I stand here next year in the Budget and say: Do you know what? Central dispatch, a necessary, critical component of emergency service in this Province is up and running. I strongly, strongly feel that we are not going to see it.

We have operators out there, we have paramedics out there, EMRs, and they would love to see government work with them. Do you know what? It affects members on both sides. We should all be working together to ensure that emergency service is there. Right now with the proposal that has been put forward, the number

of emergency ambulances in my community is going to be reduced. God forbid, if two emergencies come in at one time because one is going to get taken care of and one is not. I put that out there.

Family caregivers, \$8.2 million there. That is good news. The problem is there was \$6.1 million last year; we still have not seen that. I know it is being operated on and I am looking forward to seeing the results of that. I know staff are being trained and there were 250 placements.

I know we have all heard from people who could not avail of this because they were already in the system. So there are a lot of upset people out there. I am going to give it the benefit of the doubt, I am going to wait and see what comes out of this. I do not want to prejudge it. I know we had to wait long enough for it, but let's see how this plays out.

I have some questions here on what was not in the Budget. These were all things, many of which we advocated for. One thing, and I am not going to spend a whole lot of time on it because I am sure other members in our caucus, especially the Member for Bay of Islands and there are other members in our caucus who are all affected by it, and that is the Corner Brook hospital.

AN HON. MEMBER: Labrador is affected.

MR. A. PARSONS: Labrador is affected, that is right. Right down the Southwest Coast. The good news is that we saw \$15 million to continue the planning and design. The problem is, it is 2014 and this was first announced in 2007.

MR. GRANTER: What about the Stephenville hospital? You forgot about that. The Stephenville hospital (inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear the member, the Member for Humber West is bellowing across at me. I would suggest, if he wants, I will kindly sit down and he can stand up and put his thoughts about the Corner Brook hospital on the

record. Put it on the record, because it is right in your district. It is right in your area. If he does not want to the Premier can. I tell you where we stand, there is not enough there, and we have been waiting too long. It is the same old, same old. The good news is there is \$500,000 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: Some protection from the member, Mr. Speaker, but I am kind enough to sit down if he wants to stand up and talk about the Corner Brook hospital. I will give up my time if he wants to stand up; or maybe the Minister of Environment, who is also on the West Coast. You think she would be advocating for it, but again silence is golden – silence is golden.

It was promised since 2007, and all we are seeing is more planning. Now, the interesting thing – and I know the member knows this more than me – the Premier said he is not leaving until the first steel goes up, but according to everything that I hear in the news and read, I find that hard to believe. Maybe you can correct me.

Anyway, let us wait and see how this plays out; but, I will tell you now, what we saw in this Budget for the Corner Brook hospital – I call it the Corner Brook hospital because it is based in Corner Brook, but it is a West Coast hospital, and it is a Labrador hospital, and it is a Southwest Coast. We are all going to avail of it. It might even have people from Central. We have nothing. It is disappointing again; it is a recycled promise, one that they have put out there. The people of this area rely on it, rely on that promise, and the promise is continually broken. I know everybody on the West Coast is disappointed.

Do you know what? The good news is that there are a lot of advocates out there, and they are having a meeting on April 24 in Corner Brook, and I look forward to seeing as many members there as possible. I look forward to it. Maybe the Premier will go, maybe the Member for

Humber West, the Minister of Environment, the Member for Port au Port. I know there a lot on this side are going to go.

Now, another issue is that when it comes to diabetes in this Province we did see money for dialysis. Do you know what? Dialysis is a service that is obviously very important to those living and affected by diabetes. It is very important. I am fortunate enough that in my area we manage to receive it, especially through the hard work of the individuals of the Southwest Coast who fundraised hundreds of thousands of dollars for theirs. I congratulate those in Bonavista who managed to get their funding for it.

The problem is, with dialysis, dialysis shows a failure to combat the problem at the front end. Prevention and intervention is the key, and in this Budget it is sadly lacking again. We need a strategy.

I heard a physician, when we had a round table on health, talk about we are great at sick care; but when it comes to health care, including prevention and wellness, we are not where we need to be. We are not there.

In 2020, it is expected that 73,000 people in this Province are going to have diabetes. I heard one of the members opposite talk about all of the things we are first in; we are also first in this country when it comes to the rate of type 2 diabetes. That is not a great distinction. We are not doing enough. It is anticipated that health care costs will be \$322 million by 2020 to care for those with diabetes. We talk about hospitals and we talk about the cost. The average length of hospital stay for a person with diabetes is four times longer than an individual without diabetes.

I say again to the government, as we have continuously done, you listened to us on all the other stuff we advocated for, but you are missing out on some things that affect a lot of people and cost a lot of money. It is going to improve the standard of care, it is going to improve people's lives, and it is going to save us money down the road. We are not being listened to on that. I think it is the right move. Again, for a

government that is continually ranked as having the worst bang for your buck when it comes to health care dollars, these are things that could improve quality of life and the cost.

Staying on that, we hear all these different investments, which are good, but we are not hearing anything when it comes to prevention. There is no real imagination; there is no real initiative. That is the problem when you have a government that has been around this long. You start looking tired. You run out of ideas. You run out of initiative. You run out of imagination.

