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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA*

Wednesday

March 11, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

### Orders of the Day

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good morning, everyone. I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider a resolution and Bill 26 respecting the granting of Interim Supply to Her Majesty.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is that the message, along with the bill, be referred to the Committee of Supply and that I do now leave the Chair.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Bennett):** Order, please!

We are now considering the related resolution and Bill 26.

### Resolution

*“Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

*“That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to Her Majesty for*

*defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2021 the sum of \$4,602,859,900.”*

**CLERK (Barnes):** The amendment is: The resolution be amended by striking out the amount “\$4,602,859,900” and substituting instead the amount “\$2,301,429,950.”

The proposed subamendment is: The amendment be amended by striking out the amount “\$2,301,429,950” and by substituting instead the amount “\$2,631,157,300.”

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Lake Melville.

**MR. TRIMPER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased to stand and have an opportunity to speak. It's interesting, what I was going to say on this first opportunity is quite different than what I'm going to say in the next 10 minutes. I guess I would ask my colleagues if you've ever been in a dentist chair and the dentist is in there, maybe you're getting a cavity addressed or something like that, and every now and then he's in there mucking around inside your mouth and he hits the nerve. Well, yesterday I had a nerve hit, and I wasn't sitting a dentist chair, I was sitting here.

I get along with pretty well everybody in this room, I'm very pleased to say, and I do get along very well with the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, but yesterday he hit a nerve with me. I have to tell you I said I have to get up and speak to this. I will give him the benefit of the doubt because he did say were we better off five years ago than we are today. He was suggesting that the public at general was suggesting that the answer to that question is no.

I'd just like to go back with a little bit of a history, if I may, of what it was like here five years ago. I was very fortunate to be elected on the 30th of November in 2015 and then, two weeks later, lo and behold, to go from a career in the private sector working as a wildlife biologist to find myself sitting at the Cabinet table. As I said with my colleagues at the time, it was an amazing opportunity. It was a province with a whole new face, a whole new administration, a whole new Premier and so much promise.

I've mentioned this before on my feet in this House – and I'll only go so far because I don't want to talk about Cabinet confidences. I will say that for that first hour there was a great optimism as my Cabinet colleagues all introduced ourselves and got to know each other.

Then I do recall the Premier saying something very prophetic. He said: Well now, if I could just interrupt this, I'd like to have some officials from the Department of Finance come in. They need to explain to us something. Within the next few minutes I realized that, wow, what timing to get into politics. What an opportunity to serve when we're faced with what has to have been the most amazing, oppressive, greatest surprise of all time that we were looking at a \$2.7-billion deficit. Not a \$1.1 billion, not a \$1.7 billion, a \$2.7-billion deficit.

So there I am and there all we were and, frankly, everybody in the House was there at the same time all thinking, wow, all those hopes, dreams, plans, promises, opportunity to serve, to lead, to invest in the future were going to be compromised severely. I enjoyed that one hour, that 60-minute honeymoon because since then it has been a great challenge.

That said, I'm very proud of the fact that we have made great accomplishments, both in the previous Assembly, serving with my colleagues in this administration. I also feel that we are continuing to make good progress, but wow, what a pressure that's out there.

As we see today in the world markets and the pressures that we're feeling with the coronavirus, with slumping oil prices and everything that we've done collectively, not just on this side of the House but on both sides of the House, because we support budgets, we support ideas, we support improved legislation, but boy oh boy, there are pressures beyond this room, beyond this province, which come to bear down very hard on us, and that is when we really need to pull together.

Yesterday I had a nerve hit, and I want to go back to a couple of other things that were going on, those five years ago, just to put some perspective. I do remember sitting right now where my colleague is, the minister responsible

for Children, Seniors and Social Development, when I sat there as minister of Environment, and I remember that very faithful day – there's never been a budget delivered like there was by the previous minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, which he stood and delivered that budget that day.

If you recall, there was not a single clap – not one – that entire budget. It was probably one of the saddest days we've ever had to face, short of some of the huge tragedies that we faced; but I think, in terms of this Legislature, realizing the financial nightmare that was before us and the very difficult decisions that we were going to have to undertake, it was truly a traumatic day.

After that budget was delivered, I took the direction very seriously, as did so many of us. I walked out through here, walked out through the doors and went outside and there were a lot of folks out there celebrating – well done; tough, tough, but you made the right decisions; and a few backslaps. I remember some handshakes. I was so not in a celebrating mood. I actually left and I went across – and my colleague there, the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, he knows; I followed what I call Trimper's trail. That's the last time I'll use my name in the House, but I do have a little trail that I walk back and forth between the two Confederation Buildings; I like to get some fresh air.

I took that trail back over and I knew what I was going to face. I walked up to the fourth floor, four flights of stairs up, and walked in to a scene of my deputy minister, an HR person, a suite of taxis, as they were going through the layoffs. It was one after another going through my department and I watched people walking out that door, not because they hadn't done a good job, not because they hadn't served this province well, but because we could no longer afford them.

I can recall – I won't use his name – a former MHA in this House, who lives on the West Coast of Newfoundland, fired away, a few days later, that we hadn't been tough enough. We should be laying off 10,000 people in our civil service. How gutless we were.

Well, I can tell you when you've got a big problem, you can't go swinging it back the other way. I can tell you, this guy and my colleagues, we have taken our share of tough decisions. We had a seven-year plan. We are still working on it, I can tell you. As I just said a few minutes ago, we are being challenged like no other, but we will keep working on it. We hope to get there. There has been a plan. It's been a very transparent plan. It was called the godawful budget of 2016, but that has set us on a course.

It has been tough, it has been difficult but we have made progress. So were we better off than we were five years ago? Well, naïveté, I looked up the word yesterday and naïveté is an interesting word. It actually translates well in a bunch of languages. It all means the same thing. It's kind of like a happy air of ignorance or a bliss about a situation, not realizing really what's going on around you. Well, walking into that Cabinet room, walking into government as we did in 2015, the naïveté disappeared quickly.

Another amazing thing that happened that first week that I served in the Cabinet – I think it was on the second or third night and I look to some of my other colleagues – we were called to a room. I wasn't quite sure what the topic was. Walked in as a Cabinet minister representing a district in Labrador, and there were some Finance officials there and there were also people there with the pension plans. The Premier was there, some other officials and my colleague was there from Labrador West.

We were talking about the pension plan for Cleveland-Cliffs and the fact that it was severely underfunded in the tens and tens of millions of dollars. It was bleeding by the day. The situation at the time was, do we wind it up and recognize that there will be no further contributions being made by a proponent who long since disappeared, long since closed the mine and that the people were facing a 24 per cent or 26 per cent reduction in their pensions? Did we make that tough decision? Well, we had to, because the pensions were disappearing for everybody else. Thousands and thousands of people were at stake, and not just in that district but across the province and across the country.

So were we better off, again, five years ago? Again, a lot of ignorance of what was going on,

and mercifully over the last administration we did manage to recover most of that pension. Those people are back up; I think it's in the vicinity of 96 per cent. We have a mine going and, lo and behold, I'd say people are in a much better place.

I'll just give you one more example. I think I could talk here until sunset tonight about accomplishments, but one more that really hits home to me – and I know it means a lot to the Premier, and I'm looking at some of my other colleagues here – and that's mental health. As a politician leaving, again, a world of science and a career of science to walk into an MHA office and to see what goes on in the areas of mental health is truly remarkable.

My district had 322 people on a wait-list for mental health support and counselling. We managed to, two summers ago, completely reorganize the way we do things, the way we do business, the way we respond to people's needs and eliminated that wait-list from 322 to zero.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. TRIMPER:** Again, my colleague, I do enjoy our friendship and so on, but I can tell you, and I wouldn't mind giving you some more history lessons, I would suggest we have made great progress in five years.

Are all things fixed? Absolutely not. I look forward to working with you and everyone else in this House to get there.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to have another opportunity to speak in the House of Assembly this morning. I will take every opportunity that's available because I do have a lot to say. Whether people want to hear it or not is another question.

First of all, on the actual subamendment itself, I do want to thank the Minister of Finance for

bringing forth the subamendment. I will be supporting the subamendment. I do understand the rationale that simply cutting the amount that was in the original motion, simply cutting it in half, may not work from an operational point of view in terms of tenders that had to be let and things that have to be done early in the year and expenditures that need to happen.

I feel comfortable that this slight adjustment is just reflecting the realities of us being able to operate for the next three months and not have to worry about people not getting paid and work not getting done. So from that perspective, I supported the amendment and I certainly support the subamendment now that actually brings the numbers in line with where we need to be. So I will be supporting that.

Listening to my colleague who just spoke before me, I guess just a few thoughts on that. I was in the Liberal caucus at the time when all this went down. I understand – I do, 100 per cent – the situation that we're in and the situation we were in. I can't say I had the same knowledge as he would have had because I wasn't a Member of the Cabinet and, quite frankly, that's part of the problem.

One of the things that I keep raising here in the House of Assembly, and outside the House of Assembly, around the need for democratic reform and so on, is that you have a select group of individuals under our system who go into the Cabinet. They have all the information and they're calling the shots. As Members who are not in the Cabinet, there's simply an expectation that you're going to rubber-stamp whatever they do. You're going to sort of say, I trust you. That's what it comes down to. It comes down to trusting your colleagues in that role that what they're telling you is credible, that they have analyzed everything. They have all the information and they're making the right decision. That's how it works.

Unfortunately, if we look at this document right here, and most Members – I don't think anyone else has it up on their desk; most have it down under their desk. I'm keeping this big pile right here in front of me at all times because I don't want to forget what's contained in here and what happened. This was a classic example as well of one of the problems with our system whereby if

you're not a Member of Cabinet, you're not given all this information.

If you read this report – and I haven't read it all yet, I've read some of it – it's questionable. Certainly, it seems like there was a lot of information that may not even have been given to Cabinet, may not even have been given to the premier at the time. I don't know if that's true or not. I don't know what the former premier knew. I don't know what the former minister of Natural Resources knew or didn't know. I can certainly tell you what the caucus knew, Members who weren't in Cabinet, we knew the same thing as the general public knew. That's the bottom line.

The same thing goes for the budget of 2016. You'd have to have your head buried in the sand if you didn't realize that there was a serious situation. I don't think anybody wanted to commit political hara-kiri, so to speak. Nobody really wanted to do that. Think about it from a political point of view: Who wants to put down the worst budget in history to be condemned by the general public? I get that. So I absolutely believe they were in a terrible situation because we're still in a terrible situation. The Auditor General has said we're still in a very, very serious situation. The bond-rating agencies have said we are in a very, very serious situation.

Now, whether or not we were at risk of not making payroll, as the Minister of Finance has said, I don't know. Again, I have to take him on his word for that, but I don't know because that information never came out until a year later. The current Minister of Finance told us the story last year – no, it wouldn't have been last year, a couple of years back, whenever – about not being able to make payroll, but the former minister of Finance in delivering her Budget Speech and thereafter, she never told us anything about not being able to make payroll. She never told anyone in the caucus about not being able to make payroll. This was all new information that came out a year later.

I think the point is that I do appreciate what the minister is saying. I don't doubt that he is sincere. I don't doubt that the events that he's saying happened, happened. But the fact of the matter is that because of the Cabinet system, because of the fact that under our system

Members of caucus don't receive the same information, they don't have the opportunity for meaningful input on anything – no more than the Opposition, unless it's changed since I left. Maybe someone is going to stand up and say, yes, everything has changed now. Everybody is briefed on every bill that's coming before this House way before it happens. I doubt it.

I would suspect that what's happened is that – I look at this bill here, Bill 28, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act. I went to briefing on this a couple of days ago and I would suspect there are one or two Members on the government side now who raised their hand and said, yes, I'll speak on that, and they were given a briefing.

One or two of them attended a briefing the same as I did, the same as the Official Opposition, and one or two of them will stand up and they're going to support this bill. I would say the rest of the – I don't know about the Cabinet because they probably would have been briefed, but the rest of the caucus, I'd say there are Members of the caucus that don't even know what this bill is. I don't mean that as an insult to the Members. I'm talking about the system. I'm not talking about an individual. I'm talking about the system as someone who's been there, done that, two administrations.

I can guarantee you, there are probably Members over there that don't know if An Act to Amend the Forestry Act is fit to eat. We're talking about scaling. I bet if I were to ask some Members, what is a scaling permit? What's that for? They wouldn't be able to tell you. They don't even know what scaling is. I didn't know what it was until I went to the briefing. I never heard of it before in my life. Not a clue, and I bet you there will be people that will vote on this bill that don't even have a clue of what the bill is about. Again, I don't mean that in any disrespect to any Member. I'm talking about the system, not the individual. I want to make that quite clear.

It's the reality of the system that we have. It's the reality that Members on the government side – whoever the government is, not just government side, the past government and the one before that and the one before that and the one that follows this. Under the system we have the Cabinet gets all the information, all the

briefings, all the details, understands all the rationale. They decide what's coming before the House, and everybody else is expected to go along. That's the bottom line. And if you don't go along, you find yourself stuck in the corner. That's what happens, and that's what happened in *Budget 2016*. That's what happened.

Again, I don't disagree with the Member that there were serious issues, and I still think there are definitely still more serious issues. I said publicly, and I'll say again, I understand. I wasn't totally offside with some of the stuff that had to be done. I wasn't totally offside. We know we're spending more than we're taking in. Things have to happen, and it was a serious situation.

What I heard from my constituents, who I represent, at the time was too much, too fast. It felt that the measures were just too severe. That will always be debatable: Were they too severe or were they not? I know there are lots of Members who were there at the time. Some of them are still there in caucus. Some of them are in Cabinet – that totally agreed with me that it was too severe.

I'm not going to get into it, but I'll just say that we were pretty much on the same page, except for that day that I stood up and then got kicked across the floor. Because they know what they were hearing from their constituents, the same as I heard from mine. That's the bottom line, but at the end of the day we're in a democracy, governments have to govern. There are things they have to do and they've made their decisions. The people have decided this time and they will decide again the next time.

Just to end off, once again, I do support the subamendment.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a great pleasure to stand up and speak to the Interim Supply amendment. I guess what I'm going to say about that is going to be summed up in a couple of words and then I'm going to go

off on another tangent. I think we are going to support the amendment, there's no doubt about that.

It's funny how things change in the way of a couple of hours. We were presented with this yesterday. I looked at it and I looked at the title and I said, misguided project? Are we exaggerating that a bit? When I went home and tried to start reading it, I could come up with other titles for it: misled, wrongly guided, mistaken project. I think the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair mentioned that it was turning her stomach. I have to say, I probably had pains in my chest when I started reading it yesterday, or last night.

I don't know what to say about this. It's just amazing. I know when I worked with government as a senior bureaucrat, I worked as the director, and part of my job was to provide advice or opinions to either your ADM, your deputy or your minister. I remember getting in discussions with ministers and they would say: Well, I don't really agree with that, what you're saying. I would say: Well, my job is to provide an opinion, to provide whatever expertise I have and up to you whether you take it.

That's one thing, but when you have something like this, a massive project, where the full picture, the full information is not being presented, again I have no words for that. That's totally amazing. I guess the good thing that comes out of this is like that song Shaggy used to say, "It Wasn't Me." I can say I wasn't here; it wasn't me.

But I think when you look around this House, there are so many of us that are brand new people to this House. I think the word yesterday talked about the baggage of Muskrat Falls. We all have that baggage now. We all have the baggage of Muskrat Falls on us and we're all elected to do the best we can for our districts and the best we can for the province. We have to do it now with the baggage of Muskrat Falls. In my time in this House, I intend to do my best. I intend to do what I can for the residents of my district.

Although we're going to have some discussion on this document I'm sure, but I firmly believe – and we talked about blame game. The opposite

of blame is praise. Unfortunately, in this environment we don't lend ourselves to praising much. We certainly do blame a lot, or pass criticism. That's part of our job, but I think if something's working, I think we have to acknowledge that. We have to be able to say, that works; let's keep doing it, rather than be so critical all the time. We all want to make this province the best it can be.

I think what we really need to focus on – a couple days ago we had a gentleman here in the gallery very, very upset. I went out, along with a couple other Members here, we went out and met with the gentleman. Although people are upset with Muskrat – I know that; there are people out there. But for this particular gentleman, Muskrat Falls wasn't on his agenda at all. He was concerned about everyday things that affect him in his particular community.

He was aggravated, he was upset and he was looking for some assistance. I'm hoping he got that assistance. We certainly offered to help him there. I think that's where we have to focus as well. Whether the issue is big or small, we all have to focus on that.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair talked about the poverty reduction program, mentioned that the other day. I believe she alluded to the fact that back in 2007, \$91 million was put towards the poverty reduction plan and the current government has put in – I stand to be corrected – I think \$286 million, somewhere in that ballpark.

That's good. I have no issue with that and I know the Member is quite passionate about what she does and a very good Member for her district. I think as we go forward, when we're dealing with some fiscal constraints we have to be more effective in what we do with our dollars and cents. Yes, we spent \$91 million back in 2007 and, later years, on a poverty reduction program, but that program dropped the poverty rate from about 20 per cent, almost in half, to about 11 per cent.

Now we're spending more money on it. In the last five years, the poverty rate has been steadily increasing again. It's not a matter of throwing resources; you have to look at the outcomes. We have to look at the outcomes for the programs

we have. That's just one particular program that I wanted to note.

People talk about cuts – oh, you have to cut this, cut that, but not necessarily. We have to be more efficient and more effective in how we use our funds. Comparing a \$91-million project to a \$286 million –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. P. DINN:** Okay, there's some tweaking. We have to be looking at something there. So outcomes are certainly an area we have to look at. I think that's where our focus needs to be. Our focus needs to be coming up with programs that generate and meet the targets that they're designed to do.

I can go on here and talk about – and some of this stuff is happening anyway, regardless of what government is in place, but we have to start looking at ways to curb it. We have a declining population, an aging population, increasing poverty, increasing unemployment. Every district has issues with roads, health care, school supports, successful transportation, affordable child care. We have to look at these issues and we have to look at them with the baggage of Muskrat Falls and with the baggage of anything else that's there, but we have to work towards finding solutions and finding outcomes that make a difference.

I know in my District of Topsail - Paradise, some of the everyday issues I get and I hear about – and the Minister of Transportation and Works is well aware of this – is Route 60. Route 60 is one of our key issues going through Topsail - Paradise. Paradise themselves are looking at the federal regulations around waste water treatment. That's a big expense that they have to take on.

The 1.6 busing, huge in the district and even bigger now with the winter months upon us; safe school zones, huge. I'm in a district that has multiple K-to-6 or K-to-4 schools. The shortage of family doctors – and I know the Minister of Health spoke to that and spoke to that issue yesterday through Oral Questions, and I'm hopeful that will work itself out.

I think, and I hope I don't insult anyone – maybe Jim; sorry, the Member for Mount Pearl. You got to go with those blinders like you put on a horse. We have to be focused forward. Yes, we learn from our past and yes, we can talk and haggle about our past, but what are we learning from it? That's the key. That's the key in moving forward. Do we take what we've learned from our past and positively use it to make this place a better place and get the outcomes we want?

I just want to end with a quote from Sparky Anderson. Sparky was a well-known coach of the Cincinnati Reds and the Detroit Tigers and I think it's appropriate for us here in the House. In his words, he said: "People who live in the past generally are afraid to compete in the present. I've got my faults, but living in the past is not one of them. There's no future in it."

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health and Community Services.

**MR. HAGGIE:** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Always a pleasure to stand. I think this is my fifth Interim Supply now. We enjoyed it so much last time, we did it twice.

I'm going to split my time a little bit and talk about my district, as well as the department's work. I'm going to try and pick up the theme from the Opposition yesterday: are we better off now than we were five years ago.

Looking at the view from my district, which is, as a rural district goes, actually very small and compact. I can drive on one road from one end of the district to the other in less than an hour. There's only one community that's actually off the highway as such. Again, fresh drinking water has been a topic, and my colleague for Municipal Affairs and Environment has quite rightly introduced that as a priority for all communities with long-standing boil-water advisories.

Gander's problem was a little different in that it actually had two sewage plants: one of which



was working at 110 per cent capacity with obvious noticeable effect, and one that was working at 60 per cent capacity because it was in an older area of town. They kind of grasped that nettle some years ago. With a collaborative between the provincial government, the municipality and the federal government it brought a project to fruition, which should be complete within the next year or so. It's quite the marvel with a waste water treatment plant of some considerable size.

That was done as a priority for that community. Their view is that they put other things on one side because it was a priority, even before the emphasis placed on it by the Minister for Environment. That was a perfect example of federal, provincial and municipal collaboration and brought home basically a project of around \$30 million.

If you look at infrastructure within the community, through my colleague, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school district, Gander Academy is being completely rebuilt around a very serviceable oversized gym. The reason for that is the gymnasium will, as it is oversized, allow that facility to be used for provincial competitions over the course of the year, whereas because of the nature of the school now being K to 3, the code for gymnasiums for that size of school would not have been the case. There's 30 years of life left in that and it has saved \$3 million on the project.

