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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

Tuesday

8 March 2016
(Throne Speech)

The House met at 2 p.m.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Please be seated.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mr. Speaker, the Justices of the Supreme Court have arrived.

MR. SPEAKER: Please admit the Justices of the Supreme Court.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has arrived.

MR. SPEAKER: Please admit His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

(Mr. Speaker leaves the Chair.)

(His Honour the Lieutenant Governor takes the Chair.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: It is the wish of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor that all present be seated.

PREMIER BALL: May it please Your Honour, the House of Assembly, agreeable to Your Honour's command, have proceeded to the choice of Speaker and have elected Tom Osborne, Member for the District of Waterford Valley, to that office, and by their direction I present him for the approbation of Your Honour.

HIS HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (Frank F. Fagan, CM, ONL, MBA): On behalf of Her Majesty, I assure you of my sense of your efficiency and I do most fully approve and confirm you as Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Your Honour, having approved the choice of this House in constituting me as their Speaker, it now becomes my duty in the name of the representatives of Her Majesty's loyal subjects, the people of this province, respectfully to claim of Your Honour their accustomed rights and privileges, especially that

they shall have freedom of speech in their debates and they may be free from arrest during their attendance in Parliament, and I, as Speaker, may have full access to Your Honour's presence at all reasonable times and that they have confirmed to them their ancient rights and privileges which have been confirmed to them by Your Honour's predecessors.

HIS HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: Mr. Speaker, I do confirm this House, on behalf of Her Majesty, in the enjoyment of all its ancient and undoubted rights and privileges.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Your Honour.

HIS HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR:

Creating the Foundation for a Stronger Tomorrow

100th Year Anniversary of Beaumont-Hamel

As we open the House of Assembly for the first time in 2016, I would be remiss if I did not pause for a moment to look back 100 years to an event which shaped our province, and has been forever etched in our culture and our history.

On July 1, 1916, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment positioned near Beaumont-Hamel, left their trenches with orders to advance through No Man's Land, and seize enemy trenches. The troops met a barrage of enemy fire, and in just a matter of minutes, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment had been almost wiped out. This was a loss that touched communities throughout province.

On the eve of the 100th anniversary of this tragic and historic battle, it is fitting that we take a moment to remember these events, the place they have in our history, and how they continue to shape our province today.

Honour 100 events in Newfoundland and Labrador began in 2014 and will continue until 2018, raising awareness in future generations of the sacrifices Newfoundlanders and Labradorians made during the First World War. My Government recognizes the importance of these events and we will continue to support the

Trail of the Caribou pilgrimage, helping to send 16 students, four veterans, four legionnaires and others to Beaumont-Hamel. Additionally, General Rick Hillier will be leading this year's *Ambassador Program* which will feature 19 students from across the province who participated in heritage fairs with First World War themed projects.

I am pleased to advise that Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment's Colonel-in-Chief will be visiting our province from June 28th until July 1st, and will be taking part in many Honour 100 events.

Through generous gifts from donors, The Rooms has been able to develop a new, permanent Royal Newfoundland Regiment Gallery as well as, the Fortis Courtyard and Amphitheatre.

This July 1st, on the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme at Beaumont-Hamel, Her Royal Highness will open this new permanent exhibition at The Rooms. Residents and tourists will be able to experience stories of the Great War and its lasting impact on the people and the identity of Newfoundland and Labrador. In addition, a full day of commemorative activities is planned for July 1st, 2016 to honour those from Newfoundland and Labrador who served in the First World War – and I encourage everyone to participate in this historic and momentous event.

International Women's Day

Today being March 8th, it is my pleasure to have our province acknowledge International Women's Day.

This year's national theme is "Women's Empowerment Leads to Equality", and My Government is fully committed to advancing true economic, social, cultural, political and legal equality for all women and girls in our province. We take great pride in working closely and collaboratively with women's organizations in achieving this goal.

International Women's Day allows us to show our gratitude to all organizations supporting women – and to all women past and present – who work to advance true equality in the

province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Your work is truly invaluable. Thank you.

A New Approach

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians understand that our province is at a critical juncture, and the election this past November was clearly about choosing the best team to get our province back on track.

My Government promised to deliver stronger leadership, better management, long-term planning, and an open government.

And we are working with our over 500,000 advisors to build the foundation today for a stronger tomorrow.

My Government received an important mandate from the people of our province on November 30th, the Premier and Cabinet were sworn in on December 14th, and Members of the House of Assembly were sworn in on December 18th, 2015.

And we immediately got to work.

My Government's cabinet of 12 ministers, plus the Premier, is efficient, capable and hardworking. They bring great experience from industry, business, health care, education and the public service to important portfolios focused on helping improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

They also share the same commitment I do to listening first, ensuring the proper due diligence is done, and then making decisions that are in the best interest of the people of the province.

Ministers have been instructed to, without fail, act with integrity in all aspects of their service, striving for excellence in discharging their responsibilities.

As publicly outlined, My Government will: Restore Openness, Transparency and Accountability; Build a Stronger, Smarter Economy; Improve Health and Health care; Support Safe and Sustainable Communities; and Invest in Our Future Through Education.

For years, Newfoundland and Labrador was the only province in Atlantic Canada to pay an additional salary to MHAs serving as Parliamentary Secretaries and Parliamentary Assistants. To further demonstrate My Government's commitment to fiscal prudence and transparency, we have eliminated compensation for these positions.

Just three days after being sworn in, My Government cancelled the process to collect pension overpayments that seniors in our province had received through no fault of their own.

It was a priority for My Government to reverse this hardship and we are pleased, as a new government, that we could put this issue to rest for the pensioners impacted.

A Commitment to Openness and Transparency

My Government is committed to openness and transparency.

It is only fitting then, to announce that the first Bill My Government will introduce in the House of Assembly, will be an Act to Establish an Independent Appointments Commission and to require a merit-based process for various appointments.

This commission will be the first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador, taking the politics out of government appointments. We believe that appointments to our agencies, boards and commissions should be merit-based, not politically motivated, as in the past.

The Independent Appointments Commission will be non-partisan and screen qualified candidates for Tier 1 agencies, boards, and commissions, including senior executive positions. It will be a much needed level of independent review to the appointments process, clearing a path for the most qualified people to apply, be considered on their merits, and be selected. The Public Service Commission will launch a website detailing membership requirements for all agencies, boards, and commissions and identifying upcoming vacancies.

My Government will also create new and expanded roles for Members of the House of Assembly. We will create and use all-party committees to review legislation, and other issues in our province. My Government believes all Members of this House should also show respect for the House of Assembly and we will encourage co-operation, respect and integrity as MHAs perform their duties.

A New Relationship with the Federal Government

We have an important opportunity for a renewed relationship with the Federal Government. The election of Canada's New Government last October, combined with the election of Newfoundland and Labrador's New Government in November, gives our province greater opportunities for partnerships.

The Prime Minister has renewed a sense of hope, collaboration, and respect throughout our country.

A strong relationship based on open dialogue will serve our province well.

My Government continues to work with the Federal Government on critical issues for our province. As we find ourselves in a difficult fiscal situation, having a partner in Ottawa is more important than ever. We will advocate for our fair share of federal presence and spending. We will seek to maximize access to federal programs that align with our priorities, including infrastructure, and we will look forward to the fulfillment of federal commitments which the Prime Minister and his Ministers have made to the people of our province.

My Government is doing its part on the national stage. We have welcomed 250 Syrian refugees, we are an active participant in the national climate change discussion, and the Premier just chaired the Council of the Federation meeting of Canada's Premiers in Vancouver which focused on climate change and the economy.

Fiscal Situation

Our province is facing a fiscal situation which is unprecedented, and My Government is committed to working with all Newfoundlanders

and Labradorians to achieve long-term sustainability.

Addressing the serious fiscal reality is My Government's top priority.

As part of our approach, on December 22nd, My Government publically released the Fall Fiscal update – putting out more detailed information than ever before.

If left unchecked, our province was on the road to sustained deficits in the \$2 billion range, and net debt reaching upwards of \$23 billion in just five years.

We have seen considerable uncertainty in the price of commodities, which is affecting the fiscal situation of our province. As we continue to face these challenges, it is important to put these changes in perspective. On November 5th, oil was trading at around \$50 a barrel, and last week it was around \$36. This is a drop in price of more than 30 per cent since November alone.

Last year's budget was based on oil trading at \$62 a barrel, but was revised at the Fall Fiscal update to \$48 a barrel. For every dollar oil trades lower than the forecast, it results in about \$25 million less in government revenue.

Our fiscal update projected the provincial deficit to be around \$2 billion this year alone, meaning if nothing changed, we would have to borrow \$15.4 billion by 2020-2021.

If we do nothing, it would be like borrowing over \$7 million a day, every day. That is close to \$300,000 an hour – essentially a new home mortgage every hour of every day. Think of it as maxing out your \$5,000 credit card limit – every minute of the day.

Bond rating agencies and major banks are watching the province closely. My Government is focused on protecting our credit ratings, as we do not want to be paying more for borrowing purposes.

The magnitude of this problem will require short, medium and long-term measures to correct the course. Decisive actions will be implemented with Budget 2016 this spring, followed by medium-term actions throughout

the course of the year, followed by longer-term actions in Budget 2017.

Given the seriousness and scope of the current and forecasted fiscal situation, a new approach is required that moves beyond single year pre-budget consultation efforts.