This year was the Budget with a heart. Last year was the Budget – I do not know what term I would put on it. Certainly there was no heart there. There was a knife in the heart. When it comes to this, we are sadly lacking still, and that is why we do not have confidence in this Budget. That is why we do not have confidence in this government.

I am going to move away from health for just a second. I only have a little bit of time left. All of us have district issues – all of us – and that is our job. We get elected by the people in our districts to talk about our districts.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear the Minister of Transportation; he is listening intently. Do you know what? That is good. That is not bad. He is listening to me. I am glad to hear that. I appreciate that. We have our moments, but as long as he is listening that is a start.

I have to give the minister credit, actually. I am going to say something, and this is on behalf of the individuals in Ramea and Grey River. Today, I mentioned about the conditions of the roads in my district. We have gone through some tough times in the last week, and we obviously have a disagreement in what is going on there.

We had an issue back in early 2014 when it came to the *Gallipoli* in our district, servicing the people in Ramea. What happened was that

government made a decision that they were going to take it away. They did not consult and they did not listen; but, to the minister's credit – and I know he is waiting for this; his ears are tingling because he knows that I am going to say something nice, which proves the fact that it is not all negative. It never has been.

The people of Ramea and the surrounding areas and actually there are people from all over the country, people from there who spoke up, and did they ever speak up – through e-mails, through phone calls, through Facebook, through petitions. What did the minister do? The minister listened to them and said our decision was wrong, and I am going to change it around. I am going to do the right thing. He did the right thing. For that, I applaud him. I applaud him for doing the right thing. He listened to the concerns of the people. The problem is he is only one minister out of a Cabinet full; other ones, maybe not so much listening.

Now, let us not take away from the fact that, look, there are a lot of issues – and this is a minister that his portfolio affects every single one of us in this House in some way, whether it is ferries, whether it is roads. The roads in our Province, especially in my district – I have some very negative areas that I am hoping will be addressed and we will see where that goes. I think the good news is that he is listening to everybody. The problem is everybody has that issue; everybody is coming to him.

I will disagree today that I think my questions were fair. I have a number of parents who have called me in the last two days and said: My kids are home – the weather actually was not bad. The problem was the road was so blocked by the amount of snow that they just could not keep up with it. The workers, I have talked to them, I have been chatting with them, and I am putting out messages. The workers have been doing great work. They are actually applauded by the individuals in the communities, people who are upset, because not only do you have kids – again, during the bad times we know you cannot go back to school; but the weather has actually been decent and the road has been blocked. You have individuals who are trying to get to work. I

have had health care emergencies. I have had people call me and say: My mom is sick; the road is blocked. What do I do? So, I pass on the protocol that Transportation and Works says, which is: Call the hospital, call the ambulance, and we will work together to make it happen. That is good.

The problem I have is that it has been a week in many places and I think more could have been done. I appreciate the support we received from the City of Corner Brook as well. They did send out equipment. That was necessary and much appreciated, but I still have people calling me today saying: I cannot get through, the kids are home, the weather is not bad, but the school buses cannot operate.

I can probably talk to the Minister of Education about it. I think he should play a role in this as well. In some cases transportation can get through, but the school buses cannot because the roads are so narrow. What do you do in those cases? You take alternate steps. You work with private operators; you work with public operators. You do what you can to get those children to school. I just put that out there.

There are a lot of other issues in the district, roads, ferries, health care, and a nurse practitioner in Ramea. We have been dealing with that for ages. We have pressed on it. We have gotten some forward progress through the lobbying of the citizens who are affected. Advanced Education and Skills, I have a lot of issues there that we are trying to work on.

We have had some good news in the district. We have had some big projects there that through the work of private industry, through the work of the communities, and through the work of the people advocating we have gotten work there. There are workers coming home through private industry.

MR. JOYCE: Any horse racing in your district?

MR. A. PARSONS: There is no horse racing in my district. Anyway, we will leave that to another time.

At this time, I am going to get another opportunity to speak to the Budget. I am going to take my seat feeling that I have represented the people of my district, put their concerns forward, and represented the people of the Province, especially when it comes to health care and the steps that need to be taken in this Province.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly want to get into the Budget and the process of the Budget, but I cannot believe the Member for Burgeo – La Poile would actually have the gall today to stand up and go back and reference something by a PC Opposition Party in the 1990s. There is nobody here on this side who was there in the 1990s, and to have the nerve and the gall to stand up and make that kind of a statement.

I did not want to go back to when the Liberals were in power, but they were getting up and making some type of remark about a party that was in Opposition in the 1990s. Then, of course, they stood up a little while ago and were saying that the contracts were not all negotiated and NLTA was not finished. Well, let's remind the people: Who actually tore up contracts in the 1990s? Who actually tore up contracts belonging to the public service in the 1990s?

AN HON. MEMBER: Was that Clyde Wells?

MR. FORSEY: It was Clyde Wells, yes, under the Liberals, absolutely. Who froze wages in the 1990s? It was not the PCs, they were not in power. Then to have the gall to get up and say what a party who was in Opposition, the PC Party, what type of policy or statement they made. I just could not believe it. I guess they could not wait to get back power again, because how long would they be in before they would want to privatize Hydro again?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. FORSEY: It probably would not take them very long. They would probably want to privatize Hydro like they tried before, and it did not work. I cannot believe it.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who was the Premier then?