Recent investments, as recently as *Budget 2019*, in the College of the North Atlantic around this government's idea of having regional centres of excellence, recognizing Gander's aviation history, both locally and internationally, they have provided funding to double the number of seats in the AME, the Aircraft Mechanical Engineers program, aircraft maintenance. This is a job-ready skill set. People who qualify from this are in great demand and they have no difficulty getting jobs.

We have doubled the number of seats there and, indeed, with a further investment of just shy of a million dollars, have started to convert the material that they train on into not just adequate but state of the art. They partnered with the local supplier for Garmin, manufacturers of what's

called the glass cockpit, to provide teaching material and support. These students, when they graduate, will be able to go straight into the marketplace. Indeed, in partnership with local industry, I think that is another example of how the people in my community are better off than they were before.

We have a thriving airport. We have a thriving aviation industry. NAV CANADA has been there for many years. The largest, however, private employer in Gander is Exploits Valley Air Services. They have become a hub for Air Canada's commuter fleet which are flown in from as far away as Ontario and Manitoba to have their heavy maintenance checks, their painting. They have a new painting technique which will reduce the weight of the aircraft quite significantly. Now with the new glass cockpit, which I think will be the first installed in a Beech in this province, they will have an aircraft that is significantly lighter.

You may say, what's the relevance of that? Well, for those who aren't familiar, this will actually reduce significantly the carbon footprint of that aircraft to the tune of reducing carbon emissions 320 tons per year. Again, an environmentally-friendly initiative that saves money and expense.

I have a lot more of the other things in my district, but I notice I've passed the halfway mark. One of the challenges in health is that there is almost limitless demand placed on the system. At regular intervals across the course of my tenure here, Members opposite have stood up and asked me to do more. They said, why can't you do this?

Well, there are six volumes here that would present several reasons why that might be the case. If you want a reason why our dental program for adults, for example, is simply on a par with Canada's rather than excelling it, I will give you four or five reasons: Danny Williams, Tom Marshall, Ed Martin, Gilbert Bennett, Paul Harrington. Those are the reasons why there is money that we do not have for our social programs. That is the tragedy of this misguided project, and there is no way of escaping that.

I give the Member for Topsail credit. He is the first Member on the opposite side of the House

to have stood up and, in any way, shape or form, condemned Muskrat Falls. He is the first to have done it. You cannot distance yourself from the heritage that party has brought to this House. Try as you might, you cannot. He has admitted it and I give him credit for that. Well done.

The Member opposite talks about being effective, more effective with the dollars that we have and focusing on outcomes. I would argue, Mr. Chair, that is very clearly what my department has focused on. We have seen minimal growth in the health care budget over the last little while – 0.8 per cent, according to CHI statistics, in the last financial year. That was at a time when the average across Canada was 4.5 to 6 per cent per jurisdiction and the average rate of inflation in Canada was 2.8 per cent. That's how you do it.

At the same time, we have added, over the four years of my tenure, no less than 60 new, cutting-edge, gold-standard medications. We have, as my colleague from Lake Melville said, eradicated in certain areas the wait-list for counselling. We have over 70 clinics where you can walk in if you have a mental health concern without an appointment, without any difficulty and you are entered into the system.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HAGGIE:** You can use that facility as often as you want.

We have a hub and spoke system for addiction services in this province and we have seen a great uptake in those services. We have gone from 1,500 people in our ODT program seeking treatment to 3,700 at the last count. That is an indicator of people accessing the system.

Our challenge has been around access; it is not around numbers of health care providers. You look at CHI statistics for the last quarter, we do better than the national average for family physicians, for specialists, for nurse practitioners. For a whole raft of primary health care providers, we lead the country in the numbers and the numbers per capita.

Our challenge is around access, and I am arguing that with mental health and addictions, we are working on solving that access problem.

We are restructuring primary health care in this province in conjunction with the Nurse Practitioner Association, with the Medical Association to bring access nearer to the community. It will take time to turn this ship. We have other practitioners here which have not been seen in this province for a generation – and I'm referring to midwives.

I notice my time is running down, Mr. Chair. I will support this subamendment and I look forward to an opportunity to continue contributing to this debate over the amendment debate and the motion itself.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Bonavista.

**MR. PARDY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yesterday when I started to speak I referenced Erik Weihenmayer. Everyone knows about Erik Weihenmayer, and I hope I'm pronouncing it correctly. He's from Princeton, New Jersey. But the main thing that I referenced him was that he states that: "What's within you is stronger than what's in your way." I thought that was a very noble pursuit for all of us to look ahead.

I had 10 minutes yesterday and I never got to the crux of what it was that I wished to discuss about the District of Bonavista, and in light of what we're discussing. But I received a text message after I spoke from somebody of whom I had known for close to 30 years within the District of Bonavista. The message went like this – not all of it, but an excerpt from it would be: "Time to move beyond the blame game and deal with the issue in front of it! We can't go back unfortunately. Mistakes were made ... we need to aggressively move ahead for the sake of our province!"

That is what I'm hearing in the House. We all work together, collaborate, we know where we are and that is work together to the best of our ability with the hand that we've been dealt and to move ahead.

The Minister of Health and Community Services just stated that my colleague from Topsail - Paradise said he was the first one to come on from the opposite side of the House and to speak about the report, how concerning it is and alarming. Well, he was the first speaker from our caucus, and allow me to be the second one. We only received the report yesterday, so I would say the same thing that we learned from what had happened in the past. It is bothersome, it does hurt, but it's time for us now to collectively say what are we going to do going forward. That is the gist of what I wish to raise today.

I'd like to be able to throw some things out that would affect the District of Bonavista that may be prevalent over the province and if it's something that we can adapt in order to make ourselves more efficient, more productive, save money, then it may be a thought. If it's new, great; if it's not, it might resurface an old thought that somebody had in the past.

If you would allow me, first of all, to where I ended yesterday, I talked about the long-term care in the Golden Heights Manor in Bonavista. I had referenced the MHA from Mount Pearl - Southlands presented the petition three or four times on care in long-term homes. The Golden Heights Manor is one of those homes in Bonavista.

I would contend that when we look at measures of which we need to conserve or budget, we always be cognizant of the most vulnerable people in our population – probably ultra-cognizant as we go forward in the following years.

Golden Heights Manor is a level 3 long-term care home. It has a little under 40 residents; none are ambulatory. I would think the vast majority of them would need help with their meals. All of them would need help with personal hygiene.

What I ended with yesterday in my 10-minute segment was the fact that when it was 3.8 hours that was allocated per resident, which is the standard or above the standard, which I think the minister had stated 3.4, which I understand would be the provincial standard and may be the national standard. At 3.8, the loved ones of those

residents in that home were concerned about the care. As I stated yesterday, not medically, they were concerned about the personal care and the meals. It was the PCAs that they were concerned about, that there weren't enough of the PCAs, they thought, to provide the ample and appropriate care for their loved ones.

When I visit Golden Heights Manor, I often go in and visit Mrs. Annie Baker. Mrs. Annie Baker is 93 years of age, a very healthy 93 until one year ago when she contracted diabetes and ended up losing her foot. She's in for a rough time but she is non-ambulatory at this point in time.

She has four children who love her very much: one a retired police officer, Rupert; a fisherman, Clifford; a retired correctional officer, Gerry; and a daughter, Dallas, who went through the School for the Deaf. All four care for her a lot but all four would state that they would be concerned about the level of care provided by the PCAs – think the world of the staff but there are not enough of the PCAs.

A few little situations that I pass on just for some noteworthy – and I'll move quickly because I know my time is getting short. I stated at the pre-budget consultation a situation that I had one time where my wife and I were sitting in the lobby of the retirement home in Bonavista. They were transporting one of the residents of that home to Clarenville to get a report on the upper GI.

There was a taxi that was bringing the gentleman up and there was a worker from the home that would travel with the gentleman. It was only to get a report for an hour and a half to Clarenville and an hour and a half back. I'm sure it's on the government's agenda or the minister's agenda if we had the virtual medicine firing, they could have quickly went across and tapped in to view or to connect with the doctor, the specialist in Clarenville, to get the report. There could be savings accrued from virtual medicine or telemedicine.

Also, in that same home, Mr. Keith Rickman spoke to me. He's on warfarin. Many Newfoundlanders are on warfarin. When they go to the doctor, the doctor will often say there's warfarin or there's Xarelto or Eliquis, but you

have to pay \$100 a month – a more preferred drug by the health practitioners.

The only thing I would throw out there for a thought would be is it conceivable that under warfarin they must have blood checks every couple of weeks. There is a cost associated with that. I'm sure there must be a consult with the doctor on the INR results. If, on the INR results, that may be another – it may be strategic that we put them on the more preferred medication, being the Xarelto, and there may be savings accrued as a result of that.

Finally, to wrap up, the MUN school of medicine are putting out wonderful graduates. I had the privilege, and I spoke to it before, of attending a rural medicine symposium in Bonavista. Forty-five of our finest were there present, and when I left I said phenomenal, the quality and the future of health care in our province. It was exciting – exceptional.

The only thing I would say is if we are retaining 7 per cent of them, if we are, if we do retain in family medicine 7 per cent, if we do, then I would say the tuition for a year on the website would be \$12,250. International students it's \$30,000. The average in Canada is \$20,000.

I would say thought with the school of medicine was: keep the tuition where it is. If it's \$12,250 for our Newfoundland students, if they're going to practice in rural Newfoundland or in Newfoundland, that is perfect, but if they're going to leave to go elsewhere, to go out to another province that is offering something, then on the entry to the school there should be a provision that the full cost of that school to the Canadian average ought to be the onus of that medical student. Just food for thought in the medicine.

I think with seven seconds left I will sit down, even though there are a few other things. I must be talking too slow.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I haven't had an opportunity yet to speak about International Women's Day, so I'd like to take this opportunity to speak about how budgets impact women in the province and in Canada.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

The first thing I just wanted to touch on is, I know that our government uses gender-based analysis for examining policies. We have presentations on gender-based analysis, and that's where they look at budgets and policies looking at differences in women's and men's lives and how they might lead to inequality for women and making sure the policies and programs of the government ensure equal treatment. I think that's an important piece I'd like to touch on.

Gender-based analysis applies a systemic approach to policies and programs. It aims to achieve equity rather than equal treatment, recognizing that treating everyone the same may not produce equitable results. I think that's an important part.

Now, one initiative recently, which I think also benefits women of the province, particularly on the Avalon Peninsula, is the free bus passes for people on income support. I'm very proud of that. In Mount Scio, I know that initiative is going to benefit a lot of families and a lot of women, for example.

I had one constituent who was coming to visit me when the buses were free after Snowmageddon and she said: Oh, yeah, I'll definitely come because the buses are free. I had never thought the cost of the bus – now that I think about it, it makes sense, but I had never thought that the \$5 return, the cost of the bus could have prevented a constituent from coming to visit me in my office here. So I think the free bus passes for residents on income support will certainly be a benefit to many of my constituents.

Mothers often plan family activities, and I think the free bus passes will enable them to plan around free swimming activities and stuff if they

have to travel further than they normally would. A lot of women do a lot of shopping for their families and it allows them to travel further, potentially, to get greater discounts, enabling them to increase the value of what they're able to buy in a given week or month.

The program costs \$2.1 million, with 10,000 income support recipients in the metro area benefiting. I'm very proud of that. I think it's a huge step forward for transportation in the province.

The other thing I'd like to talk about, which also particularly benefits women, are all the child care investments. As of April 2019, \$6.5 million in capital renovation grants were allocated to 59 child care service providers. I'm sure everything is not going perfectly, but I do think it's going in the right direction.

Before I ran, I didn't really have a good appreciation for how the subsidies worked in terms of child care subsidies. So running and becoming more involved, I've been learning a lot more about that.

If a household net income – not your gross income, your net income after everything has been taken out. If your household net income is \$35,000 or less, your family is eligible for full child care subsidies. That's amazing. That would equate to a gross household family income of \$46,000. I think that particularly helps women get back to work because in many instances they would be staying home with their children. And a partial subsidy for those with higher than \$35,000 net household income.

Just one example I'd like to highlight. After your household net income is more than \$35,000, there's a sliding scale, Mr. Chair. A two-parent family with a net family income of \$65,000 needing child care for two preschool-aged children and one infant, would be eligible for a child care subsidy of approximately \$1,055 a month. There's no catchy number we can say that there's this cost a day per child care, but based on the programs and the sliding scale after a net income of \$35,000, I do think that the child care subsidy programs do benefit a lot of families and do a lot of good work in the province.

Another element I'd like to mention are the supports for individuals with autism, and I know the Autism Action Plan is being rolled with 57 actions; 19 short-term actions to be completed hopefully, shortly by the end of this month. They include reduced wait times for ASD diagnosis, enhanced diagnosis supports, expansion of JASPER treatment and improved access to cognitive behavioural therapy. I know that's important for a lot of constituents in my district.

Then changing a little bit, looking at a Canadian level. We have summer job applications open now. I believe organizations are able to submit applications for summer jobs. I found a Girl Guides of Canada study and they did that with Ipsos Reid last year. They asked young women and men aged 12 to 18 in Canada about their 2018 summer jobs, just thinking about equality and equity in Canada.

Girls ages 12 to 18 earned \$2.75 an hour less in their summer jobs than young men ages 12 to 18. So already while they're in high school, girls are already making \$2.75 less than their male counterparts. And informal work – so this is when they might be babysitting, doing chores – girls earned \$8.67 less an hour, while boys earned \$14.98 an hour. Again, this is across Canada, but I think it's something to keep in mind when people are applying for jobs and when people are – know people who hire people or students. I think it's important to think about who you're hiring, what kind of job you're hiring them for, and are you actually paying them equal pay for equal work.

Another area that I think there's certainly room for legislation to step up around helping women is the motherhood pay gap. When we look at legislation that helps women and families, women's salaries are on average 5 per cent lower when they have families, compared to those without families.

A CBC article, Mr. Chair, recently said women aged 25 to 38 saw earnings drop 4 per cent in the five years after having a child, and women "aged 25 to 29 losing an additional 14 per cent earnings over this period." And men's salaries, as we know, go up when they have children.

So I think there's certainly room for bold legislative changes in the future where we try and tackle this. I know no one has really figured it out. These are really complicated societal challenges.

We know 43 per cent of highly qualified women take a career break of one year or more at some point during their working lives – that would be for maternity leave – and they suffer an 18 per cent lifelong decrease in their earning power as a result of their year-long break – 18 per cent lifelong decrease in their earning power. It's just shocking, Mr. Chair.

Then, when we go to women in Newfoundland and Labrador, I wasn't able to find a huge amount of recent information, but 14 per cent of employment in Red Seal trades in Newfoundland and Labrador are employed by women; however, they only earn around 9 per cent of total hourly wages. So 14 per cent of people employed in Red Seal trades are women, but they only earn 9 per cent of the total wages. We clearly have some room to improve.

How do we encourage women to move up the ladder in our organizations and our private companies? There was a UN study released – "... companies with three or more women in senior management functions score higher in all dimensions of organizational performance."

When we look at artificial intelligence – we talked about that last week – of all people who work in artificial intelligence, 22 per cent of those are women. Only 22 per cent of people who design algorithms, who test them, who code them are women. Think about all the biases built into those algorithms, Mr. Chair, in testing, because they're built primarily, more than three-quarters, by men.

Then, of 249 publicly traded companies in Canada, Canadian executive women earn 68 per cent of what their male counterparts do. That is, at publicly traded companies in Canada, the women CEOs earn 68 per cent of what their male counterparts do. At a Canadian level, we certainly have some challenges.

Then, we look at women's unpaid work. If we assigned a monetary value to women's unpaid

work, the UN estimates that would constitute between 10 and 39 per cent of GDP.

Mr. Chair, if we look at GDP in Newfoundland and Labrador, in 2018 it was about \$33 billion. The IT sector was 2 per cent. Mining, oil and gas was 24 per cent; finance and insurance, 3 per cent, Mr. Chair. Construction was 9.9 per cent GDP. So if women's unpaid work constitutes between 10 and 39 per cent of GDP, that is the difference between all of IT, mining, oil and gas, finance and insurance, and construction put together, which is significant.

Overall, budgets impact women. I think we're doing a good job, especially with the low-income bus pass. I think our job is not done in helping women achieve equality in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure, of course, to get up and speak on Interim Supply. We always say in this House it's always a pleasure to stand in your place and give your opinion on what you hear, I guess, and what have you.

I wasn't going to get up and speak actually on this section, but the Minister of Health and Community Services made a comment and I thought it was kind of – he referred to my colleague from Topsail - Paradise when he made mention of the report and he was the first person who spoke on it. In actual fact, I guess, there are not many over on this side can really speak to that report with any knowledge. I don't think, really, any of us can for that matter because it all pre-dated us.

We got the report yesterday at 1 – 1:30 when we came in here, we heard it was coming out at 1 with the news conference, so we didn't even know what was in the report other than what we watched on television. None of us were privy to the – we never had representation at the hearings or whatever, so we're just like the Joe Q. Public.

There's one thing that needs to be clear. Some commentary has gone around blaming, pointing fingers at the PC Party or this group of people here. I respectfully say that's a lot of misguided commentary, because we're not pleased. I'm not pleased. I see what's in that report; I'm not pleased with what's in that report.

I think most any person in this province are not pleased, but to say that it was the PC Party's fault. The full report outlines the mistakes that were made and what happened here. It's more about there were mistakes made – obvious mistakes made. It's in there; I read through the executive summary. I haven't had a chance to read 1,100 pages yet. I don't know if I'll ever get there, but there's stuff in that report, yeah – we're not disputing that. No one in this House are disputing any of that.

I think sometimes we spend so much time trying to play politics and to try to hammer down the Opposition. If you want to stay in government, you hammer down the PC Party because they were the ones that were power when this decision was made, as a political tool. I get that. I've been around politics all of my life. I know some Members in this House have done the same thing. There's a game to be played; I get that. I totally get it and we play it a lot of times ourselves, but clarity needs to be provided too from this side of the House.

That's not totally accurate, what you're hearing portrayed in the report and the findings. You go back a few weeks back when the Premier announced the rate mitigation plan or – we're not sure what that announcement was, but it was something come out. There was a lot of theatrics again, but that's not my commentary, that's a separate issue. He spent five or 10 minutes blasting the PC Party. So much so, he did his circuit after on *Open Line* and he got all his diatribe on the PC Party, the host said to him: We got that out of the way. Now, Premier, let's talk about the issue.

The public sees through that stuff too. You got to be careful how much weight you put into it. So to say we're angry. Yes, we're all angry, every one of us.

The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands who was an MHA when I was a staff person with the

former administration – this is my second term – he stood in his place over and over and over and over again and said he was hoodwinked. He was misled. The Minister of Finance has said the same thing, because he voted for it but he said since he didn't realize what he was voting for.

What makes them different than a lot of the former people who sat in the former administration?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. PETTEN:** Is that a rational response?

I respect both of their intelligence. I'm not knocking either one of them. I've known them a long time. The Minister of Finance, we can play political games, but he's said to this House he did not know what he voted for. Do you know what? I've never questioned him; I believe him. I have no reason not to believe the man. I have no reason not to believe the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

But why, then, when our leader who was totally not involved in the Muskrat Falls Project, he'll stand in his place in this House and the Premier of this province got up one time recently and asked him to apologize to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for the Muskrat Falls Project? Now, is that politics at its finest, rawest, purest, probably the part that people don't like about politics – is that not what we see when we see that?

I don't mind saying it in the House again. I stood in my place and I told the Premier that day, maybe you should get up and apologize for the Upper Churchill because that's how unfounded, misguided that rationale is, Mr. Chair.

I heard yesterday on the media somewhere the Leader of the Third Party: The PC Party should be held responsible for that project. You can't share the blame because you weren't there. It don't make any sense.

So the NDP need to be responsible for every misguided thing that's happened in their party over the years. If something happened 15 years ago when she wasn't there but it was an NDP person who did it, you're responsible. I don't agree.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. PETTEN:** She may agree about that with us; I don't agree.

A lot of mistakes made over the years with the Liberal Party; do I hold those Members over there now responsible before they were ever elected? No, I don't.

If you want to talk about talking real language, go out in a coffee shop. As the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave said yesterday, in all the coffee shops. I spend a lot of time in coffee shops. That's my thing, in my district. My office is down in the middle of a busy area. They agree with what I'm saying. No one walks in there and points the finger at me, it's your fault – no.

Do you know what they say? How are we going to move forward? How are we getting solutions?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. PETTEN:** Barry, I can't afford to heat my house. That's the stuff that hits me.

I don't care what stripe I am, as long as I'm elected to represent the people that elected me, they put their faith in me, I will speak for them. They're concerned about the power rates. I think every Member in this House have constituents who have the same concern. That's where it is.

We've spent a lot of time and we've spent a lot of energy pointing the blame. Long before Muskrat, this is five years – we're hearing it this past week is the blame, blame, blame, but unless people are not reading the same newspapers or talking to the same people as I am, people are sick of it. I can say I'm sick of it because I'm sitting on this side of the House. Sometimes the barrage comes at us because we get it from all sides for some reason. We're the Opposition, we're the former government and everyone likes to blame you. I'm okay with that. I'm a big boy. That doesn't bother me. That really doesn't bother me.