Our Government Renewal Initiative and engagement process is providing information government can use to address our fiscal realities and lay a stronger foundation for the future.

My Government is using a series of approaches and tools to ensure public sessions are engaging and produce the type of information needed to inform our decisions. These include a discussion document, the Dialogue App, social media, and public engagement sessions.

People recognize the seriousness of the problem and they want to be part of the solution.

And we want to continue to hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on the long-term solutions, as well as the short-term actions for Budget 2016. The mandate of this approach is to: identify a combination of measures to increase revenues and reduce expenditures; eliminate waste and identify opportunities to do things better and more efficiently; modernize the role of government in the provision of public services; and establish multi-year fiscal targets.

The choices ahead of us will not be easy; everyone will have to accept some level of sacrifice in the months and years ahead if we are able to provide critical services, while restoring accountability and stability to government finances.

It is My Government's responsibility to consider all the options put forward by the people of the province and continue to have an open and honest discussion with all residents.

I am pleased to say the public have responded in a productive and real way.

To date, over a thousand people have participated in engagement sessions, including 16 public sessions, nine public service sessions and several stakeholder driven sessions. There

have been almost 30,000 users on our Dialogue App, generating over 1,700 ideas and 4,400 comments. We have also received over 600 email and phone submissions and over a hundred ideas or comments from fax and regular mail. This provincial engagement is about bringing forward ideas that contribute to the work of My Government as they identify a combination of measures to increase revenues and reduce expenditures.

My Government will continue with this process, producing short, medium, and long-term solutions, until our provincial fiscal situation has improved and stabilized.

While dealing with our fiscal reality, My Government must continue to keep the economy moving. We will deliver the programs and services our province needs for a stronger tomorrow, while also living within our means as we correct our province's fiscal situation. We will provide the better management, long-term planning and open government the people of our province expect and deserve.

Infrastructure

My Government recognizes communities are facing infrastructure challenges throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. It has been well-documented that investments in public infrastructure support economic growth and create employment opportunities. My Government will invest in public infrastructure and seize every opportunity to leverage funding provided by the Federal Government through various programs. We will explore ways to make funding more predictable and flexible to fit our needs, and take an asset management approach to help guide investments.

Delivering on My Government's commitment for multi-year infrastructure planning and a comprehensive transportation strategy that supports economic growth, we are developing a Multi-Year Transportation Infrastructure Plan that outlines major projects for the coming years.

This plan will expand the current rankings beyond smaller-scale road and bridge improvement projects to a managed and proactive road and bridge construction and

maintenance program. This will result in strategic investments in pavement, bridges, culverts, guiderails, drainage structures, and physical transportation infrastructure assets.

The Multi-Year Transportation Infrastructure Plan will emphasize a transparent and accountable approach to transportation assets in our province.

Decisions will incorporate life-cycle cost considerations to ensure our province is receiving the best value possible.

This plan will move My Government from a reactive approach to a proactive, long-term plan that uses our limited funds more efficiently and effectively by making full use of our province's short construction season.

Multi-year planning will serve as a cost-saving measure for My Government. We will take advantage of early tendering and collaborative potential by grouping smaller projects in the same area into large tenders that take advantage of economies of scale.

This year, My Government will invest in the improvement of educational facilities throughout the province. We will fund repairs and maintenance of K-12 school facilities to ensure students and teachers continue to have safe, comfortable and high quality learning environments. We will fund ongoing capital projects such as new schools and extensions to existing school facilities to address student capacity in growing areas.

My Government is committed to providing the best care to the seniors in our province. As such, we cancelled a recent request for proposals on long-term care as the terms were far too narrow in scope. My Government will explore all options for the development of these facilities to make sure we get it right.

My Government will also pursue a transparent, value-for-money analysis on how best to replace the century old Waterford Hospital. For My Government, mental health will be as important as physical health. Providing modern care requires a modern facility in which to deliver it.

My Government is committed to the long-overdue replacement of Western Memorial Regional Hospital in Corner Brook. To our surprise, after \$40 million spent on the project over the last number of years, there was no tender-ready document. A priority for My Government is to develop and finalize a tender-ready document by the end of this year.

Innovation and a Strong Economy

My Government believes the answer to building a stronger, smarter economy is through diversification, job creation and growth. An important part of realizing that potential is through further growth of our tourism industry.

There are approximately 2,500 businesses in the province's tourism sector, of which 82 percent are small businesses, creating an estimated 18,000 jobs.

The industry generates a billion dollars in visitor spending each year. To further support this important industry, we are undertaking a new visitor exit survey this year to collect information on non-resident visitors to our province.

My Government understands the importance of investing in tourism marketing as a way to grow the industry and we will put further focus on marketing our province's natural and cultural heritage.

With the growth of the tourism industry comes new opportunities for businesses in our province. My Government is working with craft producers and retailers to ensure our products meet the demand and expectation of our travelers with respect to price, design and a "sense of place". In cooperation with the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador we will focus on new product opportunities.

My Government knows that growing a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation presents tremendous economic potential for Newfoundland and Labrador. To that end, we will develop a new Provincial Innovation Strategy in collaboration with industry and innovation partners to drive economic growth. We will consult with our partners and the public on a strategy that focuses on innovation,

productivity, and competitiveness, to maximize benefits from private and public technology investments in all sectors of the economy.

Cooperation within Atlantic Canada on population growth will help us to attract and retain more people, including here in our own province. Collectively today, less than five per cent of our population in Atlantic Canada was born in a different country, in contrast to more than 22 per cent in the rest of Canada.

My Government will develop a Young Entrepreneur Retention Program to encourage innovation and youth retention. We want our youth to live here, invest here and build businesses and stable careers. My Government knows that innovation projects inspire youth to explore their creative thinking abilities, while also improving their collaborative problem solving skills.

Business incubation provides entrepreneurs with resources and services to channel innovation and accelerate the successful development of start-up and fledgling companies. My Government will expand business incubation, in collaboration with Memorial University, to provide prospective entrepreneurs with increased access to investors, advisors, space and networking services, with the end goal of seeding new businesses throughout our province.

We believe reducing waste is critical in helping companies become competitive. We will continue to work with the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters to support lean training and other initiatives to help improve companies' competitiveness.

Ensuring we maximize supply chain opportunities with respect to large industrial projects associated with our natural resources as well as federal aerospace and defence expenditures is critical. Through these opportunities, companies are able to build capacity and expertise that will enable them to expand and export their service offering to international supply chains.

As we continue to work toward increased economic diversification, the ocean technology sector and Arctic development opportunities present great potential for economic growth. The

ocean technology sector in our province enables activities and expansion in economic areas such as oil and gas, fisheries and aquaculture, defence, security transportation, environment, marine recreation and tourism. My Government will capitalize on existing strengths in research and development infrastructure and expertise, a private sector with unique capabilities, and support from all levels of government to further elevate the province to a unique position in the global ocean technology sector.

The Arctic is an area which offers great opportunities for Newfoundland and Labrador. Through the Arctic Opportunities Initiative, considerable work has begun with respect to positioning the province as the path to the Arctic and creating an environment that will benefit local stakeholders and northern communities, and will further attract global industry leaders.

As geographic neighbours, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut have a common sense of culture and a like-minded approach to safe and sustainable development that respects the environment and traditional ways of life. Implementation of the recent Memorandum of Understanding with Nunavut will be a priority for My Government. We are also actively seeking to secure partnerships with other like-minded Arctic jurisdictions.

As the offshore oil and gas industry faces challenges with the downturn of world commodity prices, My Government is committed to the creation of an Oil and Gas Industry Development Council. This council will bring together key stakeholders to develop a long-term vision and implementation framework for the future development of the industry, with a focus on making it more sustainable and competitive, and bringing benefits to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

My Government is committed to creating conditions for increased exploration and development in our offshore. These include pursuing options to explore and develop our natural gas reserves, streamlining the regulatory approval process, and finalizing the generic offshore royalty regime.

And we are committed to opening the books on Muskrat Falls – a cold eyes review of the

project. This review will analyze the cost, schedule and associated risks of the project and is the kind of due diligence that is long overdue. We will make this report publicly available and will use evidence-based decision making on future decisions on this project.

My Government will take steps to support the mining industry to encourage expansion and grow the contribution the industry makes to the provincial economy. This will include increased investment in the Junior Exploration Assistance Program.

We will lead the development of a social enterprise strategy, in consultation with the not-for-profit sector, to enhance the benefits of the sector for the economy. Building on the success of our Memorandum of Understanding with the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Cooperatives, a similar approach will be taken.

My Government will remain focused on ensuring Newfoundland and Labrador firms are positioned to capitalize on all new international trade agreements, including the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We will continue to advocate our province's interests during negotiations on the development of a new Agreement on Internal Trade. The unfettered movement of electricity between provinces is one consideration in this agreement and we are working to see that realized.

Climate change is one of the greatest long-term challenges facing the world today, and as such, My Government will develop a new provincial greenhouse gas strategy. The Federal Government has committed to developing a national climate change plan, in consultation with provinces and territories, and we will participate in this work.

My Government will create a Global Network of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. In keeping with our commitments to openness and informed decision making, the Global Network will complement government's engagement processes by allowing us to connect with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who live and work both inside and outside our province.