MR. FORSEY: Well, they were in power.

I know the Member for Bay of Islands certainly has a soft spot for the area of Corner Brook and the West Coast and the hospital over there. There is no doubt about it, and so he should. As all of our members here, we have that type of soft spot for our areas and our districts. However, let's remind the people across the way, there was a hospital they had promised a little bit further west in Stephenville. I do not know, it probably took them about twelve or fourteen years to get there. We are a lot closer today in Corner Brook than they were in Stephenville back in the 1990s.

I will just finish with this little tidbit about going back because, like I said, I did not want to go there. One tidbit was the election back in 2003, when we were talking about education. Well that is where I wanted to go, was to talk about education, how much we have done for it and how much investments have gone in there. We have come a long way, Mr. Speaker.

Also, I did want to mention the appreciation that our members had for the process of the Budget and how the process went. I know my colleague, the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale, had mentioned the process, how the Premier and the minister had several sessions and let the members sit around the caucus table and present our issues and our concerns provincially, and issues concerning our districts.

It was a great process and a great exercise, Mr. Speaker, and a lot of it came through in this Budget. A lot of it came through where most of the members did see some good things in this Budget that were good not only provincially, but it leaked down into their districts as well. It was

very important for their districts and very important to the Province.

We all have representation at the table and issues that were of concern to us. We were bringing these requests and concerns back from our districts and our constituents, Mr. Speaker. Two of the things that actually resonated with me that I was able to bring back to the table were concerning seniors and our youth.

This year, Mr. Speaker, it was great to hear that we have increased the tax benefit for seniors. However, one of the other things that was a concern was affordable housing and the Home Repair Program. Well, this year, I would just like to say, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and the provincial government will again partner with the Government of Canada to extend the investment in the Affordable Housing Agreement for an unprecedented five years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: The \$68 million agreement also extends to the Provincial Home Repair Program and will assist 2,100 households with low incomes to repair their homes.

The other one that was really of benefit, as well, Mr. Speaker, was the Residential Energy Efficiency Program. There was \$12 million invested for over three years and will assist up to 1,000 low-income homeowners.

Mr. Speaker, I recall a number of seniors coming into my office in the District of Exploits and asking for applications so they can make application for these programs, the Home Repair Program and especially REEP, as we call it. It was up to \$3,000. I spoke to one of the – I do not know if you would call him a contractor, but he is the guy who comes in and assesses the house. He will tell you what deficiency and what you are losing. Then after your work is done and you put in new windows, doors, or insulation, he will come back, assess it again, and do an efficiency on it. He will tell you how much heat you have saved or you were losing before you got the program. He was telling me that he has been all over the Island doing this for

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and he was saying it was one of the best programs that was ever introduced – one of the best. There were a lot of people in my district and across the Province who availed of that program. Of course, it was of great benefit for low-income earners.

Now, the affordable housing, the \$68 million, also extends into the home repair program, and it is going to be for over five years. This, again, is important for the seniors to be able to have affordable housing, something that is comfortable. I know out in the Central area and in the District of Exploits, there are a few of these there now and I know that the low-income seniors have moved in there and they certainly benefited from the affordable housing projects.

I wanted to get into the youth and education, too, but I have some quick facts before I do. To further reduce student debt, the provincial government is eliminating student loans and replacing them with non-repayable, up-front grants through an investment of \$14.7 million for two years. Of course, that was welcomed news to the youth in the Province. I know since this government came in, just in education alone – and I would like to state a few facts: like the elimination of school fees, free textbooks. I remember when we brought in the free textbooks, Mr. Speaker, and I spoke to one particular constituent in my district who said that particular year, when we brought in the free textbooks, she would save \$500 in September – \$500 that she would not have to come up with out of her pocket in September –

AN HON. MEMBER: That is for one year.

MR. FORSEY: That is for one year, absolutely – one year.

When you are on a very low income, \$500 just in one month to try to get your child back to school is a lot of money. So, that was welcomed news. Then, of course, we introduced skilled trades into the high schools, Mr. Speaker. That, in itself, when we talk about trades today and we talk about how many jobs are going to be needed

in 2020 and so on, we have come a long way in skilled trades.

When we introduced the program into the high schools – I am sure I told this story before because it was so fitting that in some high schools some students, I guess probably like a lot of us when we were in high school, are not sure what we want to do when we get out, whether we want to go to university or we want to do a trade or whatever.

I recall the teacher telling me one story about one particular student. He said that he did not know what he was going to do. He did not know if he was going to go to trade school or if he was going to do anything when he got out of high school. He said when we introduced the skilled trades into the high school, the young fellow was in the carpentry shop and, all of a sudden, the teacher realized the young fellow was right at home in the carpentry shop. That was a good investment by this government, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the tuition fees as well are frozen. That is welcomed news for the people in the Province and especially for our students.

I wanted to get into the education a little bit more and the investments in infrastructure. I also wanted to get in to health care, but I probably will not have the time. We can all get up and talk about how good we are doing and all of this, but it is nice to state the facts so people will know exactly what it is and what we are doing. Just this year, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014, an investment totalling \$852.7 million focused on advancing strategic infrastructure in rural and urban communities, as well as the management of Newfoundland and Labrador's transportation network.