I'm about making sense. If it makes sense, bring it on. No problem. If I do wrong, I will apologize, make no mistake about it. I live in a house, I have a wife and I have two daughters.

Every pet in the house is non-male, I'll leave it at that. I do not have any say in my house – trust me. I have a mother who lives by herself and what they don't, she controls. So that's my life.

Then I represent 16,000 people who give me grief everyday about every pothole. Even on the town roads, I'm responsible for every pothole in CBS.

**MR. CROCKER:** You are.

**MR. PETTEN:** As the Minister of Transportation and Works says, I am.

But it bears repeating – again, I don't mind saying I'm wrong. Trust me, I apologize everyday of my life. I do, but I have a problem when I sit and I listen to some of the commentary, some of the stuff that's said. There's only so much of that you can listen to without getting to your place, like I am here now. Like I said, I wasn't even going to speak but I felt this feeling inside me. I didn't want to get up, and it's not getting up and attacking people in this House. I think we're all in this together. I think we have to move past that.

Whether that report costs votes to this party or that party or whoever it costs votes to, that's something you deal with at another time. Right now the seniors are worried, people are worried, families are worried, and low-income and middle-class people are worried. They're worried about how to pay their bills. They're worried about the coronavirus. There's a lot of stress on the streets, Mr. Chair.

We were talking yesterday about probably coming out and making this comment, or going this way or this strategy. I was asked my opinion, and my colleague for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, we were asked our opinion. I said no. It was probably a good strategy; but, no, there's enough fear on the street. People are concerned enough. We can't be coming in here or making releases that are going to put more fear into people. I don't think people need that. Our society doesn't need that.

Our province, our country or the world right now is on edge. Say what you want, everyone is on edge. The last thing we need to do is put them further over that edge. We need to stand up



and be leaders. We're all elected to represent our areas. We're all leaders in our communities. Be leaders and show the way.

Don't be living in the past, Mr. Chair. There's enough of that; people are tired of that. Move ahead and find solutions to solve the problems. Do what we're elected to do, and that's what will keep you elected and that's what will make people happy and that's what we should be concentrating on.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, a couple of comments. I understood we were going to go directly to the vote, but I do have to respond. There are a couple of corrections that I will make.

First of all, I will say that if we want to talk about you can't blame people or parties for stuff that didn't happen. It was just this week, I think, that we heard Members opposite talk about the Poverty Reduction Strategy. I'll remind Members that the only individual in this Legislature that was part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy planning was me. I was a minister who sat on the Poverty Reduction Strategy planning when that was announced; yet, the other side of the House wanted to take credit for the Poverty Reduction Strategy when not one of those Members sat on that, not one of those Members sat in Cabinet, but when it comes to Muskrat Falls: don't blame us.

Now, there were two Members over there that sat in caucus when that was –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. OSBORNE:** It's not the time, I'm being told by the previous speaker.

Anyway, two Members of that caucus currently sat in the former caucus when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned. One of the independents sat in that caucus when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned. I

didn't sit in the caucus, wasn't privy to the information. I did vote on a private Member's resolution.

The fallacy talked about in this House – and it's the first time I've ever corrected on the Legislature floor, by the way. I didn't vote for Muskrat Falls. The two bills that were brought before this Legislature, I didn't vote for those. I will say, I did vote for the private Member's resolution that was in 2012 or '13. I was an independent Member at the time. I did vote for that. That was prior to sanctioning.

That was based on the fact that I believe Muskrat Falls was supposed to cost just over \$6 billion, not the \$12 billion or not the number that it was when it was sanctioned, but the promise of what Muskrat Falls was going to be. I think at the time when the private Member's resolution happened, the public opinion polls at the time showed there was about 70 per cent of the population of this province supported Muskrat Falls.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. OSBORNE:** Sixty-four per cent, the Member for Cape St. Francis is saying.

The public opinion polls said that 64 per cent of the population supported Muskrat Falls. I would suggest that's the reason, during the private Member's resolution, the people who voted for it voted in favour, but it was based on the fact that it was \$6.4 million, I believe, at the time, not the \$12.7 million –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Billion.

**MR. OSBORNE:** – or billion. Not the \$12.7 billion that it turned out to be.

The biggest challenge, Mr. Chair, this province faces today still remains Muskrat Falls. Every time I speak with the bond-rating agencies, it's the main topic. We've borrowed \$3 billion as a government, that in 2016 when we put in place our return to surplus plan, we did not realize we were going to need to borrow. That's the facts, that's the reality.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MR. OSBORNE:** Three billion dollars we've borrowed as a province. That's on top of the money that Nalcor has borrowed. In fact, the three bond-rating agencies have said that it's the largest contingent liability on our province today. It's the largest downward pressure on our bond ratings. But you know something? Our bond ratings today are better than they were in the mid-2000s, and that's a reality as well.

Despite the fact that we've gone through the most difficult challenge fiscally in our province, really since the collapse of the ground fishery in 1993, or prior to that, the 1930s, our bond ratings are better than they were in the mid-2000s when we were at the early stages of the biggest fiscal boom our province has ever faced. I will stand and defend that.

The reason I wanted to get up, Mr. Chair, and speak today is that we do hear people stand in the House and take credit for things they weren't part of. When it comes to taking credit for things they were: Don't blame us for that, you guys are the government. Again, the Poverty Reduction Strategy is a prime example of that. I was one of the architects of that strategy and I'm not looking at any of the other architects as I look across the floor. That's the reality.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition from a scrum yesterday saying that the biggest finger pointers are on this side of the House. I challenge that as well, Mr. Chair. I challenge that as well because I would say that the reason I see the Leader of the Opposition coming is I see him finger first. He's fast and furious with the finger when he's talking about this side of the Legislature.

He talks about tenuous at best, Mr. Chair, and some involvement of Muskrat Falls from that side of the House. Tenuous at best is what he calls for resignations on this side of the House. If we're going to be fair, we have to be fair. That was the point I wanted to stand and talk about today.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Seeing no other speakers, we're going to now take a vote on the subamendment.

Shall the subamendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subamendment carried.

**CHAIR:** Seeing no other speakers, we are now going to vote on the amendment, as amended.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment, as amended, carried.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

We're now debating the main resolution, as amended.

**MR. WARR:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise in my place today and speak to the resolution, as amended. It's an opportunity for me to speak a little bit about my district, a little bit about the department that I'm proud to be the minister of.

I think before I get into that, Mr. Chair, there's been a lot of banter back and forth with regard to Muskrat Falls over the last day or so. We did receive a report yesterday, *Muskrat Falls: A Misguided Project*. We received Judge LeBlanc's report.

I think probably I'm going to take a piece from my colleague for Happy Valley-Goose Bay on – our friend or our colleague for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. I think he probably made a statement yesterday that hit home with me as well and that is that we have to – quote – look beyond Muskrat Falls – unquote. That can't happen. We just got this report yesterday, we

will live this report for the foreseeable future and we will live Muskrat Falls; we cannot forget it. I think I understand where you were coming from with that, but it certainly is something that we can't forget.

I made a few notes. Before I get into the gist of what I want to say, the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands mentioned today about the *Forestry Act*. Well, let me tell you, Sir, I was a scaler. That's what I did when I came out of university. I was a scaler. So anything that you need to know about scaling, I'd be more than happy to share it with you.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'm pleased to stand here again today. It's an opportunity to outline the many important and progressive initiatives happening under the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for children, youth and young families across the province.

It's an honour for me to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. I think, Mr. Chair, going from the MHA for Baie Verte - Green Bay to continuing that role and taking on the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, I owe a lot of credit to my CA and her name is Kathleen Hynes. She works out of the office in Springdale representing the full District of Baie Verte - Green Bay, and I have to tip my hat to her today because she's –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. WARR:** Thank you.

She's done an absolutely fabulous job and she has stepped up to the plate when I have not been there. I owe her a great deal of gratitude and I hope she's hearing this today.

Mr. Chair, a lot of good things are happening in the department. I want to thank the employees for their dedication and commitment to support and enhance the K-to-12 and early childhood education systems in our province.

Mr. Chair, I want to say I have always had a great relationship – and I go back to my own school years, always had a great admiration and

relationship and friendship and it continues today with the educators who I was so privileged to have during my own school years. My colleagues would kindly remind me that that wasn't yesterday, but I've never forgotten them. Just being the Minister of Education since May of 2019, I sometimes now, even though I went down the role of police work and private business, I think I probably would have enjoyed being an educator as well.

I had my opportunities to speak with the hon. Member for Bonavista and, certainly, the hon. Member for St. John's Centre, who are both my critics, and we've shared many conversations. I've really grown to respect the educators in our province through my role here. It's an exciting department to work in, to see everybody, most days, with a smile on their face and busily going along with their day-to-day chores and work. They are really there for the right reasons, and that's the children of our province.

Mr. Chair, I want to talk about the implementation of the Education Action Plan. It's on target with 65 per cent of the actions completely or substantially underway. Since the launch of the plan, we've been adding teaching resources, new reading specialists, a new position called teaching and learning assistants and we have increased learning resource teachers. These resources, as I spoke yesterday, will add an additional 350 – will certainly be fully implemented in September.

In the classrooms this year, Mr. Chair, we have allocated 48 new reading specialists. It's going to be increasing to 104 in September. We've added 100 teaching and learning assistants, which will increase to 200 in September and 26 additional teacher librarians, increasing to 39 for September. Last year, we increased the budget for the Education Action Plan to \$13 million, which was an increase of \$6 million from the previous year.

There's no doubt that education is, and continues to be, a priority for our government and it should be a priority for all 40 Members in this House of Assembly.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. WARR:** Mr. Chair, we have stated quite clearly that there are no plans to increase class sizes. Again, I was on my feet yesterday speaking to that as well. It's also important to note that class size caps in this province are comparable to other provinces. We always talk about doing jurisdictional scans, and we've done our work here as well. Some may suggest that there shouldn't be soft caps; however, other provinces also have provisions in place to allow some flexibility, depending on certain circumstances.

While the class cap for Grade 4 is 28 – Mr. Chair, I'm going to share those numbers again – only 19 out of 226 classrooms have 28 students. For Grade 7, only eight classes out of 228 are at the cap. In Grade 9, only eight out of 218 are at the cap.

We understand and appreciate composition is a factor when considering class sizes. Again, my two hon. critics have made me certainly aware of that as well, and their concerns around that. That's why we've been creating these new positions and adding teaching resources through the Education Action Plan.

There is also no doubt that the actions are improving the ability of our schools – in fact, the entire school community – to better meet the needs and supports of the inclusion of all students with exceptionalities. We are hearing this directly from educators across the province. We have received very positive feedback from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools, Mr. Chair. I hear it when I visit schools and speak with teachers and principals who say the changes are truly transforming the experiences for students.

The additional resources and the new responsive teaching and learning model is helping to ensure all students, regardless of ability, Mr. Chair, are getting the supports they need. Are we fully there? No, we're not, but we're working towards that.

A simple scroll through Twitter also reveals the exciting things happening in classrooms throughout the province, from the daily activities in the new learning library commons to the workshops and activities on coding.

Mr. Chair, I don't have a whole lot of time left, so I think probably what I'll do is I'll stand in my place again to continue on.

Mr. Chair, I just want to highlight; yesterday, I was down and spoke to 350 administrators on a two-day professional development seminar here in the city. We had the opportunity to hear from Leary's Brook academy and a bunch of young students here singing to the group yesterday. I'm so amazed at some of the children that we have in our schools today.

I know the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands spoke yesterday about *The Wedding Singer*. I had the opportunity, actually, to go the Arts and Culture Centre – that's the students from O'Donel High – and watched that program, Mr. Chair, an absolutely fabulous program. They did a great job.

Last but not least, I want to highlight Woodland Elementary in Dildo. I had the opportunity to go out there during education – sorry, not Education Week. I just can't remember the reason, but anyway, went out to Woodland Elementary. Mr. Chair, I was amazed to see the students. The musical talent in that school was absolutely amazing and I certainly wanted to highlight that again here today.

Mr. Chair, I know my time has ended. I'll take the opportunity to rise again in my place at another time, but I will be supporting the resolution, as amended.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This is a difficult speech for me to make here today because I look back – I heard the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair yesterday evening get up and say that she was mad. I heard people across the way say they were mad and I heard my colleagues on this side of the House also say they were mad.

Well, I'm very mad also. I'm really upset. I sat in this Chamber now for the last 12 years and

I've done my best. I stood here, I voted for things that I voted for because I felt in my heart it was the right thing to do. Anybody that knows me, knows that's the way I am no matter what.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I always try to show respect, whether it was in government or whether here in Opposition, to the Members across the way, or to my colleagues on the side of me. That's the number one thing I'll always do. I have a decision to make in the next few months whether I'll be running again or not, and I will walk out of this House with the same integrity that I walked in with.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** But to say I'm upset, I'm so upset over this report because it's going to affect my children, my grandchildren and my neighbours. It's going to affect people that I live with and people all over this province.

I sat in the Chambers and I sat in a lot of meetings. I sat with the minister of Finance, I sat with the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, I sat with the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island and I had lots of questions when it came to Muskrat Falls. As anybody who knows me, and my colleagues here know that when I sit around a table I'm not afraid to ask questions or give my opinion, and I did. On lots of occasions, I gave my opinion.

When we came in to the Muskrat Falls, the biggest problem, the biggest issue we had in the province at the time was that we needed power. We needed the power. We were told that, there was a DarkNL, if we didn't do something – we needed the power.

We were also told that Holyrood at the time would cost \$1.6 billion to – now I don't even know what they are, precipitators and brushes needed to be replaced out in Holyrood in order to put that back on. We were also told at the time that is burning oil out there, the same thing as putting 800,000 cars on the road a year and letting it go up to affect our environment. So we needed to get rid of Holyrood, that's what I was told.

I was also told there were all kinds of different options that were available to us. There was wind, there was solar, there were other different routes that we could do. There was, they called it, inland options where we could upgrade our inland ones in Bay d'Espoir and at Star Lake and those things, but they weren't the cost. What we were told, the least-cost option for the province – this is what I was told by experts – was Muskrat Falls.

Now, I sat around a table, like I do now with my caucus Members, and we have people come in and they give us advice. They tell us what's on the go and whatnot.

I'll give you a little example now. I knocked on a door during the last election, and the guy was a retired teacher – and I told my colleagues the story before. He was a retired teacher, I've known him for years. He said, Kevin, I can't vote for you because you voted for Muskrat Falls. I said, okay, I can understand that. I said, can I give you a little bit of what Muskrat Falls was for me.

I don't want Muskrat Falls at \$12 billion. I was assured that Muskrat Falls was going to be around \$6.2 billion. I said, you're a schoolteacher. You sit in a classroom and the students listen to you because you're the expert in that classroom. Now, if you tell them that Christopher Columbus discovered Newfoundland, they will write that on their exam and say the teacher told me, because he's the expert in that room, that Christopher Columbus discovered Newfoundland.

I sat in a room with experts every day there was a briefing. Anytime there was a briefing on Muskrat Falls, I did not miss one. I sat there, I wanted to know about it. I read about it. They gave us report after report. There was Manitoba Hydro, there was Navigant, all these reports. I sat in the nighttime at home reading about it, because I'm not an engineer. I'm not an expert when it comes to hydro projects. I'm not an expert when it comes to what we need for electricity, but I have to listen to the people that have the expertise. That's what we do.

If I have an issue today, I would walk across and speak to a doctor and ask if this is what I do. If there was something with education, I would

talk to an educator. That's what this was. We had expertise in that room that sold me on Muskrat Falls.

Now, will I apologize for it? No, I'm not going to apologize, because I know in my heart and soul I voted for the right reasons. The reasons why I voted for Muskrat Falls were because we needed the power, it was going to be great for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it was going to be great for my children, my grandchildren and the constituents I represent. Anytime I'm in this House of Assembly, I'll continue to do that in my own heart and soul.

Now, afterwards, after I read some of this report yesterday, yes, I am mad. I am very, very upset. Now, am I upset with myself? Yes, there are some things in this report I look at that probably could've been done differently. I think the PUB part was something that should have done an investigation into. But again, I listened and, at that time, when they talked about the PUB, they were going to use Manitoba Hydro as their expertise. What I was told at the time was that Manitoba Hydro was after doing basically the same thing over again, so we were only repeating the process. Again, I listened to what I was told by the people that were the experts at the time.

I'll sit in this House and I'll stay in this House and I'll always represent the people that elected me to the best of my ability. When I voted for Muskrat Falls, I voted for Muskrat Falls because I was doing that. I was doing it because I felt it was the right thing to do.

The Minister of Finance, he also voted for Muskrat Falls. You have to remember that – I'm sure he did it for the same reasons I did, but we also had a board from Nalcor. There were a couple of members on that. The former Finance Minister, she voted for it, everyone – I don't know if we were all hoodwinked like the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said, but we did listen to the people that we paid a lot of money for.

The expertise on the front of that table are making a whole lot more money than I was making, and they were a whole lot better with the numbers and names behind their names that should have known a lot more than what I did.

But I'll always get up in this House and I will tell the people of Cape St. Francis that I voted for Muskrat Falls, yes, I did. Information that was given to me at the time – I'm not sure what I'd do today, whether I'd vote for it again. But at the time, the information that was given to me, the best project that this province could do was Muskrat Falls. It met the needs of the people. One time – and I don't know if the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands can remember – I asked a question about cost. I was told at the table that this could even come under \$6.2 billion cost. That was from an expert that was sat at the head of the table.

We did ask questions. Every time, if you listen to *Open Line* or you listen to the Opposition, like I used to listen to everybody, and they'd come up with an issue, whatever the issue was, the questions used to be asked, but we were always reassured that we know what we're doing, we know what's going to happen and we know what the results are going to be.

To come here today and tell you that I'm mad and I'm upset, yes, I am because this is going to affect a lot of people. I also agree with what's been said here today: We need to move on. We need to make sure – listen, we live in a beautiful province, as far as I'm concerned we live in a beautiful country and I would not want to live anywhere else but Newfoundland and Labrador, but I also want to see Newfoundland and Labrador prosper. I don't want to see our seniors or people on fixed incomes, or even myself or anybody in this province, worry about their light bills. I think we have to get on with what we were elected to do, to represent the people and I can honestly say to do the best job that we can for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, just like I've been doing for the last 12 years.

When I finish politics, I'll be able to look in the mirror and know that I did the best I could for the people of Cape St. Francis.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am quite pleased to see that our subamendment and our amendment have passed and now we can get back to the very important discussion of Interim Supply.

Certainly, I think the coffee-shop people that we all talk to are going to be feeling very reassured once we pass an Interim Supply because that, of course, will provide us with greater stability and greater certainty upon when we might have someone dealing with our rate mitigation issues or negotiating with the federal government on a financial restructuring. So these things are very important and it will enable us to get on with the work of the House.

Certainly, we know that the folks in the coffee shops are very concerned about the potential for another election, so I think that by passing a three-month Interim Supply bill we provide certainty that we will have our public servants paid, Crown corporations will have their funding, not-for-profits will have their core funding and they will be able to continue providing the very valuable services that they do to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, at a time when we have a great deal of uncertainty and instability and a lot of volatility.

That goes well beyond what's happening in the House of Assembly. We certainly have a great deal of instability as a result of COVID-19. We have a great deal of instability as a result of fluctuation in oil prices. All of these things have a major impact on how people feel about living and working in our society and, as government, part of our responsibility lies with providing at least some certainty in times of uncertainty.

Now, why do I think that we are going to provide slightly more certainty? Well, with this three-month Interim Supply bill what we've done is we have thwarted what could potentially have been a general election call with a six-month Supply bill and then being in a position where either the Official Opposition or the Third Party or some of the independent Members would have been blamed for calling that election. So I think that's a good place to be.

I also think that it was rather inappropriate to have a \$4.6-billion knee-jerk reaction to what amounts to nothing more than rumour. Certainly, any threat of a coalition government

would require co-operation by at least some of what we now know as a solid Liberal caucus. If that was the case, according to news releases, then that ought not to have been an issue for a coalition government because it was not possible to even form one. What we're seeing there was a knee-jerk reaction.

I would also like to point out that no one thought to come and ask my caucus or myself about what a coalition government might look like. If we are going to work together in a minority government situation, then the first thing we need to do is talk about how will we engage all of the parties here. That's not come to me and tell me exactly how a minority government will work or a coalition government will work, it's coming to all parties involved and asking them how they would like to be engaged in the process. Then, in the method of engagement we go ahead and deal with the issues at hand.

Instead of, say, perhaps – and this was an experience – sending lackeys to come interrogate me during social situations, will not get any definitive answers on the formation of a coalition government or anything else. I would also like to point out that if there was to be movement on rumours or speculation of a coalition government, then perhaps in the spring of the year we may have actually had a true coalition government with a confidence-and-supply agreement, or later on we could have had a minority government secretariat. None of these things have come to fruition so I would suspect that a \$4.6-billion six-month Interim Supply, in response to rumour, was perhaps a little bit overambitious, we'll say.