Planning for Growth and Job Creation

There have been few times in our history when coming together for the future of our province has mattered more. Supporting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in gaining new skills, building new businesses, and thriving in a new economy is a priority for My Government. We are focused on creating a stronger, more diversified economy that supports business growth and job creation, remaining competitive and ensuring our policies are targeted at the attraction and retention of qualified working-age people and their families.

We will engage with the Federal Government on the need for innovative and responsive labour market arrangements to support employment programs and skills training for our residents. This is especially relevant for displaced workers, youth looking for their first job, workers in seasonal industries, newcomers, and those underrepresented in our labour market. Federal labour market arrangements must provide flexibility to allow provinces and territories to meet the evolving needs of their regional and local labour markets.

We will consult with industry to assess areas of demand and offer innovative incentives for employers in the skilled trades who increase the number of apprentices they take on. Apprenticeship placements will give young people a role in our diversifying economy and help stop the historic flow of our skilled workers to other shores.

As our province prepares to tackle an unprecedented fiscal challenge, industries based on renewable resources, such as the seafood industry, take on even greater importance as we look for ways to strengthen and diversify our economy. The sustainable development of both the fishing and aquaculture sectors are priority areas for My Government, as they are key economic drivers for many communities.

The seafood industry continues to be an important part of the provincial economy employing approximately 18,000 people in harvesting, processing and aquaculture operations, and generating indirect benefits for many more individuals and enterprises. In 2015, the production value of the Newfoundland and

Labrador seafood industry reached a record high, exceeding \$1.2 billion.

My Government will support harvesting, processing, marketing, and aquaculture initiatives in order to diversify and increase the overall viability and competitiveness of the Newfoundland and Labrador seafood industry.

We will work closely with the seafood industry to market local seafood internationally, providing market research and intelligence, and contributing to eco-certification initiatives.

We have reconvened the All-Party Committee on Northern Shrimp Allocations to present a united provincial voice on this important matter. My Government understands that the continued application of the federal “Last In, First Out” policy, in the face of a declining shrimp resource, will have major negative impacts on people and communities throughout our province.

My Government is planning for the return of the cod fishery. We will form a Fisheries Advisory Council that will create a strategic action plan on cod revitalization. In collaboration with communities, industry and the Federal Government, this plan will focus on environmental sustainability, harvesting, processing innovation and marketing.

My Government will develop a new agriculture strategy to enhance our response to the needs and recommendations of farmers, processors and consumers, focusing on land development, innovation, competitiveness, increasing local food production and value-added processing opportunities.

The development and diversification of the provincial forest industry will also be a priority for My Government. To achieve this, we will ensure that the 10-year provincial sustainable forest management plan is followed.

A new Act to replace the aging Public Tender Act is under development by the Government Purchasing Agency. The intent of the new Act is to better support public bodies in obtaining “best value” in their purchases and to reduce administrative burden for both suppliers and public bodies. Introduction of changes to the

Public Tender Act are a priority for My Government.

Some of the brightest, most hard working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians work in the public service, and My Government recognizes their experience, knowledge and dedication are important to enabling the work of this government. It is essential that we take a collaborative approach to dealing with our fiscal situation and engage with the public service to utilize their expertise in delivering the programs and services Newfoundlanders and Labradorians expect and deserve.

A Strong Social Agenda

My Government has committed to three public inquiries. All are of utmost importance, particularly those involving loss of life, but are at different states of readiness. We will proceed with the inquiries accordingly.

Recently, a number of high profile cases in our province have raised concern about whether the police should conduct investigations into its own members, or whether one provincial police force can objectively investigate members of the other. In response to these types of concerns, many provinces in Canada have created civilian-led organizations to investigate serious incidents involving the police. This provides a mechanism for independent investigations thereby removing the potential for real or perceived bias. To enhance public confidence in investigations involving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, we will identify and pursue an appropriate model for the establishment of a Serious Incident Response Team for Newfoundland and Labrador.

A properly functioning Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is integral to the administration of justice in our province and protects against potential miscarriage of justice. The office provides critical information and expert advice to inform police investigations, the courts, and families in circumstances involving, among other things, suspicious and sudden deaths. My Government intends to review the operational and organizational requirements of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, in conjunction with Eastern Health, to ensure it is

properly resourced and structured to effectively fulfill its mandate.

In September 2016, My Government will implement full-day Kindergarten. Despite our financial challenges, we are committed to providing the infrastructure, resources, and professional learning to support full days of play-based learning for children throughout our province. This investment will positively impact academic achievement and the social and emotional development of the children in our province, giving them a solid foundation in the start of their public education and indeed for the rest of their lives.

As we transition to full-day Kindergarten, we will work with all stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition.

My Government recognizes the critical role education has to play in creating a strong future for our province and we are committed to improving our K-12 education system, focusing on a number of priority areas and strengthening accountability to the public. To this end, we will establish a Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, which will consider topics including: early learning, mathematics, reading and literacy, inclusive education, student mental health and wellness, multicultural education, Aboriginal education, and teacher education and professional development.

My Government recognizes the role child care plays in early childhood development, gender equality and economic development. As a review and subsequent revision of the inclusion supports program is nearing completion, revised policies will help ensure children with diverse needs are included in the program offered in regulated child care services with the required support.

The completion of a review of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement Program will ensure effectiveness in increasing the number of qualified Early Childhood Educators working in regulated child care and to explore potential changes to the program.

As we continue to promote safe, caring and inclusive school practices, My Government will develop guidelines supporting equity and

inclusion of all students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender-nonconforming students. This will complement the training provided to district staff for the implementation of teacher training across the province with the purpose of building awareness of LGBTQ inclusive practices.

In keeping with our commitment to openness and transparency, we are committed to holding School Board Elections and are currently assessing a number of options to expedite this process.

My Government will ensure the most effective programs and services are in place to prevent all forms of violence and abuse against women and other populations at risk and build a safe and caring province. Everyone has the responsibility to prevent violence. Therefore, we will work in collaboration with community partners, Aboriginal governments and organizations, victims of violence and individual residents to achieve this goal.

In November 2014, the House of Assembly passed a motion committing to legislation to respond to the Child and Youth Advocate's request to change the Child and Youth Advocate Act to mandate public body reporting of deaths and critical incidents. My Government recognizes the importance of doing of everything we can to protect children and youth and will be moving forward with this initiative.

My Government is committed to the development of a Health Promotion and Healthy Living Strategy that will focus on two key areas: Youth Wellness and Chronic Disease Prevention and Management. The strategy will be comprehensive and include all people in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a specific focus on youth. We are committed to reversing our persistent rates of chronic disease which are among the highest in Canada. In order to achieve this, we must encourage healthy lifestyles amongst all our residents – especially our youth. In consultation with our community partners, we will identify the most effective actions to reverse some of the trends of today and realize a stronger, healthier tomorrow for all.

By 2025, 25 per cent of our population will be seniors, so now is the time to ensure that we are

meeting the current demands and prepared for our rapidly aging population. As such, My Government is committed to an Office of the Seniors' Advocate to ensure an independent voice to advocate on behalf of seniors.

My Government is committed to furthering the status of persons with disabilities. We envision a truly inclusive society where accessibility and inclusion for all is essential. This requires a fundamental shift toward full equity for persons with disabilities throughout our province.

Poverty and inequality are problems which affect all people in our province. Poverty makes it more difficult to get and stay healthy, to find and keep a home, to obtain an education, and to gain and keep work. Without these basic things in place, the demand for social supports rise and health care costs increase for all residents.

We will continue to work across various government departments and agencies, with the Federal Government and with community partners to focus especially on vulnerable youth, seniors, mental health, affordable housing and initiatives that will prevent and end homelessness. My Government will work diligently to ensure accessible and affordable housing is available throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, paying particular attention to the needs of seniors and youth.

We will consult with labour organizations and employers to establish a consistent minimum wage formula that is reflective of changes to the cost of living. This review will occur in 2016.

We will ensure the work of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions continues. The All-Party Committee has heard from many people throughout our province about their experiences with and hope for the mental health and addictions system. This work will inform a new Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

My Government will proclaim the Health Professions Act into force for midwives, and will enact new midwives regulations. This is a key public protection initiative, ensuring that only those individuals who meet the requirements set out in the legislation are able to practice in our province. We consider the

regulation of midwifery a long-overdue step towards providing an additional safe birth option in our province.

We will work collaboratively with Aboriginal people and governments to ensure development decisions are made with openness, transparency, and accountability, incorporating the concerns and interests of Aboriginal communities. We will also ensure programs and services provided reflect Aboriginal needs.

My Government will continue to seek the repatriation of the remains of Demasduit and Nonosabasut from the National Museum of Scotland to ensure their protection and preservation within their ancestral home.

I am pleased to say My Government will finalize the land transfer to establish the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve in Labrador. Becoming Canada's 46th national park, the 10,700 square kilometres of stunning landscapes, vegetation and wildlife will be protected. This area, featuring the Mealy Mountains themselves, has cultural importance to Aboriginal and other people in the region and will also play a key role in wildlife conservation and tourism in our province.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its Final Report on December 15, 2015. My Government continues to assess its recommendations, and is preparing a formal response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

The Federal Government has launched the design phase of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. My Government fully supports this initiative and recently participated in the second National Roundtable in Winnipeg on February 25-26. We will honour the undertakings we've made at that roundtable.