Now, I am sure the Minister of Transportation can get up and detail the investments of his department, but it affects us all. It affects us provincially; it affects us in our districts as well. Just a few quick facts: more than \$81 million for upgrades and enhancements to the provincial highways, roads and bridges; which includes an early announcement of \$30 million on January 9. I recall when the minister went out and made that announcement to get the tenders out early. I

know my colleague for Baie Verte – Springdale was up and he mentioned it early. He had an announcement in his district. I am sure the people of his district were very pleased to hear that announcement and that it was going to be an early tender and hopefully some early work, as we are all hoping for and looking forward to.

Labrador: \$76.3 million for widening and upgrading of Phase II and III of the Trans-Labrador Highway, and \$7.3 million for completion of Labrador West to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. That is amazing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: I say to the Minister of Transportation – he probably did not hear me the first time – I had to speak about the investments and I am sure he is capable of doing it in much better detail, but I just wanted to mention it because it affects us all.

Of course, this one here – I am sure I have mentioned this one before; \$28.5 million has been allocated for the construction of a new lift bridge in Placentia and replace the Sir Robert Bond Bridge in Central Newfoundland.

AN HON. MEMBER: Where? Central?

MR. FORSEY: Central Newfoundland, yes. I heard a comment; the Sir Robert Bond Bridge is in Central. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is in Central. Actually, it is in the District of Exploits now. It is the Trans-Canada – the Member for Lewisporte never wanted to have said that it was in his district, and it never was. Then, of course, when we announced to get it replaced, I think then he was trying to figure out that it might be in his district, but it is not there.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. FORSEY: Oh, it is right in Bishop's Falls, I say, yes.

This is not only good for the economy and generates jobs there in the area, Mr. Speaker, but this is a vital link across the Province that connects all of Newfoundland, right from Port

aux Basques right to St. John's. It is a necessity and it is something that this Province recognized. It has been announced and hopefully over the next year or two we are going to see a new bridge there in Bishop's Falls.

Also, there was some remark made about equipment. I know that the Department of Highways and their workers do their best trying to clear the roads and maintain the roads; but there is a time when it is difficult, especially, as the Minister of Transportation said earlier, when you get certain storms and you get a lot of snow, it is very difficult to keep it cleared. This year, this government is investing another \$27.7 million to manage and operate the provincial government's fleet of 620 pieces of equipment and paint trucks in the Province, Mr. Speaker. We all want to see investments. We all want to see different things for our districts and for our people in the Province.

I have to touch on – and I usually do this almost every time, the investment in health care, but more so because the Member for Burgeo – La Poile mentioned it – dialysis. It is near and dear to me, and I have said this before as well. Eighteen years ago I had a family member who had to go on dialysis. Unfortunately, at that particular time, we had to either go to Corner Brook or St. John's for dialysis. That was not easy eighteen, twenty years ago. It was not easy at all.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we have gone from seven sites since we have come in to fourteen sites.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Absolutely, yes, it is worth applauding. Today, if you are in the District of Exploits, you can go to Grand Falls-Windsor for dialysis. You can go to Gander, if Grand Falls is overcapacity. With the opening of the site in Harbour Breton, that then will of course relieve some pressure off the dialysis in Grand Falls-Windsor.

From what I know right now, I do not believe there are any wait times or anyone there waiting now on the list. There have been for some time.

There have been as high as three and four people on the wait-list. Now with the new site opening up in Harbour Breton, Mr. Speaker, it is going to make a big difference to the people who are on dialysis, like less travel. It is not easy if you are doing dialysis, like maybe three times a week, and you have a long distance to travel.

Right now in this Province I think we have done very well. I know in the Budget for this year there is also a site for Bonavista South. That is going to be a big relief for the people down there in Bonavista South, Mr. Speaker.

This is all good news, all good investments. Yes, we certainly want more. There are other things we are looking for. We probably want an extra bit of roadwork, or we probably want an extra piece of diagnostic equipment. There is no doubt that we do. We also have to have good fiscal management. You have to be investing your money the best way you can and provide the best possible service. I know that is what this government is doing, Mr. Speaker.

I will go back to when I started and how we did the process this year with the Premier with sessions at the caucus table. Not only that, but this Premier and the Finance Minister were also sitting down with one-on-ones if you had issues in your district. That was the good thing about sitting around the caucus table with our government people and our Premier. You got an opportunity to express your views and the issues in your district. That in itself was good. It was a good exercise and it worked out very well. I think we were all very pleased with it, Mr. Speaker.

I do not have much time. I guess I will take my seat. My time is just about there. I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure I will get another chance maybe next week.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I would like to move that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 3, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009, and Bill 10, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act. That is seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Verge): Order, please!

The Committee of the Whole will first consider Bill 3, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009". (Bill 3)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Committee of the Whole will now consider Bill 10, An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act". (Bill 10)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I have a question and a comment, but first the question. Under section 2, (3.2) talks about this tribunal and the method for appointing board members for the tribunal. One of the things I neglected to ask when we had the briefing was exactly what is it that this tribunal does?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Chair, the tribunal looks at, if there are any complaints that are lodged that need second looks by the general public or by anybody else out there, they can take it to the tribunal. They will rule on any complaints in terms of enforcement or directives or anything like that, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

MR. LANE: Just so I have it clear, if somebody makes a complaint regarding a business that is not accessible, whether it be the inside, the outside, and so on, and then as a result of that – the department, I would assume, is doing the enforcing – they would go to the business owner and say, you must do whatever it is they are recommending. At that point, it would be the business owner who would go to the tribunal to request that it be looked at by the tribunal, appealed. Is that the idea?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. CRUMMELL: Yes, if they want that opportunity. Basically, it is an appeals process for the business owner or whoever owns that property or building, or an individual who is out there looking for some results and a directive that they are not happy with, they can go to the tribunal. It is an appeals process, so anybody in the general public – an owner or a citizen.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister for that clarification. Mr. Chair, I just want to reiterate the point and just take this opportunity to say that I still do believe that it is an opportunity here – with all committees – that the minutes should be posted online and the expenses associated to all committees should be posted online so the public can see what is being recommended, what action is being taken, when they meeting are and what the cost are associated to – not just this committee, but all committees.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye,

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Amend The Buildings Accessibility Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 3 and Bill 10 without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bills 3 and 10 carried without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lewisporte.

MR. VERGE: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bills 3 and 10 carried with amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and has directed him to report Bills 3 and 10 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. KING: Now, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like now, under Orders of the Day, to go back and recall Motion 1, moved by myself, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, the Budget Speech.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to speak on the Budget. There is no doubt that there were a lot of good things in the Budget this year, and I will talk a little bit about those. There were some things that were overlooked. There is no doubt that government are looking towards the election of a new leader for that party and that was kept in mind with the preparation of this year's Budget – no doubt.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the financial supports for seniors and persons with low incomes. I have raised, in the House on a number of occasions, the need for more affordable housing. I have talked about, when I raised that issue, the fact that under Income Support – and I know that there was a 5 per cent, or almost 5 per cent, four-point-something per cent increase to Income Support rates under this year's Budget. I commend government for that. I think that it was absolutely necessary that the people on Income Support needed that, because many of them are falling between the cracks.

With an economy that was doing well, a very positive economy in the area that I represent, in the St. John's area, we saw a widening gap between the people who could afford to live well and those who could not afford to live well. I commend government on the 5 per cent increase for Income Support because that was absolutely necessary. I am not convinced that it was

enough, but I will not complain because 5 per cent is certainly better than nothing.

Mr. Speaker, in talking about supports for seniors and persons on low incomes, I want to go back a minute to talking about the fact that individuals who are on Income Support in different regions of the Province face different challenges when renting.

It was pointed out by the former Auditor General – and that individual was hired by government to look into some of the issues within Advanced Education and Skills – one of the things that the former Auditor General pointed out, Mr. Speaker, was the fact that rental rates, for example – and I will use the municipalities or the towns that he talked about – are considerably different in Piccadilly than they are in St. John's; yet people on Income Support receive the same rate of rental support, whether you are living in Piccadilly or in St. John's. Therefore, there is a discrepancy because the rental rates in Piccadilly are considerably lower than they are in St. John's.

When you look at rental rates in the City of St. John's and you look at the fact that a family who is trying to rent a three or four bedroom house is paying \$1,000 or \$1,200 a month in rent but the maximum amount provided as a rental allowance for individuals under Income Support is \$520, it is simply not enough to pay for that. So, they are taking money out of the food allowance or they are taking money out of other areas in order to pay their rent.

Children are going to school hungry as a result of it. We have seen an increase in the food bank usage in this Province. I am convinced that part of the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that families simply cannot afford to pay their rent based on the allowance that they are provided under Income Support.

That allowance was not touched in this year's Budget. Government did vote in favour of a private member's resolution that I brought forward, that the Liberal Party brought forward in this House of Assembly in November. Government voted in support of that private

member's resolution. The basis of that private member's resolution was to see a rental rate structure based on different regions in the Province. So if you are living in Piccadilly and you do have a much lower rent than you do in Lab City, or in Wabush, or in Gander, or in St. John's, that rents would be based on the average rental rates in those areas, and an allowance would be provided based on a regional rental rate structure.

I am not suggesting that rental rates go from \$520 to \$1,200, that the rental allowance go from that, but I am suggesting that somebody who is living in St. John's, for example, and paying \$1,200 a month in rent but only receiving an allowance of \$520 simply cannot afford to live. They cannot afford to live. They are relying on soup kitchens, they are relying on food banks, and their children are going to school hungry.

That is one of the areas in the Budget that I think was overlooked. Government was aware of that, Mr. Speaker, prior to the private member's resolution being brought forward in November by this party. They were aware of it. They were aware of it when the former Auditor General did his report. They had plenty of time to prepare for this year's Budget. They had plenty of time to put in place measures that would have helped those individuals but they did not.

While there is good news in the Budget, and while the 5 per cent increase to those receiving Income Support is welcomed news, and I commend government for that, there are things that have been overlooked and that is one of them. So I did want to point that out, Mr. Speaker, as one of the things that was overlooked in this year's Budget.

Mr. Speaker, some of the things in this year's Budget that were improved was the Residential Energy Efficiency Program. On this side of the House we had called on government to do that. In previous years there were 1,000 households under the Residential Energy Efficiency Program throughout the Province that received assistance through Newfoundland and Labrador

Housing. In last year's austerity Budget, that was cut back to 500.

On this side of the House we called for the increase of that back to traditional levels of 1,000 households in the Province receiving a grant from government in order to replace windows, improve insulation, or do other energy efficiency projects in their household to improve their energy efficiency, therefore, decreasing their light bill and making it more affordable for them to live. The other advantages to that are – and we have seen with DarkNL this year, Mr. Speaker, the fact that people were asked to conserve energy to help prevent the rolling blackouts. I am not suggesting that we are going to continue to have rolling blackouts. We may, it all depends on the generation systems throughout the Province.

I understand it was a perfect storm that created a number of generators to be down and not be able to provide the energy that was required. That should not be the only time that government is promoting energy conservation. It should not be the only time that government are going to the consumers and saying we need to conserve energy to lower the demand on our electrical system, on our generation system, not to mention the benefits to the environment, and not to mention the benefits to homeowners.

While I commend government for reinstating the Residential Energy Efficiency Program to what it was the year before last, it is a much needed program and it should not have been cut in the first place.

If you look at the Rent Supplement Program, Mr. Speaker, it was cut in last year's Budget. I should not say it was cut; it was frozen in last year's Budget. There was no new money in last year's Budget provided to the Rent Supplement Program. We will go back to what I spoke about a couple of minutes ago and the fact that people are struggling to be able to afford to pay their rent.

I understand there are not enough Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units. I understand that it would not even be logical to say we need to

build enough Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units to supply the entire demand of everybody who are on low income. We cannot do that, but one of the ways government was able to help, without it being an actual publicly-owned building, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing owned, one of the ways government was able to help was with the Rent Supplement Program. The fact that that was frozen in last year's Budget was of great concern, especially considering the fact that rental rates have skyrocketed and many people throughout the Province were struggling to pay their rent.

I commend government again for putting additional funding, a \$1 million increase in this year's Budget for the Rent Supplement Program. That is absolutely necessary. You will not hear any argument from anybody on this side of the House for that increase.

We talked about – and I had asked questions this week in the House and last week in the House – accessible housing, and the lack of accessible housing in this Province. I believe the numbers, and somebody on the other side can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe I am correct in the numbers I am about to quote. There are 284 or 287 properties in the Province that have some accessibility that are provided by the Province or through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

That means they have grab bars or maybe they have a walk-in shower, or maybe they have a ramp, but they are not fully accessible. Not fully accessible, meaning somebody cannot wheel in through the House in a wheelchair or a scooter, that the light switches are probably not low enough, or the stoves are not low enough, the bathtubs are not accessible, the doorways are not wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. They have some accessibility, but not fully accessible.

I believe the numbers are eighty-one units in this Province that are fully accessible. My argument was that was simply not enough. It was not enough. There are many, many people in this Province who require accessible units and cannot find them. That is a fact, Mr. Speaker.

The minister responsible, this week in responding to my question, said there was \$9 million spent on making properties more accessible. Well, Mr. Speaker, there is some truth to that but it is not the question that I asked. There was \$9 million over three years to extend the Home Modification Program.

Now, the Home Modification Program is a good program. I am not knocking it. The Home Modification Program is a good program. It provides a grant to homeowners – and keep that in mind now. It provides a grant to homeowners to make modifications to their home to make their home more accessible. If somebody had an accident, if somebody had a stroke, or if, for whatever, somebody lost some use of mobility and needed some modifications to make their home more accessible, the Home Modification Program is there to do that, but it helps homeowners.

It is a good program, and I have directed many people in my district to use the Home Modification Program, Mr. Speaker, because it is a good program; but, the question that was asked last week on Thursday, and Monday of this week and Tuesday of this week when I asked those questions, was about making more units available through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that are accessible units.

That \$9 million did absolutely nothing, despite what the minister might try to make people believe or the perception he tried to put out there in response to my questions. The \$9 million Home Modification Program does nothing for people who rent properties. That is for people who own properties, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the questions I asked and the fact that we need more than eighty-one fully accessible housing units in this Province to help those with accessibility issues, we need an answer to that. It was overlooked in this year's Budget. We talk about helping those with accessibility issues or with disabilities. The question I asked was the fact that we need more than eighty-one units that are fully accessible.

I brought forward an example. A constituent had asked me to bring her issue forward because she was on the wait-list for a transfer from a unit that is being subsidized by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. She was on the wait-list for four years, since 2010. She had sustained injuries on several occasions to her hands because the doorways in her unit are not wide enough. She had sustained injuries to her legs and feet because her bathtub is not accessible. It is a regular bathtub and she is in use of a wheelchair. She has sustained injuries through burns because her stove is not accessible.

Now, she is thankful that she is being subsidized by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, but her concern is her unit is not accessible. She is on the third floor of an apartment building and whenever there is an interruption in power, she is confined to her apartment because she cannot use the elevator. The unit is not accessible. She said it is a beautiful apartment. The fact that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing are subsidizing that apartment is great news, but it is not accessible. It does not provide her with her needs. The apartment building is on a hill and she said there is about an 80 per cent incline, the driveway is, from the hill to the parking lot. On a slippery day, she is confined to her apartment because she simply cannot get her wheelchair up that steep incline on a slippery day.

That apartment is not accessible. It is not accessible. I brought her issue forward to the House because she was waiting four years for a transfer, through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and being told that there is a shortage of accessible units in this city and they were not able to provide her a unit yet.

Now, I do not fault anybody who is working at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, because they operate within a budget and they operate within a set of guidelines and a set of directions set forward by the department or recommendations set forward by the department. What we are asking for is that the minister and his department provide additional money, that Cabinet, government, provide additional money to provide more accessible housing units for those who need it. I think that is a reasonable

request. I do not think anybody in this House would say it is unreasonable.

We talk about supports for persons with disabilities. There was \$600,000 to support the Vehicle Accessibility Program, and that is excellent news. That is good news. It is a great program. That is to help individuals with accessibility issues make modifications to their own vehicles so that those individuals can use their vehicles and have access to their vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the roads program. This week the minister talked about early tenders for road contracts. I think that is an excellent idea, and I commend the minister for that. In many years what we have seen in this Province are contracts going out in the summer and the contractors not being able to complete the work before the end of the summer and it would roll into the following year; meaning that the work was not completed, it was government money tied up, and it had to roll into the following year.

I think that it was good idea. I commend the minister; I commend government for that. I do want to talk about, at the same time, because there is an increase in the roads budget this year – I do not know if they are trying to pave their way back to government after the next election or not, but nobody is going to complain about an increase in the roads budget.

What was overlooked were the bridges. I am surprised it was overlooked because the Auditor General in his report had pointed out that many of the bridges in this Province are in need of repair. I want to point out some statistics. The Auditor General said in his report since 2003 when that party took government, 93 per cent more bridges are rated in a poor overall condition than there was prior to that party taking government. That was overlooked. There should have been more money put aside for bridge repairs in this year's Budget.

One hundred and fifty-four bridges have an overall poor rating in the Auditor General's report. The department has only completed 58 per cent of the planned projects or planned

repairs that it had committed to do in their eight-year plan between 2004 and 2011. Mr. Speaker, only 58 per cent of the bridges that the department and government had committed to repairing under their eight-year plan had been completed.

More than half of the bridges in the Province are over forty years old. We are creating a bit of an infrastructure deficit, Mr. Speaker, if those bridges are not repaired. Believe me, a year-and-a-half from now we will take that issue seriously. This party, our caucus, will take that issue seriously when we are on that side of the House. The Auditor General's report that follows will not say that 93 per cent of the bridges since we took government are in poor condition.

Just as an example we have two bridges in the Province where the condition of the bridges is so bad that the speed limit leading up to those bridges – and they are both on the Trans-Canada Highway. The speed limit is thirty miles per hour leading up to those bridges because the bridge surfaces are in deplorable condition and not safe to cross over.

Mr. Speaker, we do need a long-term strategy to deal with the replacement of bridges in this Province. I am disappointed that it was not addressed in this year's Budget.

I see that there is about four seconds remaining on my allotted time to speak. I thank you and I will have an opportunity to speak on the Budget again.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

I remind the member his time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today as the parliamentary day winds down and to speak for a few minutes on the Budget. I could say thank you to those who are watching on the network on their home televisions. I did message one of my friends a little while ago to tell him I was going to be getting up to speak. He messaged me back and said he would watch, but *Family Feud* is on. To those who are watching, I would say thank you.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2014: Shared Prosperity, Fair Society, Balanced Outlook* – there is a lot in that title: sharing the prosperity, being fair to people, and striking a balance, a balance between fiscal responsibility and providing the people of the Province with the services and the resources they need. Budget 2014 lays out a fiscal plan that is of great benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. At the same time, me representing Lewisporte district, the Budget, while addressing the entire Province, addresses a lot of the needs that are in my district.

I want to talk briefly about several groups in the ten minutes or so, twelve minutes, that I have, Mr. Speaker. I first of all want to identify seniors. A lot of people in this House are getting to be of senior age, and I am not referring to anybody where I would not include myself. Members, do not get offended. There is a group of people who are just beyond where we are, and their working life is pretty well done, but they blazed a trail for us. A lot of them today are living in their homes, they are on fixed incomes, and some of them are in nursing homes. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to the people who laid the trail for us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: While we get a lot of ask, and a lot of legitimate ask, I would say, Mr. Speaker, especially from members on the opposite side, asking for money for this and for that and for something else, as a government we would love to be able to meet all of those asks; but, obviously, Mr. Speaker, we cannot and that is where we come to striking a balance.

I am pleased that in this Budget the maximum payment seniors will receive in October of 2014 will be the highest ever, at \$1,036 up from \$971 last year. That is the Seniors Benefit, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 42,000 seniors across this Province will benefit from that program this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: As well, to further assist and help seniors, Mr. Speaker, we have invested \$3.7 million to further reduce. There is a 35 per cent reduction in driver's licences, vehicle registration, other licences and fees such as hunting and fishing. These are just two little things. There is a whole array of things, Mr. Speaker, that we have done over the years to help and to assist seniors, whether it is through the home repair programs or whether it is through cutting the tax on insurance or electricity. We have invested in our seniors.

As one member, Mr. Speaker, I can stand on my feet and say, yes, I wish we could do more, but we have to strike a balance. The working class benefits from this Budget. Income tax having been reduced since 2006 has returned approximately \$2 billion back to the taxpayers of this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: That has continued to encourage economic growth. Two billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, has been returned back to the working class, the people who support seniors, because it is the working class who support seniors and support services. A big part of the revenue we get as a government comes from there.

While members stand on their feet on the opposite side and ask for more, more, more, well that \$2 billion could be used to maybe raise taxes and bring more money in but we have to strike a balance, Mr. Speaker, and that is what this Budget does. It shares the wealth, it strikes a balance.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about our youth, because I firmly believe the future success of any

province, of any region, lies with the youth. That is why it is important to make post-secondary education affordable, accessible, and available to every young person who wants to avail of a post-secondary education. This Budget invests an additional \$5.1 million to continue the tuition freeze for students at Memorial University and at the College of the North Atlantic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: A continued tuition freeze, Mr. Speaker, how significant is that? We now are the most affordable place in this country for our children to get a post-secondary education, right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. No other province can boast that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: In addition, by way of example, students at the College of the North Atlantic, after completing a one-year program – because, again, of an investment from this Budget – will benefit by having his or her average student loan monthly payment reduced by 42 per cent, while a student attending Memorial will have their average loan payment reduced by 44 per cent, from \$300 to \$167. That is because of the investment we are making into non-repayable, upfront student grants as opposed to student loans. We believe, Mr. Speaker, not in giving our youth a handout, but rather giving them a leg up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: Making education affordable and accessible, Mr. Speaker, does that. It gives them a leg up, it gives them an opportunity.

Let's talk about our children, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2014 makes large investments in our children; \$35.4 million over three years is being allocated to implement a universal full-day kindergarten program beginning in 2016.

Mr. Speaker, we have talked about that for several years. Members on the opposite side have talked about that for several years. I have

heard members bring it up, to their credit, but members on this side have talked about it as a government for years as well. How can we implement a full-day kindergarten? How can we do that when we have other needs that need to be met? This year, Mr. Speaker, we were able to strike the balance and full-day kindergarten will be implemented as of September, 2016.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: On the theme of our children, Mr. Speaker, as well. Investing in children of all ages is very important to our government. That is why we are allocating \$15.7 million to assist eligible families with child care rates in a licensed child care centre or regulated family child care home through the Child Care Services Subsidy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about health care, and I only have about five or six minutes left. Health care, of course, the health budget, takes the biggest portion of our Budget. About 40 per cent of our Budget now goes into health care. Some of it is through infrastructure; some of it is through salaries.

About three years ago we started to build a new health care centre in Lewisporte. It is called the new North Haven Manor. I was pleased to see in this year's Budget we have \$350,000 there to finally finish off the whole entire building. An investment over the last three or four years, Mr. Speaker, of over \$30 million to provide for long-term care, to provide for people with dementia, to provide for an emergency after hours clinic, and to provide for lab and X-ray services. It took a while for us to get there, Mr. Speaker, the last little bit this year. It is a beautiful building, and one that I am proud to say is in our town.

I want to highlight, Mr. Speaker, the disease of cancer that continues to grip and adversely affect many of our people. Battling this disease strains the emotional, the mental, the physical, and the financial strength of many families, and we all wish for a cure. Budget 2014 allocates \$24 million to enhance cancer treatment, which includes \$7.1 million for the coverage of new drug therapies under the Newfoundland and

Labrador Prescription Drug Program. While none of us ever want to avail of that funding, because none of us ever want to go through the cancer struggle, it is an important investment for the people of the Province, the people who will need it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a minute to talk about community infrastructure. There is about \$200 million this year made available for a three-year municipal capital works program for high-priority areas such as clean drinking water, road improvements, and upgrades. As members of the House, we all vie and lobby for all of our communities to be able to avail of a portion of that funding so that the programs and the needs that they have identified in their towns get addressed. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, over the next little while the specifics will roll out as different communities find out what applications have been approved and what projects they can count on getting done.

Roadwork – we all want it – again, \$81 million on roadwork this year. We all as members of the House vie for a piece of it. Some people had their roadwork announced early. The Member for Baie Verte – Springdale is one of the privileged ones in this House, as is the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. They had their roadwork announced early. We all vie for a portion of roadwork.

Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of the Minister of Transportation to take all our needs and put them together. I am sure, while I really want my fair share, he looks at all the districts across this Province and he sees there are some needs in some districts that are greater than needs in other districts. Some districts have a lot more road; some districts have roads that are in a harder state, let us say.

I agree that treating everybody equally is not necessarily treating everybody fairly. While I will fight for roadwork in my district, and he knows I can fight – I put the fist up to him the other day – the details will roll out, Mr. Speaker, as to how much roadwork we all get done in our districts. Overall in this Province \$81 million is

invested throughout the Province, a great investment by this government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: I want to finish off by also mentioning that brush cutting got a bump this year, and that is something that is significant and important to the people.

I want to finish off, Mr. Speaker, in the last minute with something that actually was not mentioned in this year's Budget, but particular to my district. A couple of years ago we announced we will be building a new indoor swimming pool in the District of Lewisporte. I want to let the people in my district know that the site selection is completed. It has taken a while, a little longer than we had anticipated. We are hoping to have tenders out this spring and we certainly hope to see construction start on that before the summer.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget is about sharing the prosperity. It is about being fair to all sectors of our society. It is about a balanced approach. I think the Minister of Finance, the Cabinet, and the Premier have done a great job. I think it is a great Budget and I thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Works, that the House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

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