Now that we have established that everyone agrees a three-month Interim Supply bill is a reasonable place to be, then I think we do not have to worry as much about the *Financial Administration Act* kicking in as a safety net in the event that an election is called abruptly or the House has to shut down or is prorogued. We also need to be very, very cognizant of the fact that COVID-19 offers a very real possibility that our House may close. If our House closes and we do not have an Interim Supply bill passed, then we will be in a much more egregious and shameful situation, I might add, if we continue to debate issues that are not immediately relevant to our Interim Supply bill.

There are many, many more things I want to talk about here. Since we're talking about Interim Supply, I note that we have some new numbers passed along to us here. Looking at the revised Interim Supply schedule, I do have a couple of questions about that, and I do look forward to going through this in a fair bit of detail. Just as an introduction to some of the concerns, I know that we've adjusted some of the numbers slightly to allow for tenders to be released and work to be done on capital works projects. This is absolutely vital.

I do note that I'm not quite sure where a potential election might fit in this. So I certainly would be interested in finding out where the, I do believe, \$4.5 million for an election would be tucked into something like this.

As I was going through the numbers, I point that Natural Resources has lost \$54 million out of their, I guess, a quarter of a budget at this point. So I'd be very curious to find out what's happening to the Equinor project and how, or if and when that will actually be sanctioned.

Now that we have 3½ minutes left, let's talk about some things that are actually in the budget. I'm going through the Public Accounts here now – yes, the Public Accounts; reports on the programs and expenditures. So as I flip through this, one of the first concerns that I have right off the hop is as we walk into the office of the Executive Council, I notice that the Communications Branch – one of the communication branches – have \$2 million accounted to that. That office of the Executive Council has \$2 million assigned to communications, but I would like to point out that there is a bit of an incongruence in what we're doing here, because I've heard rumours that maybe our legislative agenda is rather light.

The last time I checked, I found there was only one legislative drafter. You can tell me if there are more. There's only one legislative drafter and our role is to pass legislation, I see a little bit of an incongruence, our job is to write and pass legislation and not necessarily our primary job is to communicate that. So I think our allocation of resources perhaps is a little distorted.

Going on, what I also find is that our public engagement – I'm very curious as we get into

our budget discussion. I look forward to having Interim Supply passed so we can get into some tangible and substantial discussions on our budget. During that time, I would like to look a little bit about our Public Engagement office. I note that it has a million dollars, as compared to the Communications Branch, which has \$2 million. So this says that we are half as interested in getting the information back from the public as we are telling them what we think of it all.

That might be an interesting discussion to have in Estimates. I'd like to save some of our time for Estimates, and I would like to see our Interim Supply bill passed sooner rather than later.

Let's go on to Policy and Planning. I'd like to see what under the Communications and Public Engagement have to say about Policy and Planning. They're spending \$7 million on that. So I'd like to see what some of those activities might be along the way.

Moving on, Intergovernmental and Indigenous Affairs, Cabinet Secretariat. Indigenous Affairs has \$3 million assigned to it. I'd like to see how that budget is going to be adjusted now that we've closed the office in Labrador West. We are very concerned about that. I would look forward to passing Interim Supply and moving on to a true discussion of what is in our budget.

Carrying on, Labrador Affairs office. Again, the office has been closed.

Women's Policy Office. Yes, we have our own stand-alone minister, but she does not have a department to do the work of women. As I pointed out in Question Period time and time again, we are sadly lacking in a number of areas, so perhaps we need to put more money into the Women's Policy department as opposed to an office with a figurehead.

Carrying on, Employment and Labour Relations, we are in the Human Resources Secretariat there now. We have \$1.5 million assigned to that. Perhaps we can talk a little bit about how attrition will affect that.

I see, Mr. Chair, I have 20 seconds left. I'll stop there. That is just a preview of what we will do



in the budget, or if we hear that Interim Supply is going to carry on into perpetuity, I have a giant stack of material to work from.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Order, please!

The hon. Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

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

The Committee of Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

**MS. COADY:** Tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Considering the hour, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Works, that we recess until 2 o'clock.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that we should now recess until 2 o'clock.

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.

The House now stands recessed until 2 o'clock.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Admit strangers.

Order, please!

In the Speaker's gallery, I would like to welcome Ms. Nora Normore, who is the subject of a Member's statement today. Ms. Normore is joined by Renee Houlihan, Recreation Director at Alderwood Estates, and Joan O'Driscoll.

Also in the Speaker's gallery, I would like to welcome Quinn Schmiedendorf, who will be recognized in a Member's statement this afternoon. Quinn is here with her mom, Kim Schmiedendorf; her grandfather, Louis Schmiedendorf; and family friend and cousin, JoAnne Kavanagh and Barbara Cadigan.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**Statements by Members**

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today, we will hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Bonavista, Terra Nova, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, Ferryland and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**MR. PARDY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In June of this year, Betty Fitzgerald will have 61 years of volunteer service in Bonavista – a remarkable feat since her arrival there in 1959. Mayor Betty, as she is often referred as, completed a 20-year tenure as mayor of Bonavista from 1997 to 2017 – one of the longest serving female mayors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In total, Betty dedicated 28 years to the town council of Bonavista, serving on the MNL Board and the Urban Municipalities Committee; a tireless volunteer committed to fostering community partnerships.

Since her retirement, she continues to be involved in numerous community causes and organizations: Matthew Legacy, the Bonavista Historic Townscape Foundation, T. K. Kelloway 50+ Club and the Sea and Sky committee. She's also the CEO of SaltWater Community Association, which seeks to improve the lives of those living in communities from Clarenville to Bonavista. This group supports seniors in the area and is raising funds for scholarships for high school graduates.

She continues to champion causes and innovations to develop the region. I'm privileged to work with her when the opportunity presents itself and was delighted to deliver 100 pies to seniors in our region recently. I remain in awe of her stamina and unwavering desire to improve the plight of others.

Thank you, Mayor Betty.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today with heartfelt sympathy to honour a distinguished volunteer in my district who recently passed away. Every community boasts of their volunteers but few can be as proud of someone who is the calibre of Sam Saunders.

Through the years, he was Mr. Volunteer in Glovertown and the region. The Saunders family moved to the region in the '50s. Sam was involved in many local organizations such as St. Edward's Anglican Church, the fire department, Glovertown Recreation Committee, Alexander Bay 50+ Club, Glovertown and area Crime Stoppers, the seniors' complex, CNIB, Glovertown Academy Breakfast Program, a Glovertown town councillor for 12 years, the Central Regional Health Board and many, many others.

Sam was a proud member of the Alexander Bay Lions Club for 60-plus years. He held the position of District Governor and is in receipt of the Lions International Humanitarian Award.

Sam was awarded both the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012, and a lifetime appreciation award for outstanding contributions to his community in 2011. There are very few organizations that didn't benefit from Sam's leadership, dedication, hard work, energy and time.

Samuel Saunders made a lasting impression on his community and the province and he will certainly be missed by all who knew him. He was a friend of mine and I'm a better person for having known him.

I ask all hon. Members to extend their deepest sympathy to the Saunders family, his wife Marie, two sons Jeffrey and Tracy and their extended family.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I would like to recognize the many, many strong women who came out to celebrate International Women's Day in the region of Conception Bay North this past Sunday.

In spite of the weather, more than 200 women came to All Hallows School in North River to participate in the annual luncheon organized by Mayor Joanne Morrissey.

We came together to celebrate the progress made since the early 1900s, for equal rights for women. But, more importantly, there to discuss the work that has to be done to ensure that women will be treated equally in every way and every industry. It was refreshing to see the local community leaders who are women, town councillors, teachers, nurses, the skilled trades workers and business leaders from across the region, including the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

An amazing musical performance was given by the Celeste Choir, directed by Sonya Gosse of Bay Roberts, and accompanied by pianist Deanne Delahunty of Harbour Grace.

The keynote speech was given by our province's first female Lieutenant-Governor, the Right Honourable Judy Foote, which concluded with a call of action: Support women, not because of their gender but because we are capable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** I rise today in this hon. House to wish a happy 100th birthday to Ms. Nora Normore who celebrated on February 17.

During her celebrations, in front of over 100 people she sang, "A Mother's Love is a Blessing," and finished with a round of Baileys for everybody.

Enthusiasm and vitality has been Nora's trademark. Nora's mom passed away tragically when she was eight months old. She resided with her grandmother until the age of seven, then moved to Belvedere Orphanage. She received a stellar education there provided by the Sisters of Mercy. She skipped ahead grades because of her keen mind and love of learning. Belvedere is where she also discovered her passion for music.

She worked for a printing shop in Toronto, where she did an assignment on the famed Dionne quintuplets. Nora also lived on Bell Island where she ran the local pharmacy. Finally, she moved to Tors Cove, worked in the grocery store and taught piano lessons to youth.

Her volunteer work is incredible. She is involved in many different groups and activities at Alderwood Estates where she now resides. Nora believes it is better to wear out than rust out.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in wishing Ms. Nora Normore a happy 100th birthday.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to recognize Quinn Schmiedendorf of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove on being named the 2020 Janeway Children's Miracle Network Champion Child.

Mr. Speaker, Quinn was born with spina bifida and a tethered spinal cord. At just 12 years of age, Quinn has undergone many hospital stays and surgeries, beginning when she was just seven weeks old.

Throughout her medical issues, Quinn has always maintained a positive attitude. I have attended many school concerts over the years, Mr. Speaker, and can easily picture Quinn's big smile beaming out from the front row.

Quinn is a source of positive energy to everyone around her, both at home and at the Janeway hospital, where she is known for sharing her laughter and making others smile. I know Quinn's spirit and her incredible courage gives great support to her mom, Kim, who is Quinn's biggest cheerleader. She also has her pop and her good friend with her today who are also two big cheerleaders.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Quinn Schmiedendorf on being chosen as this year's Janeway Children's Miracle Network Champion Child.

Quinn, you have earned the title and you are a true champion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to share an update on our preparations for the 2025 Canada Summer Games.

I was proud to join the Premier on February 25 as the Canada Games Council launched the bid process here at Confederation Building, and I'm excited to hear that the City of St. John's bid preparation team has hit the ground running.

Mr. Speaker, the 2025 games will be a tremendous opportunity for our athletes to shine on the national stage and gain valuable experience in competing against their peers across the country.

We are committed to supporting athletes in reaching their goals and providing funding to help them get ready for the 2025 games.

I am pleased to report that we have formed a Sport Excellence Committee to advise us on the best ways to enhance athlete performance with that funding.

The Sport Excellence Committee will be co-chaired by Mr. Frank Humber and a representative from my department, and will include members from SportNL, the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Centre, the Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Circle of Newfoundland and Labrador and other sport leaders throughout our province.

I want to thank Mr. Humber and all the members of the committee for their commitment to sport excellence and I look forward to working with them.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the City of St. John's, with the support of federal and provincial governments, will deliver an incredible Canada Games experience that people will be talking about for many years to come.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. DWYER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

It's good to see the 2025 Canada Games coming back to our beautiful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Through the years, our athletes have gone to the podium in national and international events after competing at the Canada Games. I am certain our athletes, coaches, managers and support team, along with our dedicated volunteers, will once again rise to the occasion.

We are pleased to see a Sport Excellence Committee under the leadership of Mr. Frank Humber to guide athlete performance leading up to the 2025 Canada Games.

Mr. Speaker, 2025 will be here quickly and we, the Opposition, are anxious to see the infrastructure plan and details of facilities that need upgrades and those that need construction. These infrastructure upgrades will only occur through the contributions of all levels of government.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Hosting the 2025 Canada Summer Games could be a great opportunity for athletes, coaches, organizers and volunteers. We're glad that government has taken a collaborative approach with the Sport Excellence Committee, but advisory committees are only as good as government's willingness to listen to their ideas.

Let's hope that this committee will meet with better success than did the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council, which saw the resignation of two of its members.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to promote, celebrate and highlight our provincial parks.

Since the creation of Sir Richard Squires Memorial Provincial Park in 1954, provincial parks have featured the natural beauty of Newfoundland and Labrador. Recently, photographers were invited to help showcase this natural beauty by submitting their favourite images of our parks for an opportunity to win seven nights of camping during the 2020 season.

Mr. Speaker, the department was thrilled to receive the great response to this contest, with nearly 300 entries. Today, I am pleased to announce Mr. Bailey Parsons of Stephenville as the grand prize winner of the 2020 Provincial Parks Photo Contest. Mr. Parsons submitted an absolutely breathtaking aerial view of the rolling sand dunes and beaches of Sandbanks Provincial Park in Burgeo. To view Mr. Parson's photograph, along with other winning entries, I encourage all to visit our new website, [www.parksnl.ca](http://www.parksnl.ca). While this site is still under development, the winning photographs will be featured there publicly today.

I also want to take this opportunity to announce that the Provincial Parks Campsite Reservation Service will begin accepting reservations for the 2020 camping season at 7 a.m. on Wednesday, April 22. Of the 13 provincial parks campgrounds in the province, seven are scheduled to open on Victoria Day weekend, with the remaining scheduled to open later in May.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador's 32 provincial parks are something to be discovered, and I encourage everyone to explore the natural beauty of our beautiful province.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to thank and offer my congratulations to Mr.

Bailey Parsons for winning the 2020 Provincial Parks Photo Contest. Having 300 entries into this contest is certainly a testament to the impressive nature of our landscapes and natural areas.

Mr. Speaker, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we often take our outdoor attractions for granted. We are fortunate to have a unique complement of provincial parks and natural areas which provide a variety of breathtaking experiences and activities to all who visit.

As the minister mentioned, the online reservation system for provincial parks will open Wednesday, April 22. With this in mind, I encourage residents of this province to spend some of their vacation time and money at home this year, as there's no better place.

Our province has a lot to offer. From hiking the East Coast Trail to exploring the historic Bonavista and Eastport Peninsulas or learning about the heritage of the Port au Port Peninsula, our province offers something for everyone to enjoy.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**MR. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Congratulations to Mr. Parsons for winning the grand prize in the contest.

In the 1950s, Newfoundland and Labrador had one of the best provincial park systems in Canada, but many have been since sold off. Labrador is down to one provincial park, currently, and one that has yet to see the light of day. Now is the time to bring more parks into the provincial public system and protect more sensitive areas for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources has been oddly non-committal about implementing all the recommendations of the LeBlanc inquiry report, despite having the report for five days before anyone else saw it.

Mr. Speaker, I commit, should I form a government and become premier, to fully implement Justice LeBlanc's report.

I ask the minister: Will she commit to do the same?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the Minister of Natural Resources said yesterday was that we would take a period of days and maybe a few weeks to do the due diligence on the recommendations of this inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, let's not forget that it's the PC family that got this province in the mess that it's in, as a result of this project because proper due diligence wasn't done in the beginning. We've accepted the report. We appreciate it and thank the commissioner and his staff for the work that was done. We thank those that prepared it.

Mr. Speaker, ironically, today, the Leader of the Opposition is standing here and accepting the recommendations and he did not even bother, during the inquiry, to even write a letter or even ask to appear in front of the inquiry.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Well, there are some irrelevancies in that answer, Mr. Speaker, so they're going to take more time, despite having the report for five days before everyone else.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the minister were also evasive yesterday on whether anyone in Nalcor or in the public service would be held accountable for their actions. Stan Marshall offered a full endorsement to the team at Nalcor and indicated he would not be making any changes. A government I lead would hold individuals to account.

Does the minister share this view?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity once again.

I will say to the Member opposite that he is now accepting the findings of the report. Here we are nearly six, seven years into this project and we haven't heard a peep out of the Leader of the Opposition.

Even to this day, he has not even said if this project was a mistake, Mr. Speaker, yet people that were the authors and people who have actually developed and were key pieces in this project continue to actually work with him. He's accepting their donations. He's accepting their support in his leadership bid, Mr. Speaker, yet his PC family, today he seems that he wants to distance himself from the very people who he has asked for their support.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I am certainly on the record as early 2012 as being in favour of a much fuller Public Utilities Board

process to evaluate the business case for Muskrat Falls.

In light of the shocking and potentially illegal activities at Nalcor, will the senior staff named in the report be receiving their bonuses again this year, and will the minister table the amounts?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, when you look at Nalcor and the bonuses, I will tell you one thing right now, taking those bonuses back is something that I think we should do. Mr. Speaker, now is providing the mechanism to allow that to happen. Nobody should be being paid performance bonuses on work to get us in a situation like this.

It's pretty easy for the Leader of the Opposition to stand up here after the fact, after it was his party that established Nalcor, Mr. Speaker, and the Energy Plan that we're currently dealing with right here.

Let's not forget, he can try all he might, but it's his family, the PC family, people that he's asked to support him even to this day that got this province in this situation. It is not people here. We have been fixing it. The report says that clearly after 2015 there was better oversight that went in place. We replaced the CEO, Mr. Speaker, and we are fixing the wrong of the PC government that he is (inaudible) –

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member's time has elapsed.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the people of the province – and I've travelled all over the province in the last several weeks – are much more interested in how the problems are going to be fixed than they are in political sandbox game playing.

We understand the Premier will be travelling to a First Ministers' meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau on Friday. Given the collapse of oil prices and the resulting shock to our economy, coupled with fears about rising power rates, will the Premier seek a firm commitment from the prime minister on an equity investment in Muskrat Falls?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, I would say that denial from the Leader of the Opposition should not be a solution to the problem (inaudible). All we've heard is denial and trying to disconnect himself from the poor decisions that got us into this mess.

Mr. Speaker, yes, I'm going to meet with the prime minister and other premiers in Ottawa tomorrow and on Friday. We'll be having this discussion. I wish we didn't have to have this discussion because the problem around Muskrat Falls has nothing to do with COVID-19 or the declining oil prices; it has all to do with the poor decision that was made by the PC family back in 2012.

He had an opportunity in 2012 to stand up for this province and the Leader of the Opposition did not do it.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** More sandbox games, Mr. Speaker. Again, the people are interested in action, not rhetoric.

I sent a letter to the prime minister seeking a firm commitment on real rate mitigation through a direct equity investment.

If the federal government can spend billions on a pipeline in Alberta, why is the Premier hesitating to join me in asking for the same consideration for this province?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, there's one parade I will not join and that's the PC parade that has been just mentioned here a few minutes ago. This is the Leader of the Opposition that put out a rate mitigation plan last year that didn't even add up. He missed it by \$150 million.

The advice that we're taking, Mr. Speaker, we are working with a group of officials that are doing a great job for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, with some officials at the federal government. The rate mitigation plan that we announced and that plan is now being executed and being implemented, Mr. Speaker, will require support from the federal government in probably a number of ways.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, we're still working through that. The Leader of the Opposition seems to have all the solutions to today, but why don't he get his plan to add up. Why not just start with that?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Only a few hours ago, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 a pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister and his officials for providing a briefing on COVID-19 preparations yesterday. In that briefing, we were advised that three people were quarantined.

I ask the minister: Can he provide an update to this House on the number of people in this province who have been quarantined or isolated, and if there are any confirmed cases in this province?

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

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



There are three people in quarantine. My understanding is there are another six in isolation up until this morning, where we have another eight individuals who attended a meeting in Toronto who have undergone self-isolation and are now currently in contact with Public Health. We have tested 43 samples so far in this province and they have all turned up negative.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for his answer.

We all understand that COVID-19's situation is evolving constantly. The public should be apprised as soon as possible as information becomes available or changes. I understand the chief medical officer is providing a briefing at 2:30 p.m. today.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to daily briefings so the public are kept well informed?

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

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

I see no reason to commit myself to a restrictive timetable. We will brief as often as is necessary to keep people informed. We are meeting across government today at a communication's level and we are talking to the federal government at 3:30 this afternoon about further information sharing for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to do that as and when the need arises. If that's twice a day, so be it.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do encourage – other jurisdictions are doing it on a daily basis. If it's needed more than that, we welcome that totally.

Equinor has confirmed that one of their employees on the oil rig in Norway has tested positive for COVID-19. In light of this news, we have been hearing from workers in this province who are concerned.

I ask the minister: What protocols are in place should someone in our offshore report symptoms of this rapidly spreading virus?

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

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

There are a couple of streams. For those people who are symptomatic and have been exposed to COVID-19, by which I mean close, prolonged contact, then they should call 811 if they are reasonably well; and, if not, they should call 911. On both occasions, they should ensure that they inform the other person on the end of the call that they have been exposed to the disease. 811 will organize for Public Health to visit them and 911 will ensure the paramedics, the rig crew, have the appropriate protective equipment and will bring the individual to the hospital with warning.

If they are asymptomatic, if they have no symptoms, then 811 is the place to go. You will receive advice, and if appropriate, be connected to Public Health, who will then do an individual risk assessment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Workers and their families are concerned about what happens if the virus comes here. It appears that this government does not have a preventative plan in place.

If a case of COVID-19 is suspected in one of our offshore oil rigs, will the entire rig be quarantined? Will it take place at sea or here on shore?

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

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

I think it's important that the Member opposite, and indeed anybody who's listening to these proceedings, realize that we do have a plan, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is integrated on a provincial level. It looks at logistics. It looks at technical elements. It looks at making sure our first responders and our health care workers are adequately equipped and trained and informed to do the job they need to.