We will also continue to participate in the Northern Development Ministers' Forum to advance the diverse and common interests of the people living in Canada's North.

We will continue to co-chair the Labrador West Regional Task Force and consult with all

stakeholders in the region in order to facilitate the sustainable development of the area.

We will work to empower communities in all areas of our province by exploring regional opportunities that further improve community sustainability. This will help ensure our province's local governments are well-positioned to respond to changing social, economic, and fiscal realities.

An advisory committee has been formed and public consultations will take place this year across the province.

My Government will examine options to improve municipalities' ability to access Crown Lands such as long-term leasing and lease-to-own arrangements. This will have a positive economic impact for municipalities and assist them in pursuing new developments.

To support greater engagement with municipalities, My Government will hold a Premier's Forum on local government in the fall of 2016. This annual event will allow community leaders to discuss directly with the Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs issues of concern relating to their municipalities.

In partnership with the Municipal Assessment Agency and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, in 2016, My Government will undertake a review of the Assessment Act, 2006. This review will address known operational issues associated with the timing of assessments, assessment criteria, implementation of the associated mil rate and special purpose properties. Interested individuals and businesses will be given the opportunity to provide their input on this legislative review.

Protecting Our Future

Though we face unprecedented fiscal challenges, My Government is steadfast in our determination to correct the course. With the resources of a nation within the boundaries of our province, we believe there is a bright future for Newfoundland and Labrador. Together as a province we will rise to the occasion, but we will all need to do our part to build that strong foundation now.

My Government takes its responsibilities seriously, and we will use our resources to not only benefit the present generation, but future generations as well. As part of a Legacy Plan, we will restore fiscal balance to our province and establish a diversified wealth fund once we have moved back to surplus. Working together and addressing our reality, together we will leverage our resources to create a legacy of wealth for our children and grandchildren.

My Government is faced with difficult challenges and difficult choices. But challenges are nothing new for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we've been facing them for over 500 years. And we've also fared better when we face them together.

The choices ahead will not be easy, but we will always make them based on evidence, with a fundamental belief in openness and transparency.

All Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will be a part of the solutions, as we build that stronger tomorrow.

The unprecedented fiscal situation we find ourselves in requires an unprecedented response. And Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will rise to the challenge. Together, we will overcome our immediate challenges, and build a solid foundation for a sustainable future.

Estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberation.

Thank you very much.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise.

(His Honour the Lieutenant Governor leaves the Assembly Chamber.)

(Mr. Speaker returns to the Chair.)

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

All present please be seated.

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Establish An Independent Appointments Commission And To Require A Merit-Based Process For Various Appointments, Bill 1.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there leave for the hon. the Premier to introduce the said bill?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Leave granted.

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 1, An Act To Establish An Independent Appointments Commission And To Require A Merit-Based Process For Various Appointments, now be read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Establish An Independent Appointments Commission And To Require A Merit-Based Process For Various Appointments. (Bill 1)

MR. SPEAKER: The bill has now been read the first time.

When shall the bill be read the second time?

AN HON. MEMBER: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 1 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to make a speech to the Members of this General Assembly. We shall now take a few moments to distribute the speech to Members.

(The Pages distribute the speech to all Members.)

MR. SPEAKER: I recognize the Member for Torngat Mountains to move an Address in Reply.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my great privilege to rise in this hon. House today to represent the people from the beautiful Northern Labrador District of Torngat Mountains. I'm grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne, which His Honour the Lieutenant Governor presented this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I have to begin, first, by thanking His Honour for delivering the Speech from the Throne to this hon. House – the first Throne Speech of our mandate as a new government of Newfoundland and Labrador. According to news reports, we're in for an early spring. In a way, it's a good metaphor of what's taken place inside this House as well.

Mr. Speaker, spring is the season for shaking free of the frost of winter. Here in this hon. House we have a new government after a long, cold season. As with the start of spring, we, too, will start fresh. We face many challenges as we begin this new season as a resource-driven economy, slumping global commodity prices and other factors have placed a tremendous strain on our Treasury. We also face the prospect of an aging population with increased demands on our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, our province has perhaps never needed renewal as badly as it does today. The Premier speaks of working together for a stronger tomorrow. We've also heard His Honour the Lieutenant Governor mention all the steps government will take in the service of bringing this about. Under the confident and caring leadership of our Premier, I'm certain, as

I am sure all my colleagues are as well, that he will indeed see a stronger tomorrow for all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the autumn of 2015 was memorable, not just because Newfoundland and Labrador elected a new government, but because all of Canada went to the polls and declared loudly and in great numbers that we were ready to close the book on a dark decade.

Our Premier has promised to foster a collaborative and productive relationship with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the federal government. The Premier has further promised to work in collaboration with his provincial and territorial colleagues.

The federal government's commitment to a national inquiry into murdered and missing Aboriginal women and girls is encouraging. This matter has long been cloaked in sadness and fear but now the prospect of justice and a way forward is being presented. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to serve in a government led by a Premier who has promised to take charge of Newfoundland and Labrador's participation in this historic inquiry.

I'm honoured to serve in a government that will finalize the land transfer to establish the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve in Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador's natural landscapes are indeed a global draw, and our international fame as an outdoor destination continues to grow. I will consider the creation of a fourth national park in Newfoundland and Labrador and a second national park for Labrador to be a significant legacy to be handed to future generations. I will be so proud to take part in bringing this legacy to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, even though we have only been in office a few months, we do have several accomplishments we can proudly announce here today. Mainly, we have engaged in the most wide-reaching public consultation process this province has ever seen. Communities across the province have had a chance to weigh in on Newfoundland and Labrador's future.

In the fall, our Premier spoke of having over 500,000 advisors in this province. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor mentioned them in his

speech today as well. Government has heard firsthand from many thousands of these advisors.

Our Premier led the first government renewal session, and other members of Cabinet and government have hosted sessions throughout our province. Additionally, feedback was collected and continues to be collected. The Government Renewal Initiative is a very fitting way to embark on our mandate. The feedback from these consultations will go to assist in shaping government policy and will guide us as we move forward.

The Premier has promised strong leadership, better management, long-term planning and an open government. What better way is there to demonstrate these values than by giving all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians a direct say in how we tackle the challenges we all face? As His Honour said, the way forward will not be easy and we will all be called upon to play a part so that a more sustainable future can be made possible for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, while we may be a mere few months into our mandate, I can confidently stand here today and speak of how our Premier started his first term and his government's first four years with a tangible demonstration of his governing philosophy. He has shown us his leadership by how he is willing to listen. He has shown a commitment to long-term, multi-year planning reflecting better management practices. He has proven his government to be open and willing to hear the ideas of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, we are at the beginning as a government and as a province of our renewal. There will be significant challenges and difficult choices in the months and years ahead. His Honour laid out our financial situation in his speech. We are faced with challenges that will require all our skills and ideas to overcome, and overcoming them may take some time.

We've already taken the first steps, Mr. Speaker, towards a better future. Already the frost is beginning to thaw. Under the Premier's leadership, we will bring about a stronger tomorrow together.

Mr. Speaker, I now move that a Select Committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

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

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this hon. House on behalf of the constituents of the District of Burin – Grand Bank and second the motion a Select Committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply to this year's Speech from the Throne.

I have to echo what my colleague from Torngat Mountains said in thanking His Honour for the excellent job in delivering today's Speech from the Throne. I don't think there is a Member among us with any doubt of our government's clear vision for a stronger tomorrow.

In the opening of the Speech from the Throne this afternoon, the touching acknowledgement of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel gave me pause. This was indeed a defining moment in our history. All across our province we continue to remember this sacrifice that so boldly demonstrated our spirit as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. These brave soldiers' sacrifice will never be forgotten, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, another tragic anniversary is fast approaching. On March 12th, seven years ago, Cougar Helicopters Flight 491 took off from St. John's International Airport bound for the White Rose FPSO and Hibernia. The helicopter never reached the oil fields that morning, Mr. Speaker. At around 9:50 a.m., Flight 491 ditched into the North Atlantic resulting in the deaths of 17 passengers and crew members. Only one person onboard survived the crash.

Mr. Speaker, this tragedy serves to remind us that our economy is underpinned by perilous industries, just as it has historically been. We must realize the risk undertaken each day by the men and women who work in the offshore oil industry.

Mr. Speaker, I thank His Honour for calling attention to the fact that today is International Women's Day. I feel a tremendous sense of pride to address the House as one of the 10 female Members elected to represent the 40 districts of Newfoundland and Labrador. One in four of us in this hon. House, Mr. Speaker, are female. While that percentage has been improving, we know we still have work to do. The Premier recognizes this fact and he has been a strong advocate for greater female empowerment and gender equality.

I am pleased to join him as we work toward increased female representation in the Legislature. I would also like to take this time to acknowledge my female colleagues in Cabinet. Mr. Speaker, the critical portfolios of Finance, Natural Resources, Child, Youth and Family Services are indeed in capable hands.

I also acknowledge today the hon. Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair who will begin a well-deserved term as Deputy Speaker of this hon. House. And to every female Member in this House, we should each be proud of our roles in breaking down the barriers.

I applaud the government for which I have the honour to serve, for its commitment to establishing regulations for midwifery in the Health Professions Act. This measure will add another option to front-line health care in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. I see it as especially beneficial to rural parts of our province.

The Premier's own background as a health care professional speaks to his long-standing commitment to ensure people across the province receive the best possible health care services. Under his experienced leadership, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know that his conviction will never waver, Mr. Speaker.

His Honour mentioned an increased focus on research and development in the ocean technology sector to be a priority for government. As a resident of the Burin Peninsula, I can testify first hand to our world-class strengths in this growing field. Mr. Speaker, this is a field that has applications not just for oil and gas, but for fishery and aquaculture, transportation and tourism.

I can also attest to our innovation in the ocean technology sector based on what I've seen at the Wave Energy Research Centre and the land-based fish farm in Lord's Cove in my District of Burin – Grand Bank. I applaud efforts to expand our capabilities in all of these industries. I believe that our people and our institutions will be at the leading edge of the marine technology field on a global scale.

We will also be ideally positioned to take full command of our resources when oil prices rebound. The Premier has spoken of the need for economic diversification. He has instructed his Cabinet to pursue every avenue in order to achieve this. Mr. Speaker, the Premier truly recognizes the solution for our financial challenges lies in the ingenuity of the people and institutions of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was encouraged to hear His Honour speak about the high standards of integrity the Premier expects of his Cabinet and colleagues. This is indeed welcomed, and I thank the Premier for setting that tone for this hon. House.

I say to the Members opposite and to colleagues from my caucus alike, we are faced with challenges that are bigger than party lines and political stripes. We are tasked with solving problems that impact not just us but coming generations, Mr. Speaker. I ask every Member in this hon. House to remember that we are all here for the betterment of our province. We may disagree on policy and we will engage in heated debate, but as we begin this new chapter we know that we share a common purpose here, regardless of which side we are sitting on. Our common purpose is setting in place the foundation for a stronger tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, once again, it is a great honour to second the motion that a select committee be appointed to draft an Address in Reply in response to the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

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

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

Congratulations to you on your election and official appointment today. Also, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for his eloquent delivery of the Speech from the Throne today. And I would also like to thank the mover, the Member for Torngat Mountains, and also the seconder, the Member for Burin – Grand Bank, for their role today as well.

I'd like to take a moment as well, if I may, Mr. Speaker, to briefly extend our pleasure and welcome – we have the Justices of the Supreme Court with us today. We have leaders from business, labour and academia. We have representatives here from our churches and cultural groups, communities. Also, I know that many Members here today have members of their family who have joined them today, as well as citizens who have joined us here in the galleries, or have tuned in for the broadcast. So I welcome them all as well.

I want to welcome the Premier and his caucus today and, as well, Members of the Third Party this afternoon. I also want to just take a quick moment, if I may, to extend a special welcome to new Members of the House of Assembly. Especially to our own Member representing Conception Bay South, as well his first day in the House.

Mr. Speaker, for all 40 of us it's a privilege and an honour to serve the people here in their House of Assembly, and we should never forget that. We realize that only one government can lead at a time, and we respect the people's choice they made in 2015. They decided time for change had come. But remember, time for change will come again.

In the meantime, we've been elected to serve. And for Members on this side of the House, we've been elected to serve a very critical role, a role as Official Opposition for the House, to hold government's choices up to the light, if you will, and to offer alternatives when appropriate. We will do so vigorously because of what's at stake. That's the future of our province and the welfare of our people.

This afternoon we listened to the Speech from the Throne. I was disappointed, I have to say, to hear very little detail on what the government's

direction will look like and what it will include in the coming year. We heard much of the same words and discussions as we heard during the recent election campaign. While there's been very little detail in the Throne Speech today, we do expect that more details will be fleshed out from the budget and also from Question Period and debate in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Speaker, as well, it was interesting to note today that I didn't hear a reference to the very important fisheries fund. There was very little reference to the people of Labrador. There was no solid reference to a plan of action to address the fiscal challenges that we face as a province. I was also very surprised that while there was some reference to openness and transparency, I expected to hear more details on how that would look and how that was going to take place.

A theme echoing from all the messages that we've heard today and throughout this year we know is the fiscal reality that we face as a province. We acknowledge that the challenges are difficult. In fact, the challenges were already difficult a year ago when we brought down our budget in 2015.

The cause of those challenges here is the same as it is for Alberta and Saskatchewan, and that is, of course, the sudden, steep and sustained drop in the price of oil in the world markets. The reality, really, is that none of us created that loss of oil value, and none of us could do anything to change that and we still have no control over that.

If oil prices had remained where they were just a couple of years ago, we wouldn't be facing the challenges that we are today. Neither would Saskatchewan and neither would Alberta or the many other oil-producing jurisdictions of the world who are all facing very similar challenges.

In government you have to deal with the reality that you face, not the reality that you'd prefer. That's why, even in an election year, we brought forward a budget – I believe an honest budget that included workforce reduction through attrition and also tax increases. This year I can tell you, just like last year, we will co-operate. We will co-operate with government and all Members in the House. We will work together to find the most responsible and least disruptive

course of action to get through the challenges and onward to growth and prosperity.

With so much to offer, Newfoundland and Labrador has a tremendous future of opportunity ahead of us, as long as we can get through the present storm intact. That's where choices really matter the most, Mr. Speaker. Some choices will make us stronger; other choices can leave us weaker. Putting off the choices too long will only make matters worse. Delaying fuels uncertainty, it weakens confidence, and it continues to signal to our lenders a lack of a plan.

One of our new government's first decisions, in their earliest hours of their mandate, was to reverse the HST increase that we introduced in last year's budget. I think, actually, it may have been their first request to the new prime minister. Now, it may have seemed like a popular choice to make – it was certainly a popular campaign promise – but I don't believe it was very well thought out. As referenced in the Speech from the Throne, oil prices were falling and that meant oil revenue was falling. That meant the need for new revenue was growing, but the new Premier said that HST was a job killer. He said it many, many times.

The Liberal premier of New Brunswick doesn't believe that HST is a job killer. He just raised his province's rate from 13 per cent. He raised it 2 per cent to 15 per cent saying it was the fairest way to go. The Liberal premier of Nova Scotia doesn't think HST is a job killer. He just called for a uniform rate throughout Atlantic Canada, a 15 per cent rate, saying that it would be good for the region and it would make our region stronger.

Others have also said that the most fair and progressive option, which is the same evidence that we used in raising our rate – that HST was the most fair and progressive option. Where was the new Premier's evidence-based decision making when he cancelled this increase, a decision that he made minutes after hearing it announced in the 2015 budget? His decision left a \$200-million-a-year hole with nothing to fill it. That really doesn't sound like evidence-based decision making.

How does he plan to fill it? Fee increases, income tax increases for middle class, small business tax increases. We've been put on notice today that everyone is going to be sacrificed and play some role in making this right. By cancelling the HST increase, he denied the province revenue it could be earning right now to help offset the deficit, spread over the whole year, the entire population, with credits to protect people that were least able to pay, with credits to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

That revenue would be helping us cope with this enormous shortfall that we're suffering because of the drop in oil prices. Mr. Speaker, \$200 million is a lot of money. For front-line workers I know it's a lot of money for them as well. That equates to thousands of front-line workers delivering services and programs that are important to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

By cancelling the HST increase, it also put a stake in the heart of the long-term plan that we brought to the rating agencies last spring. When the agencies saw our plan over a year ago with targets for debt, spending, restraint and revenue generation, they liked what they saw and they maintained the province's rating and outlook.

After the new government cancelled the revenue-generating HST increase on January 1, all three bond-rating agencies issued updates that very same month downgrading the province's outlook. All three agencies pointed to the lack of a credible long-term plan as a factor in their decision; a lack of a plan, especially from a government who had repeatedly declared that they had a plan – they had the plan for the future.

Now, that surely has not inspired confidence. It hasn't inspired confidence in our province and our people, giving up revenue while revenue was in steep decline. Even stalwart Liberals had been publicly saying that a plan is needed sooner rather than later. So where is that plan?

As far back as two years ago, the then Leader of the Opposition, now our Premier, told people he did have a plan – as long as two years ago. As a matter of fact, he even went as far as to say two years ago that you're going to like it. Well, clearly he didn't have a plan. That plan is

needed now, not a year from now. Because the next steps after warning from the bond rating agencies – the downgrade comes right after the warnings. That will jeopardize our ability to borrow and that could cripple our province.

The uncertainty and fear in our province and our public service is real, Mr. Speaker. The speech today confirms, as I referenced earlier, reason for that fear when the province was just told that everyone is going to have to accept some level of sacrifice. Now that's a clear warning.

We've heard these messages for several months. We've not heard messages of hope and future and potential and prosperity. We've heard messages of sacrifice. We've heard messages of tough times ahead, and yes we do, but not having that balance is crushing confidence. It's hurting investment. It's depressing consumer spending. The uncertainty in our province cannot go on and on. People need a clear sense of direction – just as much as the rating agencies look for a clear sense of direction – and they need hope.

That is why we've been calling the Premier to open the House, so we could debate these important issues. I'm glad we're here today. Members on this side of the House are all glad to be here. I know Members opposite, I'm sure, are glad to be here as well. It's the first time we've been here since June 2015, nine full months. We have to maximize our abilities and our opportunities while we're in this House. That means we have to work together to minimize the impacts on the people of our province. That's our job. That's what we're here to do.

The Premier has talked in the past about three options: cut, tax and borrow. There are other options as well. We heard some talk again today about economic diversification. No detail, but we heard talk of economic diversification.