We integrate on a national basis with a variety of organizations that parallel our own provincial structure. We meet on a regular basis, by which I mean three times a week, and on Sundays as well at the moment, with the deputies. The ministers have a regular teleconference each week also.

We do have a plan, Mr. Speaker, and it is clearly out there. I'm happy to articulate it.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Preparation is required.

Are the offshore oil rigs and installations prepared with a sufficient quantity of masks,

sanitary, testing abilities and other necessary supplies?

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

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

The airport in St. John's where the helicopters from the rigs come to have been instituting screening procedures, as for any person who's travelled abroad, as of last week.

In terms of what the requirements might be on the rig in terms of personal protective equipment, those are, by and large, the responsibility of the employer. We have not been contacted in the department to say they have had any challenges. Should they contact us, we would be happy to work with them to fill any gaps in their equipment or their skill set, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Transportation and Works must admit that the present state of the Bell Island ferry is at its lowest point. Refit scheduling, maintenance, lost trips, communications and managing are all having a detrimental effect on residents maintaining their employment and accessing medical services.

I ask the minister: What is being done to address these issues?

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Member is referring to some instances last week on the Bell Island service. I think Friday, in particular, we had a number of different challenges. We're working with those challenges.

One of the problems we have right now is the *Legionnaire* is out for a five-year refit. So we are suffering in that way in capacity. We're working with the service to make sure these interruptions are minimized. We do have to work under Transport Canada guidelines, but I can assure the Member it is receiving the utmost attention from the Marine division in the department.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, with the Bell Island ferry doing more traffic than all other provincial ferry services combined and even moving more traffic than the Gulf ferry, I ask the minister: Don't you think it's about time that we placed a shore-based manager in Portugal Cove who would have the authority to operate the service adequately?

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, over the last week, and throughout the last little while since the *Legionnaire* has been in for refit, we have been working with the Ferry Users Committee, the mayor and the MHA himself on this issue and it's certainly something that's been brought to our attention and something that we will certainly review.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We understand there are vacancies in the Department of Transportation and Works that could be allocated to fill the gap that exists in shore-based management in Portugal Cove.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to allocate some of these vacant positions to where they are needed most, not only in Portugal Cove but in other services that need shore-based management?

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite is correct; there is a vacancy right now. It is something that we will take under advisement. It's the conversation we've been having with the Bell Island Ferry Users Committee, the mayor and others and it's certainly something we'll take under advisement and review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Both the outgoing president of Memorial University and the current president of the Faculty Association have spoken out about the years of budget cuts at MUN. Recently, the head of MUN's political science department has resigned rather than make another 20 per cent cut. To make matters worse, government has ordered MUN to slash an additional \$5.4 million over the next two years; entire academic programs are at risk.

How does the minister expect MUN to maintain current programming levels and the tuition freeze with millions more in cuts?

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

**MR. DAVIS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for his question.

There's no doubt, this government believes in what Memorial University does for the people of this province. It's our only university. It's a fantastic institution, a world-class institution in many respects.

One of the things we do in that case is we provide \$363.5 million in funding for operations at Memorial University, which equates to about 80 per cent of their full operating costs at the university. On average, universities across this country are about 47 per cent. So we're trying to do our part; we're understanding the situation we're in.

I can't comment on aspects of the budget before the budget comes down. The Minister of Finance will do that when budget day comes down, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Mr. Speaker, the president of the Faculty Association has stated that Memorial's spending is the same as it was a decade ago and they've hit a wall. Mr. Ken Snelgrove notes, in some buildings, people fear for their safety because of asbestos.

Mr. Speaker, how can the minister continue to believe that this is acceptable for faculty, staff and especially students?

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

**MR. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question.

We understand that there is an infrastructure deficit at the university. We're working with our federal counterparts. We have made some

advancements in that area with respect to the Core Science building, the Signal Hill campus, the animal research facility at Memorial University, all of which brought the average age of the facilities down.

We understand there is a problem there. We're working through that. That didn't happen overnight; it can't be fixed overnight. We are in constant consultation with Memorial University and its key players there, as well as our federal counterparts. We have had success in that area.

One of the things we will continue to do is continue to work hard to try to find ways to fix those infrastructure issues that exist at Memorial University. One of the things that's really interesting is that we provide funding to the university, about \$20,000 per student, at the facility.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the minister – Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** I'll take the promotion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've attended the pre-budget consultations; I've attended the public post-secondary consultations. I've heard from faculty and staff. I've read the latest *What We Heard* document from the Integrated Planning Committee at MUN. There's a common theme throughout, and that's the infrastructure, MUN, is literally crumbling. They spend about \$7 million currently on maintenance when they should be spending about \$23 million to \$24 million.

I ask the minister responsible: How can we maintain the reputation of a quality educational facility when we continue to cut?

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

**MR. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, it's a very good question from the Member opposite and thank him for that.

I share his ideas about the university as being a first-class institution; it still is and still will be. We have great faculty, we have great staff and we have excellent students at the facility. It's where we need to be from a standpoint for growing our economy. They do fantastic work in that, and I'm sure we all can agree in this House about that.

One of the things that's really important that I didn't get the opportunity because of time, in our previous questions, is we're in the middle of a post-secondary review, Mr. Speaker. This is going to lead the transition for post-secondary institutions right across this province for the next decade or more. We look forward to seeing those results come out in the next number of months, into the fall of this year, and then that will set the course for how we deal with our post-secondary institutions on a go-forward basis. We are looking forward to that report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Roadwork in this province has always been challenging with our climate and short construction season. Individuals in the industry have been asking us when the Roads Plan will be released and tenders opened.

I ask the minister: When can we expect this year's roads program to be released?

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, 75 per cent of the Roads Plan for this year was released a little over a year ago. I do recognize that we are behind this year. Some of the contributing factors was the January snowstorm. A lot of our engineering staff at that point in time were required to go out and do assessments for the DFAA claim.

I can assure the hon. Member that the balance of the 25 per cent of the Roads Plan for the 2020 construction season will be released in the next couple of weeks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for the answer.

Considering our difficult climate and road challenges, I ask the minister: What exploration has his department done for using new and innovative technologies or different staffing models to deal with the high number of potholes in a more timely manner?

Because this is a big issue throughout the province. The minister and I spoke about it and I'd like for him to provide any update on that.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and, again, I thank the hon. Member for the question.

As he referenced, we did speak about it. Our engineering staff in the department is constantly looking for ideas around pothole repair this time of year. The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island - I have a letter here in my desk actually that he wrote to the editor back in 2014 talking about the challenges of potholes and our freeze-thaw cycle, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have to tell anybody in the province the challenges we go through. Yesterday it was minus 16; I believe this afternoon it's going to be plus six. This creates freeze-thaw situations.

We're seeing a very poor, very bad pothole season. I apologize to motorists. We're doing what we can and we're always in search for the latest and best technologies in repairing potholes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The District of Ferryland has three depots with 11 pieces of equipment, roughly, in that area and only three pieces of equipment that were actually working during the recent storm. The inventory of trucking services to the Ferryland District are in deplorable condition.

I ask the minister: When will the government act to provide adequate snow-clearing equipment for major thoroughfares in the District of Ferryland?

Thank you.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question. I sympathize with him.

We monitor our equipment availability on a daily basis, actually twice a day at approximately 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. He is correct; about a week and a half ago during a storm, we did have some issues at one of the depots in his region. We've been having those issues. As you can well imagine, this winter has been really, really tough on our equipment.

One of the challenges we faced, there was a large influx of equipment in 2007 and 2009.

Since that time, governments have been limited in what equipment we can get in there. We do have on order in this coming fiscal year 62 new flyers, and we're currently adding over 20 new loaders into the system as we speak.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Justice LeBlanc identified wilful concealment, incompetence and inexcusable behaviour in his report. Government has referred this matter to the police who may eventually lay charges. Other avenues of recourse are also available to the Premier.

I ask the Premier: In his view, is there anything in this report that warrants dismissal with cause?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we've accepted the report yesterday. A very detailed report, some 1,100 pages, as the Member opposite would know. Of course, most of it is leading from pre-sanctioning time back in 2012 and '13. As the commissioner said, by the time it reached financial close, this project could not be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, to the Member's question, right now, the decision that we made yesterday was to send this and refer this to the police and they will do a review that's already been done for criminal activity.

Second to that, Mr. Speaker, to leave no stone unturned, it will be sent to Justice and Public Safety to do a review for what would be civil activity.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**MR. BROWN:** Mr. Speaker, Nalcor CEO Stan Marshall says let bygones be bygones and that he has no intention of letting people go.

I ask the Premier: How can he allow senior Nalcor executives named in the report for their conduct on the Muskrat Falls Project continue to work on the very same project?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, as I've just mentioned in the previous question about the decision that was made to refer this report to the police for criminal activity and then, concurrently, take it to Justice and Public Safety for a review for any civil action that might be required in all of this – what this report says, as I said yesterday, it's a very disappointing report. As leader of the Opposition, I led the longest filibuster in the history of this House of Assembly against this project. I was not in support of this project. So right now, the appropriate thing to do was to let the people that will actually review those reports, let them have their say.

Putting in place a new CEO was a pivotal turning point in getting this project finished strong.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member's time has expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in New Brunswick, the acting chief medical officer identifies regular and routine cleaning of schools as one of the key strategies in the control of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19. But the English School District's policy here of not replacing absent cleaning staff until after three days prevents regular cleaning, especially in the primary and elementary schools.

I ask the minister: Will he instruct the English School District to dispense with this policy and replace cleaning staff on the first day of absence as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of viruses such as COVID-19?

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

**MR. WARR:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for his great question.

Mr. Speaker, many schools have increased stock of hand sanitizer and anticipate the increased need. The district has also been working with the public procurement process to acquire additional supply and orders are being placed today for every school in the district.

I will say with regard to the workers, we're continually looking for extra workers to come in on an as-need-be basis if someone happens to call in sick. We do that on a continual basis and we will ensure we continue to provide that level of service to the schools throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As is evidenced in the LeBlanc report, the exemption permitted under the access to information act which exempts Nalcor and OilCo from disclosing information to the public under the guise of commercial sensitivity with no required explanation and no mechanism for appeal can lead to a disastrous result.

I therefore ask the Minister of Natural Resources: Will she now amend the access to information act to include Nalcor and OilCo and allow the Privacy Commissioner to determine whether requested information should or should not be released to the public?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the Member opposite is referring to, which is the infamous Bill 29, which again we had a long filibuster in, I think, June of 2012. I think the Member opposite can remember those long nights as we sat nearly 80 hours, Mr. Speaker.

As part of that process, there is a five-year stat review on this particular piece of legislation. That stat review, I think, will be starting now around June of this year, so there are some decisions that will be made on that.

Mr. Speaker, back to the inquiry that the Member opposite just mentioned, there was six million pages of documentation, and some of that came because we made provision to make sure that the relevant information was all available to the commissioner. That process there, in this particular case, that information was made available. But, yes, indeed there will be a stat review that could be potentially around June of this year.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. LANE:** I thank the Premier for that. It definitely needs to be done.

Mr. Speaker, fixed-date election provisions were put in place to add certainty around election cycles and prevent governments from manipulating the call of an election to coincide with when it works for them politically. Unfortunately, under the current legislation, the government of the day inserted an escape clause that allows the Premier to ignore the fixed date and call an election at any time.

I ask the Premier: Will your government close this loophole?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** I just want to clarify that. It wasn't this government on this day, it was the –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**PREMIER BALL:** Yeah, as a matter of fact, I think it was probably the government that the Member opposite was part of at the time.

Mr. Speaker, part of that legislation had to do with fixed election dates and then, subsequent to that, we saw a number of districts, electoral reform had changed again. If you remember a few years ago, I think back in 2015, there were some changes that were then made that took us really off that pattern, then the election of last year that I will say, yes, that I called.

Mr. Speaker, some of the things that we're doing will be around democratic reform, but the fixed-election date, as it currently exists once I leave and finish my term as Premier in early May of this year, that will indeed trigger an election in a year down the road.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### **Tabling of Documents**

**MR. SPEAKER:** I have a document to table.

In accordance with section 19(5)(a) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, I hereby table the minutes of the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting held on November 6, 2019.

Further tabling of documents?

**MR. LANE:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.



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

**MR. LANE:** Mr. Speaker, in reply to my question, I just want to set the record straight. I was not part of the government when that legislation was brought in around fixed-date elections.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order. The Member used it as an opportunity to clarify something.

Notices of Motion.

### Notices of Motion

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to Standing Order 11(1), I hereby give notice that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 23.

I have another notice of motion.

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion:

WHEREAS Justice Leblanc has delivered his report *Muskrat Falls: A Misguided Project* which presents the key findings of the public inquiry; and

WHEREAS in that report it finds that the former Progressive Conservative government “was determined to proceed with the development of the hydroelectric potential of the Lower Churchill River and it initiated several activities to advance this development”; and

WHEREAS the report further indicates that the former Progressive Conservative government “failed in its duty to ensure that the best interests of the province's residents were safeguarded”; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative government “failed in its responsibility to objectively assess and oversee the decisions and actions of Nalcor”; and

WHEREAS the original budget for the Muskrat Falls Project was \$7.4 billion and has risen to \$12.7 billion, including financing, yet findings are that “the assumptions on which the Project's economics were based and promoted were not sufficiently tested, and a comprehensive examination of the range of possible outcomes was not undertaken”; and

WHEREAS the report indicates that “this resulted in a combination of unrealistic optimism, a willingness to misrepresent costs, schedule and risk, and an inability to change course when things were going wrong”; and

WHEREAS “the project had clearly reached the point of no return when the Ball Government was elected (late 2015). The real point of no return was at Financial Close of the FLG in November 2013”; and

WHEREAS the consequence of this \$12.7-billion project has had a profound financial impact on the people of the province, without mitigation a doubling of electricity rates, and represents greater than 30 per cent of the provinces direct and indirect debt;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House supports the referral of this report to the RCMP and RNC for potential criminality and further refers it to the Department of Justice and Public Safety for potential civil litigation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

**Answers to Questions for which Notice has  
been Given**

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

**MR. WARR:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to provide information to the Member for Harbour Main who in Question Period, Tuesday, asked about the status of restorative justice programs specifically adult diversion, electronic monitoring, bail supervision and the Drug Treatment Court. I can report to the House of Assembly that these programs are in various stages.

The adult diversion program reduces pressures on the court to help instil a sense of responsibility in offenders so they will, hopefully, avoid repeat offences and the negative consequences of a criminal record. The program is about getting people who make mistakes out of the justice system early. In order to qualify for the program, the offender must accept responsibility for the act and waive delay to allow time to complete the program.

The adult diversion program covers areas serviced by the Provincial Court in Stephenville and Corner Brook. To date, there have been 142 referrals; 56 people have completed the program and others are in various stages of the program. The results of the pilot program are being reviewed, including whether expansion is feasible.

The electronic monitoring program went live on January 13, 2020 and is available to those sentenced to probation or conditional sentences where the court has imposed an electronic monitoring condition, and to inmates being released on a temporary absence where electronic monitoring is deemed necessary. Approximately 50 devices were procured, and priority is being given to offenders convicted of domestic-related crimes for enhanced supervision.

Currently, electronic monitoring is offered in the greater St. John's area and throughout Labrador.

Any consideration for the expansion of the program will be done based on the results of the pilot, which is ongoing.

The bail supervision program, which begin accepting clients March 17, 2020, will operate in St. John's during the pilot phase. Two additional adult probation positions have been created to help oversee the bail supervision program. Bail supervision provides an alternative to pre-trial detention that reduces custodial costs by supervising accused in the community and providing referrals, monitoring and support.

The Drug Treatment Court became operational November 30, 2018, and the first applications were heard on January 18, 2019. Drug Treatment Court is an alternative approach for offenders with serious drug additions who commit non-violent, drug-motivated offences.

The Drug Treatment Court in St. John's brings together treatment services for substances abuse and the criminal justice system to deal more effectively with drug-addicted offenders. Work is ongoing to determine the feasibility of expanding the Drug Treatment Court to areas outside of St. John's. A critical component of that decision will be a collaboration between the justice system, health system and other social and community supports.

As of yesterday, Mr. Speaker, March 10, 2020, there have been 42 applications filed for the Drug Treatment Court: 29 male and 13 female.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

Just to elaborate a little bit on the question from the Member opposite about numbers, I have engaged in double counting. There are 44 people as of 2:30 today who have been tested for

coronavirus; three are in quarantine, by which I mean they have been exposed closely for a prolonged period in an area where there's been a known case of COVID-19. The remainder that have been tested are in self-isolation. That number does vary from time to time.

All of the tests that have been done are done here and then are validated at the National Microbiology Library. Of those 44 that have been tested, 22 have been confirmed negative by the National Microbiology Laboratory. The other two the results from there are pending, but on our local test are negative.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** Given the time, it being Wednesday, I call on the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to introduce the resolution standing in his name. Motion 4 on the Order Paper.

The hon. Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to move the following private Member's resolution:

WHEREAS a province facing the fiscal and economic challenges that Newfoundland and Labrador is now facing must show leadership by producing a solid fiscal and economic plan for the 2020-21 fiscal year without delay; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador is experiencing significant population decline through interprovincial migration, with Statistics Canada reporting the net loss of an estimated 1,430 people in 2017; 2,733 people in 2018; and 4,501 people in 2019; and

WHEREAS Statistics Canada projected last fall that Newfoundland and Labrador is on track to lose 65,000 people or 12.4 per cent of its population within the next 25 years under a medium-growth scenario if urgent corrective action is not taken; and

WHEREAS the government stated in its 2019 budget that it remains on a multi-year plan to returning to a sustainable surplus in 2022-23, although the details of this plan have not been publicly disclosed; and

WHEREAS the democratic principles of accountability and transparency demand that expenditures be subject to the scrutiny of the usual budget process;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to deliver the 2020 budget at the usual time in the spring, prior to a general election.

Seconded by the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any political party which forms a government has certain social, political and economic responsibilities. Various factors such as uplifting underprivileged sections of society, facilitating financial inclusion, mitigating regional disparity, providing proper educational facilities, health facilities and much more need to be focused on. Therefore, a well-planned budget is of utmost importance for any government to ensure economic stability and growth.

How is a budget different from Interim Supply? Interim Supply is like a blank cheque with no details of how the money will be spent. It's a continuation of the previous year as if nothing has changed. A budget is supposed to be a fresh, updated, fiscal and economic plan to respond to the current and emerging realities.

Most provinces are considering stimulus. You need a new budget to do that properly. Stimulus might involve tax cuts. How can you do that without a budget? A budget involves close scrutiny with officials answering questions on the record about what is being spent where. Spending half a year's money without any such answers is unaccountable and risky. This

province cannot afford to be running on autopilot. We need economic leadership and we need it now.

What is happening to our population? For the past three years net migration has been negative. We are losing thousands of people a year more than we are gaining. We're shrinking, and why does that loss of people matter?

Loss of population, Mr. Speaker, means loss of transfers for health and social programs. Loss of earners means an aging population cannot pay the cost of its health care. Here's the irony: as we lose people, our per capita situation looks better because our wealth is spread over fewer people, but we also have schools with fewer students and hospitals serving smaller regions. This makes those services unsustainable and relatively costly in many regions.

There will be cost pressures to cut and that's the last thing people need. We should be focused on growing our population to fill those classrooms and make those health centres viable. Why should Canada be growing while we are shrinking? Canada has an obligation to do something about our uniquely problematic population decline. Our party has called for an urgent federal-provincial growth strategy. The Constitution of the country obligates Ottawa to reduce economic disparity that disadvantages provinces like ours.

What kind of scrutiny comes with a budget? When a budget is brought down there are accompanying documents that detail plans and expenditures in great detail. There are Estimates Committees that take the departments, one by one, bring officials to the House and grill them on the public record about their plans and the nitty-gritty details of their spending. Budget debates take dozens of hours in the House, focusing on what's included and what's missing.

By contrast, Interim Supply is just a list of 19 numbers and the section heads they fall under. No details, no scrutiny, no questioning and no accountability. Interim Supply is intended to be a security backstop to allow the budget to be

debated in great detail; it is not intended to offer government a six-month holiday from scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, why does transparency and accountability matter? No government is perfect. When accountability mechanisms are lacking, mistakes get made and they worsen.

Transparency identifies errors early and corrects them. That's why we impose so many checks and balances on government, to protect the people's money and hold the government's feet to the fire to get the biggest bang for the people's buck.

Hiding budgetary matters from the House means hiding them from the people, and that undermines democratic freedom.

No government should elevate itself above the people and place itself above scrutiny. It's not just that this could open the door to corruption, it's actually a manifestation of corruption for the people's House. To be denied information about fiscal and economic planning, that kind of behaviour is a corruption of the normal budgetary process. It is wrong in and of itself. Financial administration must be done properly and seen to be done properly.

Mr. Speaker, should there be a budget before an election? There is no reason not to have a budget before any election. The Opposition parties are calling for a budget and the government says it intends to bring one down. So what is the problem with actually bringing down a budget?

We are facing very difficult challenges right now. We need the leadership, the direction, the stimulus and the support that only a fresh budgetary plan can provide. We cannot afford to wait.