What about those efforts to stimulate new growth? Yes, growth brings revenue to our province to help offset those losses from oil. Today we heard there is some plan and some discussion that's going to take place. Again, we haven't heard a lot of detail, but I'm talking about a plan that's going to work for the province today. Not a magical growth or fantasy

plan as has been referred to in the past. Not about growth years down the road. I'm talking about real growth that can happen in a short time.

I was glad today in the Speech from the Throne when I heard the Premier's reference to tourism growth. Tourism growth and opportunity is significant in our province. In the past decade we've made significant progress in delivering on tourism, growing communities, helping to diversify the economy through tourism, bringing people home and growing business opportunities in rural parts of our province.

What concerned me the most this spring is when I heard that Marine Atlantic was increasing their rates. Where was our provincial government? Not one word from our provincial government in trying to defend the need for rates that were going to stimulate those tourism dollars and bring more people to our province.

We've invested strongly in growth and diversification of our economy in recent years, including tourism; many, many hundreds of millions of dollars in tourism marketing, business attraction initiatives, research and development, innovation strategy, our ocean technology strategy, venture capital, aquaculture, agriculture, forestry, the fisheries, and arts and culture. I'm glad today that I heard from the Speech from the Throne that several references to some of these very successful programs are going to continue. I thank the government for not casting these very successful projects aside, but continuing with investments and partnership in some of these very key areas that have benefited Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We've invested \$5.5 billion to open up Labrador through the Northern Strategic Plan and related initiatives and \$6 billion in infrastructure. We heard a commitment today for continued investment in infrastructure, because we know that demand continues to be great. Mr. Speaker, \$350 million for a tuition freeze and student aid reform, because we need to invite and bring students to our province and have an education system that has an opportunity for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We've invested in debt reduction, \$3.6 billion, and \$1.2 billion for a very successful poverty reduction. Mr. Speaker, \$4 billion in tax reductions. That's \$4 billion that remains in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so they can spend in their communities, so they can drive growth and drive the economy.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important to remember as well that \$10 billion was utilized simply to replace the money that we used to receive through equalization payments. For several years we used to get more than a billion dollars each and every year to help us pay the bills. As oil revenues rose and equalization funding fell, then stopped altogether in 2008, we had to take what used to be those oil revenues and convert them to replacing what equalization used to cover. That amounted to \$10 billion over the last decade.

The premiers of other oil-producing provinces that are facing the same challenges we're facing here – Premier Wall in Saskatchewan and Premier Notley in Alberta – they're out fighting for some of that money to be returned. They've not been afraid to step up and represent their constituents, the citizens of their provinces. That's what equalization is supposed to do and help. It's supposed to help provinces when they have a shortage, protecting provinces when revenues don't meet the needs.

If I can read just very briefly one section from our Constitution, section 36(2) of our Constitution which says, "Parliament and the government of Canada are committed to the principle of making equalization payments to ensure that provincial governments have sufficient revenues to provide reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation." That's very simply what equalization is about.

This year, Newfoundland and Labrador does not have sufficient revenues to provide reasonable, comparable levels of public services at reasonable, comparable levels of taxation. So why is it that Premier Wall and Premier Notley can be out looking for those much-needed revenues through equalization, but our Premier is not out with them? I'm sure our Premier doesn't expect Premier Wall or Premier Notley to fight for them or to work for our province.

They're looking for equalization reform.
They're looking for stabilization reform.
They're looking for stimulus and emergency relief.

Nova Scotia is getting \$1.7 billion this year because they have shortfalls in their revenue – revenue that it needs. It's the same for New Brunswick and for Manitoba. If we had that \$1.7 billion, our problems would be essentially solved in this province. Ontario gets \$2.3 billion. Quebec gets \$10 billion because their revenues are short of their needs.

What's really interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that this year the Liberal premier of Quebec is now publicly lobbying for more. The Liberal premier of Ontario has now joined the premier of Quebec in looking for more money to support their provinces as a result of the struggles that are being experienced by Bombardier, which we know is important to their province. Those provinces and those leaders are not afraid to speak up for their citizens.

For years we've been paying our own way, while other provinces received the help, as I just described, those very much-needed equalization revenues. The Premier can't expect someone else to fight for us; he has to do it on our behalf. Even the Liberal premiers of Ontario and Quebec – and while our Liberal Premier may be reluctant to make waves and cause problems for the new Liberal federal government we refer to as their cousins in Ottawa, we know that this is crunch time and we need to pull out all the stops for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

When Newfoundland and Labrador's public service and the best interests of our people are on the line, then the province must trump party and it's time to stand up and to demand action. So let's make this not about party, but let's make this about people. The people's interests are at stake, and we all have a job to do to protect them – all 40 of us. We will work with you, the government. We will do our jobs vigorously on this side of the House. But we'll keep the people's interests as our priority, and we will do that to the best of our abilities. So let us get on with the task of serving the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm happy to have the opportunity to stand in response to the Speech from the Throne today – a speech that was rather weak, a speech that had no vision. We really still don't know what this government is all about, what it stands for. We still have no clear message.

One of the messages, one of the promises in the Speech from the Throne, is that we are all going to share in the sacrifice together. So my question to the government, the writers of the speech, is: What about the people who are already living the sacrifice? The people at the bottom end of our economy in this province, what about them? They're living it now. What is the message to them when you say we're all going to share?

Today is March 8th. We start our 48th session on International Women's Day. As we start this session, under the government's black cloud of doom and gloom because they've been spreading it for the last three months, facing cuts to every program and service we offer, we must keep in mind that tough economic times hit women and children the hardest. Are they going to share in the sacrifice?

As much as we all continue to strive towards full equality – and we all want it – and to celebrate the gains that have been made, we cannot allow those gains to be lost through thoughtless budget slashing.

In tough times – and we all know they are – increased social pressures mean that the organizations that serve women are more in demand than ever. So I hope, Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of International Women's Day, this government is not contemplating an attack on women asking them to share in the sacrifice, and that organizations like Status of Women Councils will get the guaranteed multi-year funding they need to work most effectively as the Premier promised during the provincial election.

There were a lot of promises made then in their Red Book and repeated in today's Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. We will be watching in this 48th session to see how many or how few of those promises are followed through on.

There are other things we would hope to see happening in this session. We are eagerly anticipating legislation to enshrine the rights of transgender individuals in our Human Rights Act. We are looking for school board elections to be announced. The previous government dragged its heels on that since 2013 and while the current government seems to be taking its time as well, we live in hope that we will not see unelected school boards closing any more schools in this province.

The Residential Tenancies Act is long overdue to be updated. Consultations wrapped up in 2012. The previous government chose to ignore that report and we are hopeful that the current government will take action to improve the lives of tenants, many of whom live in wretchedly substandard conditions.

Later this month we should finally see the report of the panel on fracking. We will be looking to see what that report contains and what government's response to that report will be.

We also want to see government proclaim the midwifery legislation. That was promised today in the Speech from the Throne. But I would like to point out that I have a memo from the Department of Health and Community Services dated December 15, 2015 – so, under this government – pointing out that even if the legislation and regulations are put in place, midwifery will be outside of the public health care system. That's not acceptable. That's not what the midwives, who've given their lives already in this province and who can't work now, want. They want to be part of the health care system, and they should be part of the health care system.

Those are some of our specifics, Mr. Speaker.

The people of the province also wait to see, at last, how this government plans to deal with the real financial challenges we face. We didn't get a sense of that from the Speech from the Throne.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are struggling. Many have already lost high-paying jobs in other provinces, and thousands here are worried about what will happen in the next provincial budget. They have heard so much speculation and musing from government, Mr. Speaker, that they are worried about their own jobs, about providing for their families.

Students worry attrition will destroy their chances for finding work in this province. Business owners are already seeing a downturn in their sales as people hang on to their money. A constant message of doom and gloom can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and we see it happening in our province.

Let's work together to deal with extraordinary challenge, and let's use methods other than the defaults that tired governments turn to out of reflex. This government says it wants to consult and work together; well, let's build a vision together.

Attrition? Layoffs? Businesses and economists alike will tell you this approach can cause more harm than good. Anyone who lived through the last round of Liberal government layoffs in 1991 knows how devastating that kind of action can be.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt the previous government left quite a mess behind with their reckless financial management. High but unsustainable oil revenues and short-lived Atlantic Accord money could have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lay a stable financial foundation. Instead, they apparently thought we could afford to simultaneously increase spending, drastically reduce government revenues and commit to a massive big-ticket project like Muskrat Falls.

We were alarmed, Mr. Speaker, at the tone of recent public consultations, which the Speech from the Throne referred to. Most years, the people who have elected us are invited to speak to government representatives and give their opinions on what government can do to make their lives better and more meaningful. This year, the Government Renewal Initiative starts off by asking our public servants and institutions to identify 30 per cent savings in their budgets –

30 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Does this government plan to shrink its way to prosperity, I ask?

Then, instead of the usual public budget consultations, the people of the province were asked to suggest cuts, ways to reduce spending. They were not asked which services they thought they could do without, though that would have been a very meaningful question.

Trying to cut our way out of the current mess runs a very real risk of making the cure worse than the disease. It has been proven time after time around the world, austerity does not create prosperity. For this government to follow up its months of prophesizing doom with thoughtless slashing of vital services and selling off irreplaceable assets would be sheer folly. Is that what they're going to do? We don't know. They didn't tell us what their vision is.

Mr. Speaker, I get concerned when government representatives say everything is on the table, or perhaps more accurately, everything except Muskrat Falls is on the table. I'm not sure we had any kind of real promise around that one.

Does government stand for nothing? Some things should never be on the cutting table: universal accessible public health care delivery, for example; affordable education, including post-secondary education; equality of opportunity, including opportunities for young people to put down roots; dignity and respect for seniors.

We cannot use economic difficulties as an excuse to justify leaving people behind. Ordinary Newfoundlanders and Labradorians did not create the mess we're in, and they should not be forced to pay for the cleanup. Everyone should be given a fighting chance to realize their dreams and aspirations. Part of government's job is to ensure fairness of opportunity. That includes fairness of opportunity for people in rural areas in the province.

Our small communities are a priceless asset. They define, to a large extent, who we are as a province and as a people. It's the people who will be the most at risk if government uses per capita costs to determine which services to cut. Our small, scattered population and enormous land do make it costly to deliver services. The

only way to have similar per capita costs to provinces with larger populations and smaller land mass is to have inadequate services, especially for rural areas. I hope no one in this House believes the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve less.

We need to develop a comprehensive home care plan so seniors can stay as long as possible in their homes and communities, a program that is part of our health care system. Government cannot use budgetary challenges as an excuse to shirk the obligation to give seniors dignity and a reasonable quality of life.

We need to provide educational and economic opportunities for young people. Let's not forget the devastating impacts of previous rounds of government cuts. Those cuts, as we are seeing now in provinces that are jumping on the austerity bandwagon, go far beyond the people who lose their jobs. Businesses lose customers, and young people move away and make their lives elsewhere. Our demographics are difficult enough as it is without government depriving our young people of opportunity. Promising you can all become entrepreneurs is certainly not going to work, Mr. Speaker, and I defy the government to prove that it can.

Our party has long advocated for a strong, accessible, universal system of public health care. Indeed, we're the party that brought Canada Medicare. As our population ages the need is greater than ever, but health care professionals tell us we're stuck in a model that doesn't work. People with lower income, lower education, food insecurity and inadequate or no housing are much more likely to become frequent users of repute care than the rest of the population. To get at the high cost of health care we have to get at the root causes of poor health, the social determinants of health. We will not eradicate poverty by slashing government jobs and programs.

Mr. Speaker, we have grave concerns about the clear tilt toward privatization of public services in the Government Renewal Initiative documents and the Finance Minister's pronouncements. I just told you what's in the memo from the Department of Health and Community Services with regard to midwifery.

We need bold and innovative leadership. There is nothing bold or innovative about turning core public services over to the for-profit sector. Auditors General in several Canadian provinces have been very clear: P3s cost the public Treasury more than conventional government procurement and have at times compromised public safety.

The private sector plays a vital role in our economy but it is not the cure for all of our ills. There is no private sector solution for mental illness. There is no private sector solution for domestic violence. Our economy needs a dynamic and vibrant private sector and it needs a strong network of public services.

Delivering social programs often comes down to a choice between paying now or paying more later. Notwithstanding our financial challenges, we have to get at the root causes of social problems. We can't close enough hospital wings, privatize enough services or lay off enough doctors and nurses to come close to the long-term savings we can realize from systematically tackling the root causes of poverty.

Our responsibility is to make decisions that will address the needs of the people of the province. That is the lens through which we will be looking at everything this House does in this 48th session of the House of Assembly.

Adversity is not a new thing to Newfoundland and Labrador. We've always found a way to deal with the challenges we face. If there's anything we agree upon with the government that was in the Speech from the Throne, it's that point.

In the next months and years we will be dealing with a crisis that the Members on the government side have told us repeatedly is unprecedented. Let's find practical and forward-thinking ways to tackle that crisis. Let's make bold and innovative decisions here in this House that will lift all our boats, that will give hope and help to the people of the province.

Together this session, let's make a plan that will work for today, tomorrow and our future generations, not cut the legs out from our future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for his delivery of the Speech from the Throne this afternoon, but I would also like to thank those here today representing different sectors in our province and community groups from across the province. Your presence here today is not only welcomed but it is encouraged, whether it's in this House or in public events in the future, or whether you find yourself someday tuning in at home or at work.

This Chamber, of course, is the public's House, so it's important that we make meaningful responses from – I want to just mention the meaningful responses from the mover and the seconder this afternoon. It was great to hear their perspectives on the important work happening in their districts throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. It tells us that together as a group, as has been already mentioned, that all 40 MHAs working together, we can indeed move this province forward. Indeed, moving it forward will require a solid plan to build a strong and sustainable future for our province.

I also want to single out two Members, that being the Member for Torngat Mountains and the Member for Burin – Grand Bank. Like everyone else today who were watching from their perspectives, it's important to get their insights of what's happening in their own districts and their own communities, as reflected in the Speech from the Throne.

I would also like to acknowledge two other leaders, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Leader of the Third Party, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi; your comments are appreciated. I respect the fact that even though we will be different on so many things, our decisions will be thoughtful. They will be meaningful. They will be done on evidence based. The fact that you have been elected in your own districts clearly reflects the decisions of the people who made those decisions in your districts, so we respect all of that.

Before moving on, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to recognize what is a tragic anniversary that is before us, one that is really difficult to think about but something that we must never forget. This year marks the 100th anniversary of Beaumont-Hamel. I would like to pay tribute to the incredible sacrifices that have been made by soldiers of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. I ask all of you in this House, over the next few weeks and months when you get the opportunity, to make sure you participate in those events.

I would also like to recognize International Women's Day. This year's theme, as has been mentioned in the speech, is Women's Empowerment Leads to Equality. We want women and girls to have equal opportunity to achieve their ambitions.

I look today at some of the new Pages we have in this House of Assembly; some strong young women, I will assure you, that we will be following. They do a great job for us. I can tell you their future in Newfoundland and Labrador will be strong, but I think it is fair that I also mention that I have my mother who is sitting over to my left in the gallery. When you look at strong women, I would rank her right up there with anyone that I have ever met, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you.

I'm sure everyone would say the same thing, so I will declare the conflict and the bias as well.

I want to promote gender balance and leadership, as I said, in all aspects of our society. We must respect and value each other's differences and have a community and a province that is inclusive of all cultures. So I'm pleased that we do have strong women in our caucus. I encourage women to continue to be more involved in politics and business and take on leadership opportunities in our province.

I have said many times that there is room for people, that not all women we meet will take part in elected politics. We wish they could, but there will be many opportunities, I know in our caucus for sure, to take part in unelected fashions as well. We will work together to

achieve gender parity. That's up to all of us to make sure the opportunities and supports are in place to realize this goal.

This is a new beginning for Newfoundland and Labrador; a new government with a fresh perspective; a new government with renewed energy and a passion for change; a new government whose commitment to openness and transparency is fundamental and underpins all things that we do; a new government of Newfoundland and Labrador that is inclusive, engaging all people on this journey as we create a stronger tomorrow for our residents.

It was Albert Einstein who once said, "The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."

This province, and indeed our country, has changed its way of thinking. In November of last year the people of Newfoundland and Labrador demanded change, and they looked to our party for that change. The people of our province recognize that you can't keep doing the same things and expect different outcomes – outcomes that have resulted in a deficit of \$2 billion, outcomes that leave us with no choice but to change the way we do things.

A change, as you know, is often restricted. People often resist change. So while it's not always easy to talk, it is nevertheless my great privilege to be able to be in a position to lead that change, to find solutions. Together, with people of Newfoundland and Labrador, we can correct the course and move forward to long-term sustainability.

The numbers are daunting. The impact is profound. I was just asked a question in a media scrum that we often use the word unprecedented. I have met with many people in our province who have provided leadership in all aspects, not just political leadership. To a person, they have all told me the same thing, that they have never seen our province in a situation that we find ourselves in financially today. It is an unprecedented situation that we are in.

The fall fiscal update that we mentioned spoke about \$23 billion in debt; \$23 billion, that being just in five years. Those numbers are sometimes

very difficult to understand but when you put it down to your household, it's no different. If you have to be borrowing one out of every \$3 that you are spending, it puts it in perspective. People get that. So doing nothing is not an option. We will work with people in our province to identify those short-, medium- and long-term measures and we will tackle this head on working with this province.

I want to talk about, just for a few minutes, what a plan looks like. The plan that has been laid out in front of us, the one we reported on in December of this year, that plan really is unsustainable and it will not work. That was based on last year's budget.

Of course, this is not a plan that we had put in place; it's one that, really, we inherited. It is one that we actually gave the fiscal update on. Since we took office and began looking at the numbers that have been handed to us, as I just said, the deficits are unprecedented and they are unsustainable.

This is not about painting doom and gloom over the next four or five years. This is about the reality that we face. This is about laying out the facts as they are there. This is about being truthful, open and transparent about where we are as a province.

Through our Government Renewal Initiative, we have been engaging experts all across the sectors. If you read the full paragraph and the full definition of what's in this initiative you will clearly see that where it mentions 30 per cent, the words continue and they flow into a complete paragraph. It says, near the end of it, that really this is about being creative and about basically challenging people to really think outside the box and to think about new and better ways of doing things.

We have engaged many community groups. We've engaged unions, business groups and other organizations seeking their input and their ideas. The information that is coming back to me, I will tell you, has been very clear. They are thankful we've given them the opportunity to be in their communities, to listen to their ideas and to share their thoughts. That is the information that is coming back to us. We know they mean what they say because they have responded.

They have taken action. They have been sending in messages and ideas. It was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. That, in itself, has been unprecedented.

Currently, there's a lot of work that's being done. Our caucus and our Cabinet, I can tell you, are putting in countless hours of making sure that we research this. The worst thing you can do in a very difficult situation is to overreact. You must make sure that you analyze the information that you have. Because what happens is if you put in knee-jerk reactions to all of this, what you do is you find yourself making, in many cases – and we've seen this in the past when we've had to go back and redo things that were done. Therefore, we all know that costs money.

So dealing with the fiscal challenge that we face today is the number-one priority. When you effect change in any province or any organization, it happens incrementally. Budget 2016-2017, that will be what you will see – that will be the plan that will get this province back on track to a future of sustainability.

It takes focus; it takes discipline. I can assure you on this side of the House there is focus and there is discipline. Our folks are hard at work making sure that we put in place the right measures to take us out of where we are today and into a sustainable future.

When you talk about sharing of information, on September 28th, last year, I wrote the premier of the day at the time, who is currently the Leader of the Official Opposition – it was really two letters seeking information on two things. One was an update on the Muskrat Falls Project, and second was an update on the current fiscal situation our province was facing. This was in September of 2015.

Well, the Muskrat Falls Project update did come out because it was a public document as part of the oversight at the time; but, the second letter, one about the fiscal situation of our province, was never answered. So that information was denied.

I made a commitment that we would never work like that. That was the reason why in December we laid everything out – the cold, hard facts, as

they existed, and for what we knew, were laid out.

Mr. Speaker, when people look at what has changed there are so many things that have changed in our province, even in the last few months. So it is important that we make sure we put the appropriate measures in place and we take the appropriate time to do it.

The closed-door policy that we've seen in the past will change. We will be open and we will continue to put out that information. I almost say, in some ways, it's like visiting a doctor and not wanting to hear what the diagnosis is. People in Newfoundland and Labrador, they want to know what the facts are. They're intelligent, they understand it, and what it does is it stimulates them to come with their ideas.

That is the track we have taken, and it is the one that we will continue. We will always work – and keep in mind, this is not a stop-and-go; this is not something that ends on budget day, whenever that date will be. I was just asked that question outside. I said this to them: It will be in a month that starts with A or a month that starts with M. It will be one of those months, and we will see in the few weeks, in the upcoming weeks, when that budget will be.

We will do that for one reason: simply because we have the proper due diligence done and the proper work is done, people are informed and they have a right to know. We've had more than 25 sessions right now across our province. All of this information will feed into the upcoming budget, and I can assure the ideas are there and we have lots of information to work with.

People often ask, why is it you take this approach? Over Christmas of this year, I had made a commitment – there were literally thousands of messages that came in, either through Facebook or social media, mostly people that were congratulating us on our election victory at the time. I can remember over Christmas, I was reading through some of the Facebook messages and I said there were quite a few, but there was one that really stood out.

There is a young man that's in the gallery today – and I can use his name. It was a young man by the name of Parker Ralph. When people ask me

why we make the decisions that we make, it is because of people like Parker. He's an eight-year-old that I met. I invited him to the office because he wanted to be part of securing his future. Parker is here with us today and he sat in the meeting, he had his own set of questions, and I can tell you he did one serious interview.

I can tell you I will never forget when he left the office, he tapped me on the shoulder and he said: Premier, if you ever need any more advice, give me a call.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We called Parker and he is here today, and we thank him. The reason why all of us in this House of Assembly, regardless of the political stripe, I assure you, are making the decisions that we make today is because of the Parkers of the world and because of the next generation. That's the reason why it's important that we continue to do the work we will do. So yes, it is about a plan, but it is a plan that will consider everything and it will consider everybody, and I can guarantee you that no decision will be made lightly.

I know that when we make tough decisions, there are people that get impacted by that. That is not lost on us. Every single time that there is a decision that is made people and communities are impacted; we understand that. But not doing so, in many cases, will have a larger impact; that is not lost on me as well.

The new approach for us began on November 30th. The approach is rooted in a more open, transparent and accountable way. In fact, it is the very foundation. It is extremely important for us to do something new for the future of our province. When I listen today to speeches, things like the Independent Appointments Commission, these are things that are critically important for us. It is time to take the politics out of those appointments and put the people in place that can do the best job helping us make the decisions as we reposition our province.

All of this work is not possible without the commitment that I have on this side of the House. I've often heard or it has been mentioned already today that others as well, working together – and I can assure you that if there's

any MHA in this office, regardless of where you sit, if you ever need to talk to us, you know we are there because working together is extremely important for us.

I want to speak, too, for a few minutes about the new relationship we have with the federal government. It's an incredible opportunity for us and a renewed sense of hope. Not only just for us as a province, but indeed for all Canadians and one that simply did not exist under the previous administration. So I'm excited about the opportunity we have in working with our federal counterparts as we maximize the opportunity for the people of our province.

One order of business with the new federal government is access to funding, as many of you would have heard. It's about the infrastructure funding. That unfortunately was not something that was happening often enough with the previous administration. The \$400 million fund has been mentioned already. We will take the time, because leveraging those opportunities with the dollars we have is critically important. The federal budget, of course, on March 22 will give us some very important insights on where that will be.

All of this goes hand in hand, of course, as we begin the rebuilding process with our own fiscal future in our province. Through stakeholder engagement and through consultations with the industry, we've identified many opportunities to grow our province.

We will do everything we possibly can to ensure people in our province who are looking for work – that there will be work there available for us. It is important that we diversify our economy. If there is a lesson we have learned in the last 10 years in this province it is simply this: we cannot continue to rely completely on sole-source revenue like we have, for instance, on the oil sector. We must do the diversification programs in our province so that we can spread this revenue stream around.

I can assure you when you think of the social programs like health care and education in our province right now, we are committed to face those challenges. Because when I look at things like mental illness and things that impact and lead to people not being able to have meaningful

lives like they would expect – things like the Waterford Hospital, it's hard to believe we're still talking about a facility that was built and opened in the mid-1800s. So it's important we put the appropriate measures in place so that we can replace infrastructure like the Waterford Hospital.

We fully support the initiative that was set out in the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. So as Minister Responsible for Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, I am personally committed to seeing that our province's role is clear and is followed through.

There are many other important initiatives, Mr. Speaker, and plans that have been outlined today in his speech. I am proud of the work that we've already done with our government in just a few weeks that we've been there. There is a large amount of work that has been done in preparing for our mandate. The Government Renewal Initiative is where we are focusing much time and effort right now. I can assure you that it is a very intensive process that we're engaged in and we will see it through.

Rebuilding Newfoundland and Labrador, getting it back to financial security; it is not an isolated issue. In fact, it influences all other issues and it is in all our priorities. We are committed to getting our province back on track and we will do what's right for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We will continue to engage the public in this and many more conversations. As I said, this is not a stop-and-start process; it's a process that continues. We will do it in a very open and transparent way – always.

We will listen to the people of our province and we will make sure that we make the right decision. We will make the best decision for our province. We will do the due diligence.

As I conclude my remarks, today I had an opportunity to meet with a young man. When you think about where we are in our history and the fights and the challenges that people have had to take us and help us to where we are today, it was a young man by the name of Corporal Jamie MacWhirter. We participated in

a ceremony where he was recognized for the work that he's done in fighting for the freedoms that we have today.

It should never be lost on us, the privilege that we have to sit in this House of Assembly. It's something I think about on a regular basis. We can give thanks to people that have fought the fight for us. We will always recognize that.

The journey for us begins with this session of the House of Assembly. We will do it with respect and we will do it with integrity. We will make the decisions that are right for the people of our province. I look for the co-operation of all Members because this, indeed, is an unprecedented time in our history.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that a Select Committee be struck to draft an Address of Thanks to be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, in reply to the gracious Speech from the Throne with which he has been pleased to open this present session of the House of Assembly.

The Members of the Select Committee are the Member for Torngat Mountains, the Member for Grand Bank and the Member for Conception Bay South.

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.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

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

I give notice that I will move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider a resolution for the granting of Interim Supply to Her Majesty, Bill 2.

MR. SPEAKER: Other notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I give notice, and by leave move, that the Striking Committee comprise the following Members: the Member for Burgeo – La Poile; the Member for Burin – Grand Bank; the Member for Ferryland; the Member for St. John’s Centre; and the Member for St. John’s West.

MR. SPEAKER: Other notices of motion?

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition, I’m sorry.

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

I wish to table the following private member’s motion:

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urges the Government of Canada to recognize the impact of the steep fall in oil revenues on our province and that it consider financial support to our province in order to prevent deep cuts in services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House urges the Government of Canada to modernize the federal-provincial arrangements, including the Equalization Program and the Fiscal Stabilization Program, to more fairly and promptly reflect our province’s needs and to more fairly account for natural resources revenues.

This is seconded by my colleague, the Member for Ferryland.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 63(3), the private member’s resolution just entered by my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, will be the one debated tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: Prior to the adjournment of the House the motion on the Striking Committee was moved and seconded. Who was the seconder for that motion?

MR. A. PARSONS: It was seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay.

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

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