This government was given the right to govern by Her Honour following the election. This government has engaged in pre-budget consultations. This government has said it is following through on the next part of its multi-year plan. What could possibly be the reason not to follow through with a budget?

What sorts of things could trigger an election? The Finance Minister has accused the

Opposition of wanting to trigger an election. In all honesty, the Opposition does not have the numbers to trigger an election on its own, nor does it want to do so right now, as has been plainly said time and time again.

To accuse the Opposition of plotting to orchestrate an election is ridiculous when it is not possible. An election is not going to happen without Liberal help. Then the question becomes: Do some or all of the Liberals want an early election? It is the Liberals who have the capacity to trigger an election. If they want one now or after the election, they could send their First Minister to Her Honour to ask for dissolution and a new election. Is that what they want?

Maybe they want a new election to happen immediately after the election of their new leader and premier. That premier will have 12 months to call an election and will have the power to request one at any time. Are they trying to get six months of Interim Supply so they open up an opportunity for him to call a snap, late in the spring if the polls weren't favourable? What else could trigger an election if not the Liberals themselves?

Is this a good time for an election? We just had an election less than a year ago. An election costs millions of dollars. Our province is facing a serious fiscal and economic crisis that calls for leadership, not politics. That situation has been made worse by the current oil crisis. We need a solution to rate mitigation sooner than later. The Coronavirus outbreak makes this a terrible time for political campaigning and voting. This is a time to govern with a mandate that's been given and come up with sound solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, there are a number of items here that I'll address as I'm speaking. But first off, if anybody wants to be

Finance Minister here, one thing they have to be good at is numbers. To say that the Liberals have the numbers to pass a budget is not quite true. We have 19 Members on this side of the House, there are 20 on that side.

There are 20 on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker. There are 19 in our caucus. There are 20 on that side of the House. Mr. Speaker, if 19 people voting can overrule 20 people voting, that's magic numbers to me. That's the start.

There are a number of other things that I'll talk about here. Let's put to bed immediately the conspiracy theories, because we're going to vote for this. There are no hidden agendas, but we'll hear speaker after speaker over there talk about conspiracy theories; that I'll predict, but there's no hidden agenda. We will have a budget before we have an election. That there, I'm absolutely going to assure Members on that side of the House. Budget preparations are underway.

The Member also continues to talk about a six-month Interim Supply. We voted earlier today for three months. I'm not sure why that's still an issue.

Having said that, we've also talked about in Question Period here today COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, whether or not reducing it to three months makes sense or not will make sense at the end of the day. We can't predict what's going to happen with COVID-19. We can predict when the budget is going to come in and it's going to come in before an election, unless this House is disrupted.

This House can be disrupted if we're quarantined for some reason. Now, I'm not saying that's going to happen; I hope it doesn't. The House can be disrupted if the budget is voted down. I hope that doesn't happen either, but the reality is I was very honest, very forthright and very straightforward in saying that the only reason we were bringing in a six-month Interim Supply – because you can't do any monkey business with those numbers. The departments have those numbers the same as they have a budget.

The Member is quite right in the fact that the budget gets very detailed scrutiny; you can ask questions, there are dozens of hours of debate. I will absolutely agree with him on that; therefore, you absolutely need a budget. With a six-month Interim Supply, if for some reason the House was disrupted, either through COVID-19 – and we see people quarantined and isolated in the province today. Is it a possibility? It is. Is it a huge risk? No, but it was part of our planning for a six-month Interim Supply.

The major reason was because we had heard talks, even from the Leader of the Opposition, that he was speaking to people and plans were underway to try and bring the government down. So to be absolutely responsible to ensure that services continued, we brought in a six-month Supply. That has been ended. We voted on it today. It's now a three-month Interim Supply.

That's fair. It's done. That was the will of the House; I accepted it. I even made a subamendment to the amendment that was made because it was absolutely the will of the House; and, in fact, that side had more votes than this side. Whether we wanted to reduce it or not it was going to be reduced. We might as well put in a friendly subamendment to ensure that the numbers are proper.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about a solid and fiscal economic plan which is one of the WHEREASes here. I want to talk about some of the numbers and whether or not there has been a solid fiscal plan. We look at the deficits.

In 2015, the PC government in their budget projected a \$1.1-billion deficit. They refused to bring in a mid-year update prior to the election and instead called an election. To be absolutely open and accountable, our government brought legislation in to ensure that before an election you had to have either a budget or a mid-year update. So with or without this private Member's resolution, we have to follow the legislation. We will have a budget before the election.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, in talking about the deficits, the mid-year update that we actually found on a shelf collecting dust because the PCs

would not bring in the mid-year update, we presented that a few days after forming government. It was overseen by officials in the Department of Finance – again, no monkey business, it was the actual details. It was there waiting to be released, but it wasn't.

What did the mid-year update, that the former administration refused to bring in because they were going to call an election, say? Well, they said the deficit in 2017 would be \$2.4 billion. We actually lowered it to \$1.1 billion. I would say that we're following the plan.

The former PC government said that in 2018 the deficit would be \$1.95 billion. Well, in 2018 it was \$900 million; a full billion less. In 2019, their mid-year update that they didn't present said that the deficit would be \$1.93 billion. We actually had it lowered to \$552 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know why they didn't bring in their mid-year update, because those numbers alone would have dictated that they wouldn't have even had a Member elected. That's why we brought in the legislation, so we couldn't do the same thing that they wanted to do.

So, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about economic plan. I want to talk about that for a moment. Over the past four years we've had \$49 billion in economic activity because of what this government has done. You're going to say, I don't see the proof. I'll talk about employment numbers and population numbers in a second, because they do speak the truth.

We had a hundred jobs because of school infrastructure, because of money that we put in the budget – even though the province was in a financial crisis. We had 150 jobs created on long-term care construction. A thousand jobs on acute care.

Oh, by the way, for anybody who doesn't know – the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands knows full well, because he fought and fought and fought for the Corner Brook hospital – Mr. Speaker, the 2015 budget included numbers for the construction of the Corner Brook hospital. So did the 2014 budget. So did the 2013 budget.

You get the point. It was promised for eight years. Who did it? This government did it. This government started the construction of the Corner Brook hospital.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, 2,700 jobs for the West White Rose Project because of decisions this government made; 155 jobs in aquaculture directly related to decisions this government made; 300 jobs, Canada Fluorspar, because of decisions this government; 2,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker, in underground in Voisey's Bay and associated work with that because of decisions that this government – 2,000 direct and indirect jobs, Voisey's Bay and Long Harbour. It will be 1,700 when it's in full operation, Mr. Speaker; 274 for S&P Data. I could go on and on; you get the point. Even though we were in a fiscal crisis, Mr. Speaker, we made decisions.

Now, let's talk about capital investment. The 2015 budget projected that in 2016 capital investment was going to be \$10.9 billion. What was it? \$13.8 billion. In the 2015 budget, Mr. Speaker, they projected in 2018 capital investment in the province would be \$8.4 billion. It was over \$9 billion. In 2019 they projected that capital investment would be \$8.7 billion. It was over \$10 billion. Again, you get the point. Where are the jobs? Capital investment, employment numbers talk about where the jobs are.

Population – let's talk about significant population decline. If we want to be honest, we'll be honest. The 2015 budget, because they knew capital investment was supposed to go down, because they knew the three megaprojects were winding down, they projected employment numbers and population numbers in this province.

I'm going to talk about population numbers, Mr. Speaker, because those were projected by the former administration in the 2015 budget. What they didn't include was the fact that Fort McMurray was going to shut down and have a drastic impact on employment and income

brought back to this province by people who lived here who went there. Their employment numbers didn't even include the Fort McMurray impact.

What it did include, Mr. Speaker, was the promise that they would have Bay du Nord and Alderon up and running by now. Let's keep those two things in mind. They were promising employment because of Bay du Nord and Alderon, supposed to be up and running, and didn't include the impact of Fort McMurray.

Let's talk about population. They projected in 2016 the population of the province would be 524,000, it was actually 529,000. They projected in 2017 the population would be 521,000, it was actually 528,000. They projected in 2018 it would be 520,000, it was actually 525,000.

Mr. Speaker, while the population numbers were still going down, we were creating employment to keep some of those people here. What else are we doing for population? The minister that sits behind me, Mr. Speaker, is going to talk a little bit about the immigration strategy today because we've reached our 2022 targets already. We've been working on an immigration strategy for the province because we know we need to bring more newcomers to the province.

We also know we need to create opportunities to keep people here. If people are going to stay in this province and live in this province, they need reasons to be here. They need work. That's the reason we've been doing some of things we've been doing, Mr. Speaker, to create those opportunities.

Now, what you won't hear Members opposite say is we've gone through one of the toughest fiscal, economic times that this province has ever seen. Did we create that? No, but you won't hear Members opposite say that. They'll blame what happened on us. Most Members over there, did you create it? No. The answer is no as well.

There are a couple of Members that were in the former administration but I can't look at you guys and say you created it any more than, if you're going to be honest and you're going to be

fair, that you can say we created it because we weren't sitting around the Cabinet table when the bad decisions were made, including Muskrat Falls.

Why is borrowing up? Largely because of Muskrat Falls. Why are our bond rating agents saying they have some concerns? Number one reason, Muskrat Falls.

Mr. Speaker, have we done hard work to try to turn things around? If you want to be honest, you guys would say, yes, we have. That's the reality.

Employment numbers, just as an example. Last year, employment numbers, based on the former administration's projections in their 2015 budget, 222,800 people working. How many people were actually working in the province? 225,300. We've surpassed every one of the projections that were put forward in the 2015 budget, Mr. Speaker.

Population, employment, capital investment. Have we made things the way they were in the mid-2000s? No, but oil revenues in this province last year were \$1.2 billion. In 2013, they were over \$2 billion; 2014, they were over \$2 billion. That kind of money allows you to do things that you can't do without that extra billion dollars. That's the reality.

Now, you guys should know that, and if you're honest – we're supposed to be at this together. We're supposed to be working together to try to make things good. We hear people saying you shouldn't be pointing fingers. Well, let's get on that platform and work with us to make things better.

Things are getting better than they were in 2015-16. That's the reality. They're better than *Budget 2015* projected they would be. That's the reality.

So, you're calling for a budget before the election. You got it. It's a promise. It's a commitment; you'll have it. We'll vote for this resolution, because there was no intent by this government of monkey business. I'm telling you

that that's the reality. It's a fact, you'll have the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER (Bennett):** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to get up and speak on this private Member's resolution brought forward by my colleague for Stephenville - Port au Port.

I'm not exactly sure what the Minister of Finance articulated because it was blame and pointing fingers, then it was we have to work together and then it was you did this wrong and we did this right, but you have to agree, we did it right. Be honest and tell – I'm not really sure where all that went, so I'm going to try and be more focused, I guess, on what our intent is.

Right now, we're in a situation where the current Premier is stepping down; we're in a leadership race that's just unfolding. We do not know, as a province, what tomorrow holds. After May 9, we don't know what's in store.

We had an Interim Supply bill that came to the floor for six-month spending. So what does that automatically – it's not only us in this House, read the media. The media are pumping this more than we are: election, election, an early election, June election.

We've spoke to Members opposite and we've said many times, we don't have much interest in an election. We just went through it 9 months ago or 10 months ago, but we can't control that. The controls fall on the government side.

So, in saying that, we're powerless to that degree. Do you have a minority in this House? That's very questionable. You read some of the commentaries that come from Members in this House. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands has come out and proudly says he's a Liberal – always been a Liberal, always will be a



Liberal. Just because he sits here doesn't mean he's not going to be a Liberal. They have their votes.

Playing antics and politics and smoke-and-mirror stuff – we have to do this because we're not going to get our budget passed – that's irrelevant. I think that's the most misconceived notion that I hear all the time. I've said it publicly and I continue to say it: we've never truly had a minority government. If we had a true minority government in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, they wouldn't be governing like they have a majority.

That's the problem they miss. They govern like they have a majority. They're not governing like a government that has a minority government. They're not at all. The arrogance, the commentary, the comments come across the floor. What we hear in the public domain: no way, no way, no way. People can argue with me all day long, I don't care. That's not a minority government in this House, because if not there would be a lot more respect shown by that side to this side and we don't see it. We do not see it.

I stood in my place this morning and we talked on Interim Supply. A lot of it ties to this. I tried to articulate what the public – now I mean I don't know everything the public knows. I have a good feel on the ground; I think a lot of us do. Then we get in Question Period and we stand up and we listen to the Minister of Finance trying to still jab you. The public doesn't like that. The public are tired of it.

We hear the former administration – the former administration was this administration. We're the former former. Think about that. You're on the second term. They're the former administration, not us. We're still hearing that.

For us to get up here and say that we don't want an election, we think the budget should be brought down to this House and dated properly on the fiscal policies of this province, that's our job, but there's a cloud of uncertainty hanging over everybody. To say we don't want an election, we don't have an interest in an election, they're great – their words.

Last May of 2019 – April I should say, because the election was in May – we sat in this House on a Wednesday, ironically. We debated a private Member's resolution, all under the cloud of suspicion there's something brewing. We weren't exactly sure. We were getting all kinds of messages, but we were not certain.

Six o'clock in that lobby, there was an election call. The Premier was out announcing they were going to the polls. He had visited the Lieutenant-Governor and was going to the polls.

We left the Legislature and, literally, where do we go from here? That's not what fixed election dates are about; that's not what it's about. It was about giving people certainty. It's levelling the playing field, Mr. Speaker.

If you're confident enough in your monetary policies and the way you've governed – and the Minister of Finance says they've done a good job. He thinks they've done a good job. I'm not going to argue that, not a bit. I'm not going to say I agree, but I'm not going to argue with him. I'm not going to argue with him about it. He's the minister, he said that, and I respect it. That's it, but I don't have to agree.

Go to the polls; tell the world we're going to the polls. What's the big deal? That's what fixed election dates are about. If you're trying to pull the wool over people's eyes and try to sneak out, we're going to have an election, catch you off guard – because that's what happened last year. That's exactly what happened last year.

We were fairly prepared because we knew something was coming this year, we were getting ready, we were in an election year. We weren't totally ready – they were. That's not what the fixed election date is about.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You lost 10 seats.

**MR. PETTEN:** Yeah, you barely hung on.

So when we ask here and we get up in this House and we're asking, we're bringing a motion to the floor and the minister just said they're going to support it, which is good to hear. When

we say we want government to present the monetary policy, which is better known as a budget, and we want it debated on the floor of this House, that's a very responsible thing as an Opposition to do.

The irresponsible thing to do would be to give carte blanche, six months, you have Interim Supply, six months freedom to spend as you please. Go to your leadership, plan your future. You have until, do the math, September, October month to have an election – for to bring down the budget. A lot of things can happen then in a six-month supply. In a six-month supply a lot of things can happen.

Then I hear the minister say: so, you're going to support our budget. We can't go blindly and support a budget we haven't seen. That's vacating our responsibility to the people of this province. If we go and agree to a budget on the blind, that's being very careless and we're not doing our job as an Opposition.

With the six-month Interim Supply, you're agreeing to half of the spending. Billions of dollars of public money being spent without any questions? Yes, give us that and we'll go on then. Then we can plan our attack and try to hang on to government. I think that is very concerning, and it should be for more than this House, people in this province.

Again, fixed election dates, this openness and transparency that we hear, we hear it all too often. It's probably one of the most overused words I hear, because every time I hear it, I go – I tune out now, Mr. Speaker. When I hear that word it's like I've heard, okay, here we go, turn off the switch.

There's a former Premier of the province who used to always say, on a go-forward basis. After a while that became – you get tired of listening to that stuff, because we know what it really is. It's like when someone goes to insult you, they'll say with all due respect. Get ready, we've all been there. I've been on the receiving end of that one many times: with all due respect. My back is up, it tightens up. I'm ready for it. Okay, bring it

on. That's what you're getting. That's what you're preparing for.

For any criticism or anyone to say we're wasting our time, or how could you? How dare you bring in something to ask the government to present their budget? I think it's the most responsible thing we can do as an Opposition. That's what the people want.

You say about budgets and the concerns and the effect on our economy. People need to go and look at the stock markets. The markets are in absolute turmoil.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. PETTEN:** Better still don't look, right.

They're in absolute turmoil. The fear in the public is at, I would say, one of the highest times I can remember. It's pretty heightened out there with the Coronavirus. People worry about their power rates. People worry about, really, they worry about – I suppose, economically the cost of living is an issue we hear all the time.

Then we stand here in the House and we are asking the question when the budget is, and we're bringing this up and it's important. We keep being reminded and finger pointing on this report that came out this week. That's your disconnect, Mr. Speaker. We all spoke, I spoke about that this morning.

Bring in the cameras and I'll speak about it. I have no problem; I got nothing to hide. That's not where we should be. That's a very important issue. That's something that's being dealt with and it has been kicked around forever and it will be kicked around and debated. Right now, here today, I'll tell you, I've said this to my caucus. Since that report came out yesterday, I haven't gotten one message. And I answer every message, every email, Facebook.

As a matter of fact, 2 o'clock this morning I was getting fan mail about a pothole, and I responded. I should never have done it because it took me till about 4 o'clock to get back to

sleep, but I do respond – sometimes to my own detriment.

That's not where people's minds are to, that's not where they are. I hear lots of concerns, lots and lots of concerns, affordability; the coronavirus is coming in there. A lot people are concerned about that, what happens, what should they do, cancel trips? We brought it up here this week about the school trips, and the minister spoke on it and that's been rectified. This is where we should be to, not wondering when an election is going to be called.

I said this recently when I spoke to the media, why don't the two leaders – or one of them is going to be the leader – the two candidates running for leadership, why don't they come out and tell the public we have no plans of having an election or, yeah, we're going to have an election. Realistically, why not? Is that unrealistic to say that?

Last year, we abided by the election laws. There were some adjustments back in 2015, but it was still in that same year; it was moved ahead a month or so. Now we did it last year, in May of 2019. We don't know – and honour among thieves, as the saying goes. If they're telling us the truth, well, okay, I have to go and blindly accept it. I trust a lot of them, by the way, Mr. Speaker. I use that lightly when I say it. I don't know for certain if they know.

My question across the floor is: Why don't you ask both your candidates what their plans are? Because until I hear that and I hear that for certain, I don't think anyone's concerns will be alleviated.

But a budget is tied to a new leader. We see the price of oil, it's pretty scary. Let alone the markets, because this province is exposed to the markets through different funds we have. It affects everybody. Oil prices, obviously, is affected by the market economy. All of that is driven on people's fears.

The coronavirus, people have fears. It affects everything. The economy is interconnected. Everything we do, our economy is all meshed together. This affects every person in the

province, so why shouldn't they have clarity? If there's now a time to stop the antics, stop the finger pointing, stop the blaming and stop this – it's exhausting.

My daughter follows politics because I'm into it. That's the only reason –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. PETTEN:** She has better sense, yeah, that's right.

But she said to me last night – my youngest one is into the politics; the oldest is not – Dad, people are drained; people are exhausted, listening to it, listening to what you fight about, listening to what you're talking about, listening to what's being beat about in the media, listening to scrums out there and what is said. People are tired.

I won't say it doesn't happen on this side, that we're not part to blame for some of that, people getting tired. People get cynical; they get tired. We all do. As a matter of fact, there are many days I get that feeling, Mr. Speaker, and I wonder what have I got myself into. But I stay focused on what I got myself into because I believe in what I'm doing. I really do.

I also believe that if you're going to play by the rule of transparency and we're all living in this transparent world, well, come be transparent. Tell us. Yes, okay, you're going to say you're going to bring in the budget. Good, but open up the rest of it. That alleviates, gives more certainty. People can plan, people can figure out.

There's more than us in this Legislature, if you look at elections and budgets. There's a bigger piece to this. There are a lot more mechanisms. There's a lot of money involved, obviously, but there's a lot of staff. There are a lot of things that have to happen to make an election happen. They just don't happen when you drop – there's a lot of planning. That's where I think we need to start focusing.

I said this this morning and it bears repeating. We need to focus on what society are feeling.

Right now, we should be showing leadership, not what I see again today. I was hoping I would see it here in Question Period, I never seen it. Alleviate concerns, get off that train. People can make their own opinions. They're going to make their opinions with or without what happens in here, because what happens in here sometimes paints all of us with the same stripe, Mr. Speaker, and that's not where we need to be.

We need to tell the province what you're doing. You're having a budget. Well, that's good, but clarify everything else. There are too many clouds of uncertainty hanging over everyone in this province right now and this is a means of clarifying some of that, but that's not going to be all. There is a lot more than just a budget; the full picture. We need clarity, the public deserve it. Not us in here, we can survive it; the public deserve it. That's what's required.

We need to alleviate the concerns and the fears out there because I think that is our, you can say – and I know if you're on that side, you're going to say Muskrat Falls is the biggest issue facing us right now. It's not, Mr. Speaker, it's not. I emphasize, there is a lot of uncertainty and a lot of fear out there that they could care less about hearing about the Muskrat Falls report. They want to see answers, and answers can come in a budget.

People need leadership, and that's what we seem to be lacking right now. I look forward to seeing more leadership and taking good direction for the people of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand and speak for a few minutes on the budget. I wasn't going to, but I heard some comments from the Member for CBS. I always listen. I always take notes of it.

I'll just say to the Member, because I was a Liberal and I have Liberal values, that doesn't mean I'm just going to walk in and take everything that the Liberal's say that I'm going to do. I never did it when I was in with the Liberal Party, I never did it when I was in the Liberal caucus, and I never did it when I was in the Liberal Cabinet either.

So for the Member for CBS to stand up and say: They got a majority because the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said that he's a Liberal. I'm always going to remain a Liberal. Obviously, he don't know me.

I remember back in 2002, I was parliamentary assistant to the premier, Roger Grimes, at the time, and they had an all-party fisheries committee set-up on the capelin. The Gulf capelin out there had nothing to do – it was very strong. It didn't mingle with the other capelin, the other masses in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, but for political reasons they wanted to cut the Gulf capelin – just for political reasons; no reason whatsoever for any prevention or saving the biomass out in the Gulf region.

I just want to let you know that I was the only person who stood up in this House against my party, that went against that. I want to put that on the record for the Member for CBS. You can stand up and make the assumptions that I'm just going to rubber-stamp everything.

I remember the Member for Baie Verte - White Bay. I remember when my good friend at the time, Claude Ward, the mayor of La Scie, was down there. Paul Shelley was the Member actually; Paul Shelley was in the Opposition. I remember the roads down in La Scie. We went down there and it was so terrible that I stood up in this House and I went against my government to ensure that La Scie got money because of the safety of the road.

For anybody in this here – for the Member for CBS to think that I'm just going to take and rubber-stamp things in this House for the Liberal Party, obviously, you just don't know me. You want to talk about playing politics and getting on with your foolishness with politics? It's a prime

example of how you say one thing but do the opposite. I just want to put that on the record.

I'm going to vote for this also. I think we deserve a budget. When the Minister of Finance set up in six months – yes, this is how this Legislature works. You set up the six months, here are the reasons why; let's debate it in the House of Assembly. What we did in this House of Assembly is we put in an amendment, and the minister a subamendment, to ensure that the numbers were correct, and he voted for the subamendment. This is how this Legislature works.

The minister had concerns that maybe the budget was going to be voted down. I just wanted to say to the Member for CBS: if you think the Liberals have a majority and were going to put in the six months, why were the subamendments put in? We could have voted it down. If you're going on with your assumption and casting aspersions on people, this could have been voted down, no problem, and go along with the six months, but there were never any discussions with me with that minister to go along with the six months. There was absolutely none.

Here we have an Opposition – and a lot of nice people. Absolutely, I'm not saying anything about him personally, but here's an Opposition who's saying –

**MR. PARROTT:** You're Opposition.

**MR. JOYCE:** No, I'm independent right now, sorry.

**MR. PARROTT:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. JOYCE:** Here's the Member for Terra Nova again. You'll have your time to talk.

Here's the Opposition talking about how we have to get along and casting aspersions of how I'm just going to get up and rubber-stamp stuff. It just doesn't make sense. Mr. Speaker, I'm actually looking forward to the budget. I think

the budget process is a process where once we get into Estimates, we can delve into the details of the budget.

I know my colleague here for Mount Pearl - Southlands, all of our discussions, we're all anticipating a budget. I know, I understand and I'm going to support the private Member's motion that was put in today. Absolutely, I'll support the private Member's motion that we should have a budget put in. Absolutely.

This is where we get into the Estimates part and we can go through line by line of each department, just to see what we are voting on and what's being spent around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; what departments are spending and how they're spending the money. We also see what wasn't spent last year and what went over from last year. That's a part of the Estimates. We will see line by line if things last year were kept on track, what were expenditures and what wasn't spent. The information here is that we can develop priorities here in this House of Assembly.

All this debate here and now about if we need a budget, I agree 100 per cent. We do need a budget. Again, for the Humber - Bay of Islands area, part of Corner Brook which I've been elected, and I thank the people again for their support. Of course, I'm going to be looking for some of the priorities for Humber - Bay of Islands, and the only way to get that is through the budget. It wouldn't be fair to go back to the people of Humber - Bay of Islands and say: Well, I don't know what's in the budget. They're going to wait and put it in later.

Last year, it was different. I admit, I was left in the dark also, scrambling when the election was called. I admit that, but this is just part of the budget process. I wouldn't be able to go back to the people of Humber - Bay of Islands and say: Well, I'm really not sure what's going to be in the budget. I'm really not sure how we're going to look at the deficit down the road. I'm really not sure how oil prices – because I voted not to bring a budget in to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It would be

irresponsible for us not to bring a budget into this Legislature.

This is part of the process. I didn't mean to be standing up here today to talk about it, but after the words from the Member for CBS thinking that I'm going to rubber-stamp this six months or rubber-stamp just no budget so that they can just glide on through to go through the leadership and hopefully after the leadership they can call an election to bring a budget back, or bring a budget in with the new leader, then call an election.

All these conspiracy theories, I had no discussions with anybody on any of that. I had absolutely no discussions on that. I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands could speak for himself, but I know we had no discussions on this type of theory here in this House. I agree, and I say to the Leader of the Opposition: You're doing your job to make sure that we're holding the government's feet to the fire. You're doing your job. That is what you're supposed to do.

To all the Members here, that is what Opposition – if we don't have this here in Newfoundland and Labrador we're going to end up over in some other part of the country where whoever has the biggest gun wins. This is what we're doing.

I know there were some tough questions that were asked here yesterday; some tough questions. This is what we're elected to do. If you can't answer the tough questions, you shouldn't be in the positions. If you're not going to ask the tough questions, you shouldn't be in the Opposition. This is what we're elected to do.

I'll say to the Minister of Finance, and I said it yesterday, you have one of the toughest jobs. Even now with the oil prices down, Coronavirus, you have a tough job. I know as President of Treasury Board, every person here is going to be looking for something for their district; looking for some megaproject, looking for the schools. I'm no different, but this is where we need the budget. This is where the minister has committed to bringing a budget in, and I am

very, very confident – I take the minister on his word that there's going to be a budget in.

When the minister stands in this House and says I will bring a budget in before an election, I 100 per cent – unless something major happens that this House of Assembly is dissolved for some reason because of the Coronavirus or something, I'm very confident that there will be a budget brought in. It is not because I'm a Liberal; that I have Liberal values. Of course, I have Liberal values. I've had them all my life. My mom and dad had Liberal values. I'm not going to change my values.

I'm not saying there's anything wrong with PC values either. I think that's proper. I think that's very proper, but I'm definitely not going to stand and let a Member from CBS stand up in this Legislature and put across and on the record that because I have Liberal values that I'm just going to rubber-stamp anything. That's just not where I'm at.

I know, when I was over in the government side also, I worked well with a lot of Members. I know a lot of Members are working well now. When the budget comes out, we're going to have a very vigorous debate. I know the deficit is going to be a big issue. I know it's a big issue out my way, about the deficit, when we're going to try to get back to surplus. That's going to be a big issue. I know it's brought up in Humber - Bay of Islands on a regular basis.

Do you think that I never had been part of the government the 2016 budget? Sure I did. Did I walk away from it? No, I don't. I don't walk away, because we had to make the decisions that we had to at the time, but people are asking about that now. How can we make the decisions different from now because it is a tough time. It's a tough fiscal climate right now all around the world and it's tough in Newfoundland and Labrador. People are going to be looking to us, saying, okay, what suggestions are you going to make?

Then I heard some questions today about Memorial University. Should we be going in and looking at Memorial University? I'm not saying

if we should put more money into MUN, take more money, but the question I should ask, if we can ask hospitals how can we save money for our health care, shouldn't we be asking educational institutions how can we save money? If we're doing it to the hospitals, if we're doing to the doctors, if we're doing it for every other aspect in this government, every department, if we're going back and saying to the health care guys how can we improve services, how can we make it more efficient, how can we save money –

**MR. P. DINN:** Or create revenue.

**MR. JOYCE:** Pardon me?

**MR. P. DINN:** Or create revenue.

**MR. JOYCE:** Or create revenue? That's part of it, too. That's the other part, too, I say to the Member for Topsail - Paradise. That's true. Find some way to create more revenue. That's a two-way street. That's a hundred per cent. But even if you create more revenue – which I agree – should you not evaluate where you're spending your money? That comes hand in hand. I'm not saying what we should or shouldn't do, but that comes hand in hand.

I just want to stand and I'm going to support this motion to ensure that there's a budget coming in. I take the minister's word and I have no reason not to believe that there wasn't going to be a budget coming in the first place. I just want to tell people – and I can speak for myself, and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands can speak for himself – I was elected as an independent. The people I'm responsible to now are the people of Humber - Bay of Islands, not the Liberal government, not the Opposition, not the NDP and not my Opposition Members – the people of Humber - Bay of Islands.

Any suggestion put in this House that because I was a Liberal, I still have Liberal values, that I'm just going to take and rubber-stamp stuff from this government, you just don't know me. On my past record where I stood up against my own government at the time when I was parliamentary assistant to the Premier, and I

said, take that position from me because I cannot sell the people that I represent down the drain. I said remove me from the position if you want me removed, but I'm going to stand up. I was the only person – you go back in 2002 – that stood up in this House against that move in this House. I'll do it again today.

I can say you ask anybody – ask Paul Shelley. When Paul Shelley was stuck, I stood against my government to say it's a safety concern. When Claude Ward, my dear friend who passed away, said it's a safety concern and when I stood with Paul Shelley and said we have to get something done, do you know where the money came from to do that? Do you know where the money came from? This is the kind of stuff at the time, when I stood up and said we've got to – do you know where the money actually came from? Roger Grimes's district. He said we can see what we can do to push this aside. Instead of increasing the budget, that's where the money came from.

Those are the kinds of things that we did for Opposition Members. And I know there are Opposition Members when they were in government – I use Kevin O'Brien, Darin King. We work well together. So it's not just the Liberals when they're in government. There are a lot of PC Members that I dealt with. I remember the fire truck in Cox's Cove and there was a bit of issue with Kevin O'Brien out in Gander. Kevin O'Brien – just want to put it on the record so I'm not just praising up the Liberal government – when the PC governed, he arranged the schedule for me to go to Cox's Cove around my schedule because I was away.

I think all Members here would do the same, because we're all here to represent the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We banter. We pass over ideas. Sometimes it gets a bit heated. I like the quiet stuff sometimes. Sometimes we banter back and forth, but I can assure you if the Opposition now, which I'm a part of, were over there, I guarantee the people on this side would give a lot of Liberals and myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands the same respect to see what they could do for the district, because we're all here

to help out the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm going to support this motion. I will be looking forward to the budget and I will be having my input into the budget and into the Estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you.

The resolution sets the question or the voting issue for the resolution, namely that the government deliver the 2020 budget at the usual time in the spring prior to a general election, in the context of our disturbing population loss, which actually goes back to, Mr. Speaker, the cod moratorium in 1992. This has occurred at a time when the population of Canada has increased by one-third. Over that same period of time, we here in this province have lost population by about 15 per cent. We're the only province in Canada where that's occurred.

That is a fundamental, underlying structural problem which underlies and makes more difficult all of our other challenges – our fiscal and budgetary challenge and our rate mitigation challenge – is that loss of population. Some more disturbing information about that is that projections from Statistics Canada show that this province will be the only province in the country to shrink in size from now until 2043.

In *The Globe and Mail*, the report in February said: “For now, the outlook appears bleak. Under a medium-growth scenario, the province's population will ebb to 460,000 people by 2043, a decline of 65,000 (12.4 per cent) from 2018, according to a Statscan projection published in the fall. There is no scenario in which the province doesn't lose tens of thousands of residents.”

*The Telegram* reported, “The data shows a worst-case scenario of 429,400 people living in the province by 2043, with the most optimistic

scenario being 501,500 people. In 2018, 525,400 lived in this province ....”

That's the context in which, Mr. Speaker, I wrote the following to the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau by letter dated yesterday, March 10. The caption is: Muskrat Falls: moving forward for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.

First, I would like to thank you for your attendance at the funeral service for my father in January and for our private meeting. I greatly appreciate your decision to take the time to be there.

The purpose of this letter is to seek your support for direct strategic federal equity investment in a clean energy hydro project of enormous importance to Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic region.

The unsupportable cost burden of the greatly over-budget Muskrat Falls power dam threatens the sustainability of Newfoundland and Labrador as a contributing province of Canada. The project was conceived to have regional benefits of a new clean energy and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and resulted in federal debt guarantees extended by the former and current administration totalling \$7.9 billion.

The federal and provincial governments recently announced that they are negotiating a financial restructuring to aid with electricity rate mitigation. Few are persuaded that restructuring alone will achieve the aim of keeping rates affordable enough that rate increases do not accelerate population decline, further shrinking the ratepayer base and putting Muskrat Falls into a death spiral.

The electricity rate impact of this over-budget project must be viewed in the setting of the population decline that began with the 1992 cod moratorium imposed by the federal government, a necessary decision associated with my late father, the hon. John C. Crosbie, in his capacity as Minister of Finance.

Newfoundland and Labrador is facing the most difficult demographic, fiscal and economic



challenges it has confronted since joining the Canadian Confederation in 1949. These challenges threaten the very survival of the province.

The difficult situation requires immediate action by the federal and provincial governments, as partners, to develop a recovery plan for Newfoundland and Labrador. The significant and continuing decline in population since 1992, from a peak of approximately 586,000 to today's level of around 521,000, combined with the older age profile of our existing population has had a devastating impact on all aspects of our province – socially, economically and fiscally.

I would ask for your recognition that the mitigation scheme proposed by the current federal and provincial negotiations is inadequate and for your commitment that your government will go beyond financial restructuring and make a direct, strategic federal equity investment to support the affordability for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians of this clean energy project with regional benefits.

Newfoundland and Labrador finds itself at a very difficult and troublesome crossroads in its existence as a province in the Canadian federation. It will take a strong provincial leadership and wide national support, led by a federal government that realizes the risks of not solving Newfoundland and Labrador's profound social, economic and fiscal challenges.

The prime minister of Canada must be prepared to be both proactive and nation building by making a direct strategic federal equity investment in Muskrat Falls. This step is an essential element in the greater project of reversing the population loss which began with the federally imposed cod moratorium and the implementation of a comprehensive recovery plan for Newfoundland and Labrador, which will place this province on the path to social, financial and economic recovery.

I look forward to your favourable consideration of these issues of unique importance to the future of Newfoundland and Labrador as a province, as, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we all do.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

**MS. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to take a bit of a different approach this afternoon with the PMR and I'd like to go through each of the sections and talk about some of the stats and the research behind them.

Starting out, I'm going to start with the second **WHEREAS:** “**AND WHEREAS** Newfoundland and Labrador is experiencing significant population decline through interprovincial migration, with Statistics Canada reporting the net loss of an estimated 1,430 people in 2017; 2,733 people in 2018; and 4,501 people in 2019 ....”

Mr. Speaker, when we look at immigration, I think our government has done really well with the Immigration Action Plan. In 2017, we had a goal of increasing immigration to 1,700 permanent residents annually by 2022. Actually, we reached that target two years earlier than expected. That's amazing. We're doing great things to attract and retain skilled workers here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our new target is 2,500 permanent residents annually by 2022. We made a target; we reached it; now we've increased the target, so that's amazing. We've also added two new categories to the Provincial Nominee Program to try and make it easier for people to come here and stay here.

International students who came here for school, who want to stay and start a business, there's a special, new category for them so that they can stay and become a permanent resident. There's another category for international entrepreneurs. If they want to come and start a business or buy a business, we want to help make it easier for them, too, because they're going to contribute to our economy.

The second item I want to go through is the second WHEREAS: “**AND WHEREAS** Statistics Canada projected last fall that Newfoundland and Labrador is on track to lose 65,000 people or 12.4 percent of its population within the next 25 years under a medium growth scenario if urgent corrective action is not taken ....”

Mr. Speaker, I really struggle with this paragraph. I think it's a bit misleading and I'm going to explain why. I've been to the Stats Canada site; I have all the numbers from Stats Canada. The PMR put forward talks about this number is under a medium-growth scenario. To me, that says that it's like in the middle, that there are three and this is the middle one.

When you actually go to the Stats Canada and you look at the growth numbers, there are five categories, Mr. Speaker. If you look at medium-growth scenarios, there are three scenarios. I'd like to quote Stats Canada actually. On the page where they have these numbers, Stats Canada says: “Cautionary note” in bold. The scenarios should “be understood as an exercise designed to” envision “what the Canadian population might become in the years ahead according to various scenarios of future change.” They're not saying this is what the population will be; they're saying these are five scenarios that will show what the population may be like.

They come up with those scenarios based on looking at fertility, mortality, immigration, emigration and the number of non-permanent residents. Out of the five categories, Mr. Speaker, for example, the lowest would look at low fertility, high mortality, low immigration, high immigration and low number of non-permanent residents, whereas at the largest would have the opposite of those.

The numbers, Mr. Speaker, that the PMR present as being the medium-growth option are really the second lowest, so it's the lowest of the three in the medium category. As they say, the lowest of the three in the medium category is 65,000, but if we look at the most optimistic in the medium category that they say, the population decline is between 20,000 and

23,000, a huge difference between the 65,000 that they quote in the PMR, Mr. Speaker.

I do think that paragraph is misleading. It's a bit gloomy, if you will. If we look at between now and 2025 – sorry, now and 25 years' time would be 2045 – it upsets me to think that we're going to take a gloomy, pessimistic forecast to our population. I personally am going to do anything I can to make sure that doesn't happen. I would certainly –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. STOODLEY:** Yes. I would encourage them to as well.

We should not be using the second-lowest scenario put forward by Stats Canada for a population, considering everything that we're doing in immigration, everything that we're doing to stimulate the economy and everything that we're going to do in the future. I look forward to being a part of that.

Mr. Speaker, the next statement: “**AND WHEREAS** the Government stated in its 2019 Budget that it remains on a multi-year 'plan to returning to a sustainable surplus in 2022-23', although the details of this plan have not been publicly disclosed ....” I'd like to talk about the sustainable surplus for a minute. I know Minister Osborne has said previously that we've made all the easy cuts.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. STOODLEY:** Oh, sorry. The Minister of Finance, thank you very much.

The Minister of Finance has said publicly that all the easy cuts are done, we've done everything that's easy. Everything that's left is going to be really difficult.

Obviously, we're going to have to do some of those really difficult things, but in terms of returning to surplus, which I significantly hope we can do, there are going to be some hard decisions in that. I went through last year's budget, Mr. Speaker, and I spent a full day. I

went line by line. I was saying, okay, what would I do? What could I cut? I have to say, it's pretty lean. I went back through all the Estimates conversations and there's not a lot that I, as an MHA, would feel comfortable cutting.

I really do think we need to think about how we can increase efficiency within the public sector. I think we should do, for example, an efficiency task force. In my former life in the private sector, Mr. Speaker, we regularly had to come up with ideas of increasing efficiency. Every month, I had to come up with five new ideas to save so much money and grow sales X amount. Then, the CEO would pick one and I had to do that that month. I think it's like a culture of efficiency and cost savings that, as a province, we should start looking at things like that.

Again, as the Minister of Finance has stated, we've done all the easy things and the hard things will come next. Anything else that we cut in order to return to surplus, they would be difficult things.

Then, the next statement: “**AND WHEREAS** the democratic principles of accountability and transparency demand that expenditures be subject to the scrutiny of the usual budget process ....” Mr. Speaker, I don't think that anyone has suggested that we would not go through the usual budget process. The Minister of Finance has said that the budget will be presented at the normal time. As the Minister of Finance already said today, we voted on a three month supply and everyone agreed to that, so that paragraph is certainly acceptable.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the last: “**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED** that this Honourable House urge the Government to deliver the 2020 Budget at the usual time in the Spring, prior to a general election.”

Again, Mr. Speaker, no one on this side is talking about an election. I, personally, would prefer not to have an election any time soon and I don't believe anyone on this side would do anything to move us towards anything other than what this PMR states.

I'm happy to support the PMR, but, again, I am quite disappointed at the gloomy option that the PMR chooses to talk about the population forecasts if you will. What Statistics Canada says, it's not a forecast; it is one of five scenarios that they pointed out for the future of the population – one of five – and neither is more likely than the other. They're not saying this one is happening and this one is not. I think the statement, “... if urgent corrective action is not taken ....”

The way that Stats Canada presents the five scenarios is certainly not saying this is what's going to happen unless urgent action is taken. This is one of five based on different amounts of immigration, fertility and mortality and non-permanent residents.

There's a whole range of things that could impact that: The number of international students we have because they're considered in the numbers; how successful we are – and I hope we're really successful – in growing the tech sector, bringing a lot of new people and new skills into the province.

Mr. Speaker, I do support the PMR, but I personally would prefer that the WHEREAS statement around population projections did not take, of five, the second lowest and instead we looked at the high, medium projections scenario put forward by Stats Canada where 20,000 to 23,000 population decline rather than the 65,000. I fundamentally disagree with that paragraph, but overall I support the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an excellent time to talk about what a budget does, instead of the context in which we will introduce our budget and some of the contexts in which we will build our budget.

A budget is a forward-looking document designed to align policy with expenditures.

Basically, this is the way that a government shows the public, and shows the Members of the Legislature and everybody in the public service what government intends to do. It shows how government tends to manifest its ministerial mandate. It shows how government will decide on allocations for the rest of the year.

When we talk about things like that, one of the things a budget ought to do is address what was brought up by the Member for Harbour Main most recently, about structural deficits. A structural deficit, the strictest form of that would be when the expenditures and revenues of government do not align at the same place or where an economy would be in what we call equilibrium.

When an economy is operating at its full potential, the expenditures of revenues of government don't align with what's actually happening in the economy, so there's a mismatch of what's happening. Certainly, I've seen lots and lots of examples of that as I have reviewed budgets throughout the years. Addressing that structural deficit means changing the way in which perhaps we garner our revenues, changing the way in which we choose to make our expenditures and the areas in which we choose to do both of those things.

Again, the budget is a manifestation of government's policy. It signals what government intends to do. A budget is designed to let the public know, well, am I going to have more taxes? Do I need to put that money away for the future? It is prudent and appropriate for a budget to be brought down in a timely manner to, again, ensure certainty for individuals, to ensure certainty for the delivery of programs and services and the development of new ones.

When we're talking about budgets and timeliness, that gives a very large signal to not only the public but also to our creditors, our debtors and our lending agencies. Again, budgets are important for a variety of reasons, not only the context in which we have tabled this motion, or this private Member's resolution.

If I were to talk a little bit about this, what we would like to see coming out of this year's budget, perhaps, would be a signaling of the direction of our government. Certainly we've talked an awful lot about what could potentially happen, some of the things that we need to do in order to get our budget back into balance. Perhaps I can just lift some of those things out and maybe when the Minister of Finance delivers his budget speech, he may be able to touch on some of these things along the way.

One of the things that government could potentially do is decide that they would like to have a balanced budget, which we know is potentially coming in several years down the road. Again, that will change based on the circumstances in which we are in. A dramatic drop in oil prices will mean that it's going to be much more difficult – no, I should not say that. It will be ...

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. COFFIN:** No, devastating if we had a balanced budget simply by cutting programs and services with no larger direction in place. Just having a direction of a balanced budget is not the way to go.

If instead we talked about, well, we would like to improve the lives of individuals, then our budget ought to be developed in conjunction with our strategic plans and the outcomes that have been identified by our government. Things like we would like to see healthier individuals, so we need to have things like do we have health checks, are we living longer, are people having less ailments, do they depend on medication, do they get enough exercise.

If those are our outcomes, then we need to allocate our budgets over here to reflect the importance of those outcomes. Maybe what that means is that our budget then needs to have a greater allocation towards prevention and healthy living, as opposed to responding to disorders and disease and anything else that may come up. It's a proactive versus a reactive allocation of funds.

Similarly, we've heard in several reports recently that one potential way to mitigate rates and provide, let's say, affordability for our province is to privatize some of our assets. Now, if that is a direction that government chooses to make, then the manifestation in our budget will be substantially different. If we are going to move with a privatization of government's assets, then that means that we will see revenues coming in.

However, there is a downfall to that because as we privatize assets, we lose control of revenue streams. We might have a blip in revenue one year, but then we would have decreased revenues in future years. Privatization could potentially mean a reduction in salaries and a reduction in employment. That, too, will have a run-on effect on our budget. In contemplating what the budget will do, we need to think about what is it intended to do, what are our outcomes and are we allocating our dollars to match those outcomes.

Let's talk about another one. Let's talk about our *Advance 2030*, where we say we would like to invest more in oil. Well, if that's the case, then our budget will manifest that. Our budget will say that we have put \$110 million away to invest in equity stakes.

Prudently, we should perhaps reconsider that move as the price of oil is currently hovering around \$33. If I understand correctly – and I may have this figure wrong – I do believe the right value for sanctioning of the Equinor project is around \$65. Perhaps it is imprudent to tuck \$110 million away to save that for equity investments when that equity will not be generated for quite a number of years down the road. At this point we do have an urgent need to address some of the serious concerns, socio-economic concerns, of our population.

Let's talk about some of the other things that a budget could manifest. A budget could manifest things like we would like to invest in a garbage incinerator, so then we would see money that's put away to have economic stimulus in a particular area, but that would also signal that we have very little concern for our environment. So the setting of government's priorities

determines what's in that budget and, vice versa, that budget reflects where government's priorities rest. It is very important to consider what is happening in the budget and how that will manifest for individuals who will be living and implementing that budget along the way.

Let's talk about something else. What do I have here? If government decides that one of its top priorities is environmental protection, then we need to reconsider our oil investments; we need to reconsider open-pen aquaculture; we need to reconsider what our forestry industry is doing. Again, we need to know what the direction of government is and that will dictate what is happening in our budget.

This is a very important thing because if we think about, well, we are going to invest in environmental protection, then I well imagine that most of the firms who are involved in environmental protection will begin to prepare for that increased investment in environmental protection. You will have a spinoff effect whereby those individuals will go out and employ a whole pile of individuals who are well educated with great sets of skills, who will be enjoying reasonably good pay, and hopefully will encourage new people to come into our province to have children.

Speaking of children, let's talk about that. If we want to encourage immigration, for example, or if we want to encourage an increase in our population, then it ought to be prudent to have a budget and a policy that encourages people to have children. How about offering things like two-year maternity leaves or \$25-a-day child care, or how about free tuition for everyone because we want to invest in youth and we want to invest in areas that will generate a long-term, substantial return for our province.

That budget needs to give a signal to the people who are involved in anything that is budget related about what is about to happen. If we instead signal that the tax rate is going up and the tuition fees are going up and we're privatizing half of the province and we are not doing rate mitigation, then we will see a mass out-migration.

Again, it is important to see what the budget is and what is it intending to do and let people decide how they would like to raise their families, where they would like to live, where they want to get an education, where they might want to start a business. These are key things that ought to be considered when we are talking about a timely delivery of budget.

If I were to speak personally or from the perspective of our caucus, I would offer two points that would be a direction for the implementation of budget. The two things that I would suggest we ought to do is when we make decisions about where we are allocating funds in the budget, one, we ought to look at how do we make a more even distribution of income in our economy. As we know, in recent years there is a greater and greater divide in terms of income, so the rich are getting richer and the poor are barely able to live. If we start making our budget decisions that start to reallocate income so we have a more even distribution of income, I will guarantee you that we will all be better off. That is economics 101 – basic, basic stuff.

The second thing that I would like to offer as a policy suggestion would be we need to increase what we call in economics the multiplier. That simply means that we need to keep more money in our economy and keep that circulating in our economy so that everyone can benefit for that. We spent \$8 billion a year in our budget. The more of that money that we can keep in our province and circulating within the individuals who are living and working here, the better off we are.

If we have that \$8 billion and we are giving it to companies who do not reside here, whose main workforce is not here in our province, who come in and do a project and leave again, they will take that money with them. They will not raise their families here. They will not pay taxes here and that will not be a good manifestation of our budget policy because it will fly in the face of all of our WHEREAS clauses.

We need to make a concerted effort about what the budget is intending to do in terms of policy and then we need to see that manifested in that

budget. If we want to go one step further, we can tie together what we have as objectives or outcomes from our strategic plans: We want to be healthier. We want to be smarter. We want to have more jobs. We want to have higher fertility rates. We want to have seniors who can age in dignity with enough people to support them as they age. They can stay at home. We have roads that do not threaten your rims or tires.

Let's start tying how we spend our money to what we want to see happen in our economy. If we start tying those things together, I guarantee you we can say we hit our targets, but not only will we hit our targets, we will create a better place for everyone in this province to live in, to raise their families in and be proud of what we have done.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

It's indeed a privilege, like I always say, to get up here in the House of Assembly and say a few words on this private Member's motion. What I'm hearing is that – I'm assuming that everyone in this House is going to support this motion today and vote to make sure that we do get a budget in before there's an election call.

Mr. Speaker, I know what the people in my district want and I know what the people in the province want us to do. They want us to be in here working together to address the needs of the province and address the needs of the people in our province.

No matter what side of the House you're on today, we all realize that the province is in hard shape. We don't have oil prices at a hundred dollars a barrel or \$120 a barrel and we don't have the revenues coming in from the oil industry that we had back in the early 2000s and stuff like that. I was here when the oil revenues

were pretty high. It was good because the budgets were coming down and they were fantastic budgets.

I always go back to and always talk about a budget before the time I sat here in the House when I know that infrastructure in this province was in brutal shape. It was in hard shape. I think – now I could be corrected; maybe the Minister of Education knows this – in the early '90s to the mid-2000s, there were probably only two schools built in this province. Then when revenue came, I know that education-wise, there was a huge deficit. There was a deficit in what was needed for education in this province.

When the revenues were high, as a government, we invested in that deficit. The deficit was building schools. We built two schools. The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, in her district there were two new schools built there. In my district, I had two new schools built also, Holy Trinity Elementary and Juniper Ridge, which was probably one of the last ones that was opened when it came to education.

Also, at a time when revenues were good, we built a new bridge in Outer Cove. Underneath the bridge was falling apart. There were slabs of concrete falling off the bridge. That was back in 2008. I can remember, my first year in here, wanting to get a lot of roadwork done and I was complaining about the roads in my district. When I went and met with the Department of TW and said, you have a bigger issue than that; your issue is the bridge down in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove because there were slabs of concrete falling off it.

Back in those days, there was revenue there to pay for what we needed. I don't care what district that people were in; there was mass improvements made in this province. It was due to the amount of money that was coming in, our revenue coming in when it came to oil revenue. The Minister of Finance stated earlier today, times were a lot better than what they are right now.

Listen, I'm not going to stand here today and tell government what to do, what not to do. I understand that it's not going to be easy to bring in a budget, it's not going to be easy to address the needs of the province and it's not going to be easy to make everybody happy. That's not what we should be doing in a budget anyways.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the people in the province and the people in my district have major concerns. They have huge concerns.

Affordability is probably the biggest concern that they have. When I talk about affordability, I talk about being able to live, being able to provide for your family, being able to get the necessities of life and being able to do it so that you – that's our biggest concern, is making sure that we can afford to live. People are worried about their hydro rates and they are worried about what happened with Muskrat Falls, but more concerned about the way that they're going to end up paying for it.

I'd like to see government, Opposition, all Members of this House of Assembly stand together and come up with a rate mitigation plan that we can go to the federal government and say listen here, we need help. You were in on this from the start and we're no different then any other province in this Canada that we live in, a country we all love and everything else.

I look at rate mitigation as no different than what was happening when it comes to the farming situation in the mid-'80s in Alberta and Saskatchewan and Manitoba. There were huge impacts and money put in that area. I look at no different than what we see now with the oil industry and the government even went as far as buying the company that was going to put in the oil pipes right across this country.

I'm a Canadian and I think I should be treated as fair as everybody else, but I think that when we talk about rate mitigation, I think the people in the province don't want us bickering back and forth about who got the best plan, who got this, who got that. They want us to stand up here and be elected representatives and do the best we can for the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I noticed the Member for Mount Scio talked a little bit about our population and population growth. Just to be sure now, the population growth that was talked about here earlier and you used the worst-case scenario?

**MS. STOODLEY:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Yes, but that came from *The Globe and Mail*, and they said this is a mid-growth scenario. That's what they talked about.

Listen, I don't want to talk about negative things in the House of Assembly; I want to talk about positive things, but we have to be concerned about the growth in our province because it affects so many things like our health transfers, our education transfers from the federal government – plays a huge role. That's based on what population we have. We talk about what we want in this province of ours and we want to grow like the rest of Canada. We're the only province in Canada that will not grow in the next number of years and we have to do things to make sure (inaudible).

But that all comes back to the economic situation that we're in. Listen, I'm very fortunate that I have two children and both of them are living here in the province. But I have lots of friends, and I'm sure lots of colleagues here in the House of Assembly, that have their family that are living away and would love to have them live here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know there are lots of them there. The main reason why people move is because of affordability to live here and the opportunities are better elsewhere. I don't knock anybody for moving out of this province because the opportunities are elsewhere. What we have to do as a government and what we have to do as a House of Assembly is to make sure opportunities are here.

We want to work with the other side, we want to make sure that our children and our grandchildren live here. We're talking today about bringing in a budget and everyone is throwing around – I'm after hearing that there will be an election called on May 10, there will be an election called on June 1 and there will be

an election called this fall. I agree with the Member for CBS. I think anybody that's running for the leadership of the Liberal Party right now should state it: I'm going to call an election on whatever date it is. Give people an idea of when it is.

This opportunity of taking opportunities for political gain is not what the people of the province want to hear. The people of the province want to hear that we're in here working for their needs and making sure that their interests are taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has an opportunity now; he's going up Ottawa on Friday. He has an opportunity to talk to the other premiers of Canada and talk to the prime minister and officials. I made a little note today of things that I'd like to see him talk about.

Rate mitigation is number one on my list. Our leader has sent a letter off to the prime minister saying you're a partner in this; therefore, you should be involved in it just like the rest of the people. We're no different than what the oil industry is in Alberta; we're no different than what the farming industry is in Western Canada and we're no different than what life is in Quebec.

Those are the things that we look at as a government. I'm all the time floored by equalization. To me, equalization should mean that the taxes I pay in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador should be no different than the taxes that somebody pays in Quebec or Alberta or Saskatchewan or BC or PEI. Obviously, there are going to be different needs in each province, but I think that the burden of taxation that we have in this province is unfair as a Canadian.

When I look at equalization and I can see that Quebec – and I'm not knocking Quebec, but I can see one province that can get \$13 billion worth of equalization and we're not getting anything. I look at the taxes that are paid in Quebec versus what taxes are paid here in Newfoundland and Labrador and I think, as a Canadian, it's unfair.



I look at other provinces in Atlantic Canada and just see what they're getting in equalization. I'd like to say to the Minister of Finance, how would you like to get \$2 billion that Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are getting for equalization payments, and have that with your budget this year and see what we would be worrying about?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Yeah, that's true. We would have a surplus.

I think, as the House of Assembly and especially the Premier of the province, our leader, and the Leader of the Third Party and everybody else, we should be fighting for what we deserve.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I love Canada. Canada is a great country. I'm not knocking what it is, but I think we need to be – fairness is important to me. I really believe that fairness when it comes to what we live in Canada and what our expectations are.

Sometimes expectations – and we all know it as politicians – are way too high. Honestly, I do tell constituents in my area that, listen, you can't expect that. You can't get that. Because I'll always remember my father, who I always said was a pretty smart man. When I was in my younger days, a bit wilder than what I am right now, he used to say to me when I got paid, he said you can't be getting paid \$400 and spending \$500, because you're going to go in the hole. We're in the same position here in this province.

I understand, the biggest thing we have to do in this province right now is we can't have a \$8-billion budget when we have to borrow \$1.5 billion to be able to make that an \$8-billion budget, and no way of paying it. When a budget comes down this year, no matter what's going to happen, no matter what the economic situation is in the province, we have to look at making sure that our spending is done properly. I could slam over across the way and say I wouldn't have this; I wouldn't have done that; I wouldn't have done that; I wouldn't have done that. But I'm not

going to do that. We have to get our spending in order.

The Leader of the Third Party mentioned free tuition and free this and free that, but we can't afford it. We have to be realistic. We have to do things better, and that's what we're in here in the House of Assembly to do, is to do things better. It's important that we bring down a budget – because that's what we're here talking about today – so people get a little bit of confidence in what we're doing, to say, okay, they have a plan.

I can remember in 2016 when the previous administration – now the b'ys across the way, obviously, and girls – they came and they said we had a plan for our economic future. People in this province really wanted to hear a plan. I still think today they want to hear a plan. That's like with rate mitigation. We just can't have rhetoric. We have to have a plan in place.

To be honest, a budget gives security. It shows people that, listen, okay, this is where we're going to spend our money on education. I don't know how many schools are in dire need to be replaced in the province right now. I think most of them are after being done, because we've done a real good job in education, on both sides of the House. The Liberals did a great job on some on their – Coley's Point school has been built, and that's a good thing. A school was opened in my district. Now, it was allocated under the PC government, but it was opened in my district and CBS had the same thing. Those are things we're doing right.

A budget, what we're saying here today is, listen, people in this province do not want an election. I can tell you right now, I do not want an election. We've only been one year out – less than one year – an election and we went to the people of the province and they made their decision. They made the decision that they put a minority government here and they made the decision who they wanted to sit in the seats here in this Legislature.

I think that we need to get a budget in, needs to be done, and then we need to make sure that we abide by what the wishes of the people. Now,

there's legislation going to come and it's going to say we have to have an election within one year, but I'd like to see the candidates say here's your date of election, here's when it should be so the people in the province will have some security of knowing when they're going to the polls.

Listen, if you want to go and pick a time that you think is the best, sometimes that backfires. Let's do the work for the people of the province. Let's do the work in here and do the job that we were elected to do.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm only going to take a couple of minutes and I do thank the Members for a little bit of time.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be supporting the private Member's motion. I'm not sure if it was necessary. I don't really think there was any intention of pulling a fast one. I discussed it with the Minister of Finance at the time, when this came out, and I took his word for it then and I take it now and, obviously, he is supporting the motion.

I'm glad to see it. I think it makes a lot of sense that we only go the normal course, that we don't go the six months. I think it puts everybody's mind at rest. I think now with the subamendment which was made by the minister to the amendment in the motion that we are debating on the Interim Supply, I think that we're fine now. We will be and the province will be able to pay the bills between now and the budget coming down.

As far as the budget goes, as I said – I will say once again – I have no intentions – and I've said this numerous times – of voting against the budget and bringing down the government just for the sake of voting against the budget and bringing down the government. That is not my

intent. I do not believe that would be the wishes of my constituents. I don't believe that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, as the Member for Cape St. Francis said – I know in talking to people in my district – they have no interest in having an election right now. They don't. He's right when he says it; they don't.

Whatever happens, happens. When the time comes, we'll have to go back to the polls; we'll all have to face our constituents again. I did last time and I will again this time. I'm not concerned. Whenever we're ready to go, we're ready to go. I'll take my recycled signs out of the shed and we'll give 'er and the people will decide once again whether they want me to continue to be their Member or they don't. Again, as far as the budget goes, I want to see the budget; the people want to see the budget and the people want us all to work together.

We can all speculate on when the election is going to be. I've said from day one that I really don't believe, to be honest with you – and Members can figure this out for themselves what I mean – but there were an awful lot of Members that were elected in 2015 and they were sworn in, in December of 2015. I don't believe there's going to be an election until at least after December of 2015. That would be one point I would make.

I think the election will be in the spring of 2021 because we're not going to have an election during Christmas and I don't think we're going to have an election before that magic date in December of 2020. That is my guess, but, like I said, whenever it happens, it happens. We'll all be ready for it. I'll certainly be ready for it.

As far as the budget goes, I just want to say to the minister – and I know that much of the work has been done on the budget. The reality of it is I think as much as we'd all like to see things for our district and for the province – and there are all kinds of wonderful programs and ideas we could think of, things we're not doing, things that other provinces are doing, things that we think would benefit our province and our people – at the end of the day I think we all have to be very mindful of a report and a briefing that all

Member of this House of Assembly received only a couple of short months ago from the Auditor General about the fiscal situation that our province is in.

While Members across the way, some of them, will want to say it's all about Muskrat Falls, there's no doubt that we all know that it's an issue that's looming over our heads. We hope that there is going to be a rate mitigation plan that's going to allay any fears from people as it relates to power rates. Even if there was no Muskrat Falls – I think that's a point that's important to make – as the Auditor General herself said at the time – or I should say the former Auditor General because I understand she just took a new job – even if there was no Muskrat Falls, we are in a very, very serious situation in our province, and I think it's important we be mindful of that as (inaudible).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today is Private Member's Day, so the last 15 minutes goes to the person who introduced the motion, to conclude the debate.

If the hon. Member speaks now, he concludes the debate.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't need 15 minutes.

I just want to stand and thank the various speakers today, starting with the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands; the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands; the Member for Mount Scio; the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; the Member for Cape St. Francis; the Member for Conception Bay South; and our leader, the Member for Windsor Lake. I don't think I've missed anybody, except finally I want to thank the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for the reassurances that he's given today that we will have a budget before an election.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Now, we will keep the pressure on to ensure that the budget date is set. The date will be set in the spring and we look forward to the Estimates process; we look forward to a healthy debate and we look forward to that process and we'll keep asking about the date. Hopefully, we're not going to bring in a budget and then find ourselves out on the street.

**MR. OSBORNE:** That's up to you.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** It isn't going to be us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

Before we adjourn for the day, I just want to say viewers may have noticed that today some Members are wearing a moose hide pin. The Moose Hide Campaign is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are standing up against violence towards women and children. In support of this campaign, some Members are fasting today, and I wanted to let them know that we have some snacks outside the Chamber out in the hall for Members who want to join us to break the fast.

Thank everyone for participating in the Moose Hide Campaign.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** It being Wednesday, in accordance with Standing Order 9(3), the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon.