



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume XLVII

SECOND SESSION

Number 8

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

Tuesday

23 April 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I stand today to speak to you about a ruling I made on Tuesday, April 16, 2013. Since making this ruling, I have become aware of considerably more information regarding the complexities and the nuances of this new evolving social media and its use, particularly as it pertains to Legislatures and particularly the manner in which individuals may find themselves attached to a group without their explicit consent.

I have found that there is a lack of law and regulation in this area in the use of social media, thereby leaving and exposing members to many pitfalls. As members, I think it is incumbent upon all of us to be aware of those pitfalls and the implications for them.

Consequently, my finding of contempt in this situation was erroneous and I offer my own apology to the Member for St. John's Centre for the position for which she was placed as she was asked to apologize to this House of Assembly.

Today we are very pleased to welcome to our gallery, from the Town of Musgrave Harbour, Mayor Raymond Stokes, together with Councillor Watson Moulant and Town Clerk Kim Osborne.

Welcome to our Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Bonavista South, the Member for the District of Bellevue, the Member for the District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi, the Member for the District of The Straits – White Bay North, the Member for the District of St. John's East, and the Member for the District of St. John's South.

The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Mr. Speaker, hon. colleagues, I rise in this House today to recognize the successful collaborative efforts of six communities on the Bonavista Peninsula. By working together, these communities are forming a new hiking trail network, sure to attract many hikers and tourists to the Bonavista Peninsula. The towns include King's Cove, Bonavista, Elliston, Trinity Bay North, Port Rexton and Trinity.

This new network will be comprised of the King's Cove Lighthouse Trail, the Cape Bonavista Trail, the Klondike Trail, Murphy's Cove/Lodge's Pond Trail, Gun Hill Trail and the Skerwink Trail. Each of these trails is unique in their terrain, landscape and history. The project will require repairs and upgrades to enhance these existing trail ways, and will provide employment in the area for the completion of the work.

Deemed as a hiker's paradise, the Bonavista Peninsula's hiking network will certainly be a hiking destination, drawing people to the Province and attracting visitors to the region for a longer period of time. This will generate increased revenues to businesses, non-profit organizations, and provincial and federal tourist sites.

Mr. Speaker, hon. colleagues, please join me in recognizing the continued joint efforts of all those involved in the creation of this hiking trail network.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PEACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This being volunteer week, it gives me a great pleasure to rise in this hon. House today to recognize the many volunteers throughout the District of Bellevue.

Volunteer and non-profit organizations are not only important contributors to social development but also to the economic development of communities and towns throughout the district.

Municipalities, LSD's, youth based groups, fire departments, recreation committees, co-operative organizations, along with many others are on the ground, addressing local needs and supporting the local communities and the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in thanking and congratulating the volunteers, those who give up their time to make a difference throughout the Province and hang on to the legacy that plays an important role in the existence of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate a constituent of mine who truly needs no introduction. Andy Jones is one of this Province's best-loved and best-known actors and writers.

Most recently, on March 30, Andy was awarded the prestigious BMO Winterset Award for his book *Jack and Mary in the Land of Thieves*. This delightful Jack tale was illustrated by Darka Erdelji and published by Running the Goat Books and BroadSides – a small press also based in the District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

The BMO Winterset Award was established by journalist Richard Gwyn, in honour of his wife Sandra Fraser Gwyn, and named after the house on Winter Avenue in which she grew up. Its

\$10,000 prize is the largest literary award in Atlantic Canada.

This has been a big year for Andy Jones. His adaptation of Moliere's *Tartuffe* was a huge hit last summer at the New World Theatre Project in Cupids. I was delighted to hear that it will be remounted to open the National Arts Centre's theatre season this September.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain Andy Jones has many more great things in store for us. Today, I congratulate him on winning the 2012 BMO Winterset Award.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to welcome Habitat for Humanity to my District of The Straits – White Bay North. Since 1994, Habitat for Humanity has built thirty-nine homes for low-income families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Their flexible model of building partnerships with community groups and municipalities, and incorporating volunteer labour, and donated supplies and financial resources is one that has found success worldwide and I was happy to hear Habitat for Humanity is coming to St. Anthony to offer four affordable homes for families in the area.

Right now, Habitat is looking for the four partner families. These families must be in need of sound, affordable housing, may not already own homes or property, must fall within a specified income, and must be willing to partner with Habitat Newfoundland and Labrador. St. Anthony, like so many areas of the Province, faces an affordable housing crunch, and this is a welcome project.

The build will commence this summer. I am certain that the community spirit of the Great

Northern Peninsula will ensure that it is successful.

I ask all hon. members of the House to commend Habitat for Humanity for the good work it does in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate a constituent of mine on a milestone celebration. Stevens Norvell turned ninety years old this year and while he officially retired from working in 1992, he continues to research and contribute to the academic world.

Dr. Norvell was born in the United States and immigrated to Canada in 1950. He worked as a general practitioner, then did his surgical residency and worked as a surgeon here in the country. He went to Dalhousie University in 1961, where he taught surgery in the medical school until his retirement, and still holds the position of Emeritus Professor.

His interests as a medical professor were malignant melanoma and the examination methods for assessing the surgical knowledge of med students and surgical residents.

Stevens moved to St. John's to live with his son and is enjoying life in what he describes as his new home, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

He maintains an active interest in his principle hobby, Esperanto, the universal language, which was invented in 1887. Dr. Norvell has published more than 140 articles in Esperanto, on topics ranging from melanoma to poetry, and has helped edit several dictionaries.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Stevens Norvell for a lifetime of accomplishments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask all members to join me in honouring Mr. Alex Street. Sadly, Mr. Street passed away earlier this month, but he will always be remembered for his dedication and involvement within his community.

This outstanding gentleman was the recent recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal. He served with the Engineering Division of the Canadian Peacekeepers in Germany and was an active member of the Veterans Association. Mr. Street was also extremely active in the community of Blackhead, advocating community improvements, and was instrumental in helping to restore the one-room building that served as the community's schoolhouse and chapel.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join with me in paying our greatest respect to this outstanding peacekeeper, activist and Queen's Jubilee Medal recipient, Mr. Street.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today in this hon. House to recognize the life and passing of a distinguished

Newfoundlander and Labradorian, who, as representative at the Commission of Government in the Dominion of Newfoundland, participated in a very significant era in the history of our Province.

Mr. Morley Bursey's life of public service to the Dominion of Newfoundland and later as a member of the Canadian Diplomatic Service is an example of the spirit of service and adventure, and the work ethic that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have been known for throughout our history all over the world.

On behalf of the people of the Province, I extend heartfelt condolences to the family of Mr. Bursey. His long life and outstanding list of accomplishments must certainly be a source of comfort and pride, even at this time of loss and grief.

Mr. Bursey spent twenty-seven years in the Canadian Diplomatic Service, posted throughout the world in various capacities. Upon his retirement, he represented the Canadian Automotive Parts Industry for fourteen years and helped frame the automotive portion of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing this native son of Newfoundland and Labrador, who distinguished himself around the world for more than a century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today and express, on behalf of the Official Opposition, condolences to the Bursey family. After living 101 years, you get an opportunity to do many things in your life. Mr. Bursey is an example of that. He had a distinguished career – actually, when you look at

it, many careers as a distinguished Newfoundlander and Labradorian. He lived through some difficult times in our own Province, but then went on to do many other things at the Canadian Diplomatic Service. Then went on again and participated in the North American Free Trade Agreement.

There is no question that he provided great leadership in everything he did, in everything that he touched. As we celebrate his life of 101 years, we are pleased to know that we have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have a tremendous impact on many areas, not only of our country but internationally as well.

As we celebrate his life, we pass on our condolences to the Bursey family and I am sure they are left with many special memories of a wonderful life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

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

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

I am very pleased to stand with the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition as I express condolences to the family of Mr. Bursey on behalf of our caucus, and also words of celebration for his brilliant career. We need to thank the people who have gone before us, as he did, for the services that he performed for us, for us as a Province, for us before we were a Province.

I think it would be very good for young people in the Province today to look at the life of people like Mr. Bursey, to look at his career, so that they can see what a person is capable of doing when they work hard and believe in what they are doing. He is an inspiration for the ages, for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member for St. John's South have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: No leave.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to advise the people of our Province that a Triple A rating has been assigned for the financing of the Muskrat Falls Project by credit rating agency Moody's Investors Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, this is the highest possible credit rating and is based on the strength of the loan guarantee that our Premier successfully negotiated with the Government of Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the Triple A rating has important value for the people of the Province when it comes to the raising of debt financing as it will result in lower borrowing costs. By reducing the cost of the financing for this project, the loan guarantee represents a projected one-billion savings. These savings will be passed on directly to the ratepayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the rating solely reflects the unconditional, the irrevocable and the absolute guarantee provided by the Government of Canada to the debt that will be issued by the Nalcor funding entities for the Muskrat Falls Project. Mr. Speaker, our government did its due diligence to ensure we attained a guarantee that provides maximum value for the project and for the ratepayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Muskrat Falls Project, Mr. Speaker, is an essential one for our Province. Through our energy company Nalcor, which is owned by the people of the Province, we are building a world-class hydroelectric resource that will be a significant economic driver and will diversify our economy. It is the least cost source of electricity to meet the growing needs of Newfoundland and Labrador families and businesses.

From jobs and business contracts during both the construction and the operation, to stable electricity rates and additional provincial revenues, the benefits of the hydro project at Muskrat Falls will accrue to the people of the Province today and for many generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his Ministerial Statement.

Of course, this today is really an extension of what we heard in December. It is not new news. It is what we anticipated from the sanctioning announcement in December, but it does come with many conditions.

As we know, the federal loan guarantee is conditional on many things. It is capped and certainly do not include the cost overruns. We know that through this whole project we will see cost overruns. The federal loan guarantee will not protect us from that, and this rate extension will not be included for that.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that was not mentioned in this statement is that there is no doubt the Triple A rating does not express the merits of the project itself because without the power purchase agreement, which is a commitment from Newfoundlanders and

Labradorians to commit to a fifty-year power purchase agreement and the total cost of the project, this triple loan guarantee would not be in effect.

Even though it will reduce costs, we recognize the negotiation in itself, the Muskrat Falls Project is conditional on the power purchase agreement committing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to the cost of the whole project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

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

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

All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that since this government was hell bent on developing its Muskrat Falls Project it is a good thing they secured the loan guarantee because we would not be having the message that we have here on the table today, as I think the minister himself is acknowledging in his statement, by the way.

I would like to remind the government that it was a federal NDP who pulled for the loan guarantee in Ottawa, on the belief that when provinces agree together, the federal government has the responsibility to help the provincial governments that are involved to develop regional projects that benefit the nation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, as has been said, there are many conditions in the federal loan guarantee that have to be met before December 31, and we will be following very closely those conditions because that is our responsibility as an Opposition Party in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. F. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, for more than two decades, the provincial government has been consulting with Aboriginal organizations on land and resource development decisions in Labrador.

In May 2012, government announced plans to update and publish its Aboriginal Consultation Policy to guide and facilitate consultation with Aboriginal organizations.

I am pleased this afternoon to announce that we have finalized this policy and have made it publicly available on the Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat's Web site.

This new policy helps to clarify government's expectations and requirements during Aboriginal consultation processes and clearly establishes the roles and responsibilities of all parties including the provincial government, Aboriginal organizations, and project proponents. The ultimate goal is to help ensure that resource development decisions minimize, or where practical eliminate, potentially adverse impacts on asserted Aboriginal rights.

Governments have a duty to consult Aboriginal organizations whose asserted Aboriginal rights might be negatively affected by land and resource development. This new policy will aid us greatly in continuing to respect this obligation and in giving Aboriginal organizations a meaningful voice in the process.

Industry will also benefit from this policy, Mr. Speaker, as it will ensure potential impacts of development activities are understood and addressed in a timely and transparent fashion.

Mr. Speaker, the Aboriginal Consultation Policy was informed by consultations with Aboriginal

organizations and industry stakeholders, and a draft policy was made publicly available. All feedback was considered in finalizing the new policy.

Model Aboriginal consultation guidelines will be developed to provide practical, step-by-step guidance to regulatory, industry and Aboriginal officials on how consultations shall be conducted.

Mr. Speaker, over the past few decades, we have seen considerable advances with respect to Aboriginal consultation. Through this policy, we are making further advances in ensuring that potential negative effects on asserted Aboriginal rights are addressed during government's decision making on land and resource development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, this consultation policy is long overdue. Many consultations have happened over the years that could have benefitted from such a policy. Many more consultations are still required, especially with NunatuKavut. Hopefully this policy will get those consultations on track.

I find it ironic that this new policy is supposed to help government respect their obligation to consult when Nunatsiavut has clearly demonstrated their need to consult on the environmental impacts of Muskrat Falls and the mercury levels affecting their land. This government continues to ignore that request.

The Premier made an announcement on Vale and the plans to go underground at Voisey's Bay. It will probably require another Impacts and Benefits Agreement with the people of Nunatsiavut and the Innu Nation. The

government has already cut their royalty payments to both Nunatsiavut Government and the Innu Nation, a major factor in the Land Claims Agreement with the Nunatsiavut Government.

It is time, Mr. Speaker, that this government start practising what they preach. The consultation policy outlined today should guide them in any future consultation process. I am hopeful this policy will also benefit all Aboriginal groups in the Province, including Innu, Inuit, Metis, and Mi'kmaq.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. The policy was informed by consultations with Aboriginal organizations and industry stakeholders. I hope that the government consulted with all First Nations, including NunatuKavut, in devising this draft policy because all Aboriginal groups have a legitimate stake in decisions about resource development affecting their lands.

I also would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that I hope they consulted with other communities that are out there, for example environmental groups, rather than more so taking most of their input from industry stakeholders. That was the disturbing part about this draft policy.

I hope the draft policy will be made available widely to everybody, including not only to those people on the Internet but as well those people who do not have access to the Internet. I know there are a lot of regions in Labrador, of course, that do not have access to it. So I hope government will be making that readily available, and we will also be taking a closer look at this document.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Several times last week, I asked the Premier to defend her cuts to education. Instead, these questions were deflected to the Minister of Education.

Given the strong and compelling arguments against these deep and senseless cuts, I ask the Premier: Will you extend the term of the current school boards for one more year to allow for greater consultation and public debate on this issue?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we are certainly hearing from trustees that make up the existing board and some former trustees. We are going to put in place a transition team very soon, very shortly, and I would encourage those trustees to make representation to that transition team so that we have a smooth transition to the one English board.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to their input, I truly do, because all of us want what is best for the students in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister mentioned previous trustees; he did not talk about previous school administrators. There are lots of people who are giving serious

feedback and are seriously concerned about this decision.

What the minister also said is you have consultation into one board. What is the point if the decision is made? What we need are consultations to review the overall process, Mr. Speaker. The consensus is that these cuts will jeopardize the education of our children. Government, clearly, is not ready as they have made no provision for legislative change.

I ask the Premier: Are you intending to introduce legislation in this session of the House of Assembly to dismantle those school boards?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the member knows that this is the same process that happened in the last amalgamation. Through the regulations under the Schools Act, Mr. Speaker, we can transition from four to one. He knows that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, the question should be a yes or no.

My question is: Do you plan on introducing legislation in this session of the House of Assembly to dismantle those school boards, yes or no?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, it is not required.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping the member is not asking us to ignore the fact that we have 14,000

less students in this Province. For the betterment of education, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the money goes to the right place where we as a government decided front line services, students, teachers, our number one priority. Mr. Speaker, I am hoping we can have the trustees who are present, working with the transition team to ensure that the education system in this Province continues to be top-notch.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I gather there will be no legislation. Mr. Speaker, what we are concerned about and what we are hearing about trustees, and we are hearing from school board administrators, we are hearing from families and parents who are attached to this, they are concerned. All we are asking is listen to the concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier once again, in the interest of the children's education: Will she acknowledge the severity of these decisions and open discussions immediately about the existing school boards? Will you at least do it? Give the parents, the school boards a chance to put forward their compelling arguments.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage him, if he is getting e-mails and whatnot, the reason we are going to put in place a transition team is exactly that. The trustees who are in place presently, we as a government, we as a Province, want the best education system that we can for our students; therefore, I would encourage him to look forward to the announcement of the transition team and then ask the people who are contacting him to put their points forward to the transition team, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am sure that will happen, I say to the minister.

Mr. Speaker, there are 70,000 applications in the Qalipu Mi'Kmaq First Nations waiting for processing but little has happened since December. There were over 100 people in Corner Brook at a protest with no new information coming.

I ask the Premier: As a new Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, what specific representation have you made to the federal government and the Qalipu Mi'Kmaq First Nations Band on this issue, and what is causing the continued delay?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. F. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the registration process of the Qalipu First Nations is the jurisdiction of the federal government. It is strictly a federal government process. It is a process between the federal government and the band, and the provincial government has no input into that.

We have done everything we could, Mr. Speaker, to help expedite applications and to give people direction, tell them where to get information. As a matter of fact, our Department of Service Newfoundland and Labrador has done extra effort to make sure that birth certificates and all these things are processed so that the applications can be processed in time.

Mr. Speaker, that is all we can do. The rest is between the federal government and the band.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, I say to the minister, back in 2003 the very Minister of Aboriginal Affairs sat at that table. As a matter of fact, there was a press release, right here on November 21, 2003, of which there is actually a statement right from that minister.

The federal government agreed to the process for the applicants to register for the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation but they stopped the review in December, leaving 70,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in limbo.

I ask the Premier: What will you do to ensure that these 70,000 applicants waiting to review will get the same criteria on their review as the 30,000 that has been approved?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Mr. Speaker, as the minister has reiterated in his answer, this is a relationship that exists solely between the Qalipu Nation and the federal government. Upon request of the Qalipu Nation, we have done everything we can as a government to facilitate the registration and we will continue to be helpful in whatever way we can.

Mr. Speaker, if we are requested by the Qalipu Nation to lobby or advocate on their behalf, that is something we will take under consideration; but we are not going to assume that in the face of the legitimate authority of the Qalipu Nation to manage their own affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, in response to the Premier, she might consider the petitions by those people that I have presented for them in the last several weeks asking that very question.

Mr. Speaker, the FFAW has reportedly asked for approval from the government to allow fishermen to sell up to 1 million pounds of crab to buyers outside the Province as a pilot project.

I ask the Premier: What is the Province's stand on this request for processing exemption?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we value the contribution of both harvesters and plant workers to this Province. Our history speaks of it and will, well into the future, Mr. Speaker.

There is a proposal before government, it is currently being assessed, and we will report back to the FFAW when that assessment is completed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, a Nova Scotia Conservative senator wrote to the federal Minister of Fisheries stating the fleet separation policy allows for the acceptance of massive EI fraud and the stunting of personal development for thousands of Atlantic Canadians who choose to leave school for the falsely seductive life of seasonal work.

I ask the Premier: Does she agree with this statement? If no, will she demand an apology for this appalling statement?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where this member comes from, from time to time. I honestly do not know where this member comes from.

I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, our support is for the harvesters and plant workers of this Province, Mr. Speaker. We, as a government, respect the jobs that they do and every opportunity that we can get to work with them, we do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, last week the Fisheries Minister released a statement saying that the 2012 cod survey results from the *Celtic Explorer* will be released at a press conference at the Marine Institute. The survey results were not released.

Given the intense interest in the state of our cod resource, I ask the Premier: Will she table this research so we are better informed on the health of our cod stocks?

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

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, what a wonderful investment by this government to have the research capacity of the *Celtic Explorer*.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: What a wonderful investment. Because of that research, Mr. Speaker, we have found that the cod stocks are rebounding.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is not here today. I am not quite sure of his intention, but I certainly will pass along the request that the member has asked.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was reported last week that the sea ducks in the Change Islands area has been coming ashore covered in oil. Environment Canada's Enforcement Branch has opened an investigation into the matter and confirmed an oil slick near Baccalieu.

I ask the minister: What role has your department had in this investigation? Can you provide details to this House on how severe the oil spill actually is?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HEDDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In response to the member's question from the other side, basically it is a federal responsibility to ensure the safety of the seabirds and so on and so forth, as well as offshore spills. As a department, we are aware of the situation; we are monitoring it closely, and offering any help that we can to the federal government in investigating and carrying out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reason I question it is because where the oil slick is spotted is on prime fishing grounds, adding to concern in the area.

I ask the minister: Will this spill have any effect on the fishery in the area? If so, what steps have you taken to help mitigate these effects?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HEDDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I share the member's concern. Any type of a situation that is developing on the offshore, be it oil spills or whatever that can have any effect on the fish that are in that particular area, is a concern for us and, I hope, the federal government as well.

As I said in the previous response, Mr. Speaker, we are monitoring it. We are there to offer any type of support that we can to ensure – and we will await the results of that analysis so then we can speak with more authority on it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2013 announced a Paid Family Caregiver pilot program. On Budget day, government staff was unable to provide any details on the program.

I ask the Minister of Health: Will you please provide details here and now on how the pilot program will work?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to provide services to the seniors and others who are in need of any family care or any sort of protective care in our jurisdiction is very evident in the hundreds of millions of dollars that we have invested. In Budget 2013, we announced \$6.1 million for a new program called paid family care. When we announce that program, then the details will be released.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, this was announced in the Budget 2013, which was brought down on March 26.

I ask the minister: Is there any idea or timeline on when you will be announcing this program, which has been expected since the election of 2011?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this member has continued to ask this question and seems to suggest this is something that can be done fairly easily within the Province. He still refuses to accept, Mr. Speaker, that there is no template for this. There is nowhere in North America that we can find a program that will be anywhere near as robust as what we intend to offer. What we will do with that \$6.1 million, we will put in place a program that makes sense for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I invite him, if has the solution as to how to put these details in place, I invite him to share them with us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, it is this government that made the promise back in 2011 that people have been waiting on and it is this government that announced \$6.1 million for the pilot project. I am simply asking questions.

If there was \$6.1 million allocated for this project, when are you going to put it out there? The people simply want to know when they can expect it and what to expect.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am really happy to see he acknowledges that it was this government that came forward with the idea, that it is this government that committed the \$6.1 million, and that it is this government that will implement it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, it was this government that announced \$6.1 million, which is a prorated amount given that it is \$8.2 million for next year.

So, if the government actually took the time to put this into the Budget, I simply ask the minister: When can we see the details that you promised two years ago?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Mr. Speaker, again, he is right. We committed to this in 2011 and said that over the course of this term we would implement a policy. We will do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, I say to the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador, we know we have a right to see that your money is invested properly. We are taking every concern, every caution to see that we do that. In the interim, I can assure the people of the Province that we will have a paid family care program. We have allocated \$6.1 million to it for this year, Mr. Speaker. That money will be spent this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, an access to information request on poverty reduction tells us that the director position has been vacant since September, 2011; moreover, the job competition has been cancelled and two of the three policy positions are vacant with competitions put on hold.

I ask the minister responsible: How do you intend to get us to the lowest poverty levels in Canada in eight months time as this government promised?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, this government is lauded across Canada for its Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Poverty Reduction Strategy is annualized at almost \$150 million a year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: The Poverty Reduction Strategy of this government is not about the number of people we have working in the department. It is about the programs that are offered and delivered, and being able to support the people of this Province who are vulnerable and who need these services, Mr. Speaker. That is what our Poverty Reduction Strategy is, the services that are received by the people who need it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, this government committed to developing a new poverty reduction action plan in 2011-2012. This plan is now two years late.

I ask the minister responsible: You said in November the action plan was in the final draft stage, when will you release it?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, there is considerable work that goes into being able to transform the Province from a Province that has the highest rate of poverty to the Province that has the lowest rate of poverty over a ten-year period. Where this Province was ten years ago and where it will be in the future has changed significantly.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest thing we need to do in Newfoundland and Labrador at this time with our economy is to be able to have strategies and ideas that attach people to the labour market. Never before have we had the opportunities that this Province has to offer the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The development of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills was specifically to put a focus on that and to ensure the people of this Province have every opportunity to share in our economy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, it is the action plan without action, by the sounds of it.

The Adult Literacy Plan is now six years late. Last March, the minister committed to releasing the plan by the end of 2012-2013. It was actually stated here in the House of Assembly.

I ask the minister: Long promised but never fulfilled, when will you release the Strategic Adult Literacy Plan?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Again, Mr. Speaker, as we look at the present economy in Newfoundland and Labrador and where it was a number of years ago, where it is today and where it is going to go in the future, we need to ensure that the people of this Province are prepared for the economic

opportunities we have in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the new Department of Advanced Education and Skills was developed specifically to look at the opportunities that are available to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and ensure the policies and the programs that are offered by that new department meet the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to that process and that review, and we will continue to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government is pouring hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds into huge mining, oil, and energy development projects. No amount of money seems too great for these endeavours. At the same time, government has not looked at a plan for publicly administered, universally accessible child care, early childhood education, or home care. In fact, Budget 2013 takes back necessities that people have not even had time to get used to, such as the Adult Dental Plan.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Has this government ever done a cost benefit analysis of social programs?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. When we came to government in 2003, we had some of the highest poverty rates in this country. We made a commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we would do something about that, and we have.

We have in our Poverty Reduction Strategy; we have in terms of our diversity and gender clauses in all of our agreements, not only in the offshore, Mr. Speaker, but also in mining and every other opportunity where government invests money, we expect a return to the people of the Province and part of that return is accessibility by marginalized groups within our population.

Mr. Speaker, every investment we make, whether it is in human capital, investments in social programs or economic investments bring tremendous returns to the people of the Province. This government is very proud of that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: I do not see the proof of what the Premier is saying, so I want to know: Has this government even bothered to study cost-benefit analysis of social programs such as child care done in other jurisdictions, for example in Quebec?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

We look at child programs right across the country. We look at provinces who are under equalization and ask the question why they are able to afford some of the programs that do not seem to be available to people who are not on equalization.

I encourage the Leader of the NDP to further her analysis and she will find that in this country sometimes things are not always fair and balanced and where dividends are sometimes held that can sometimes advance people's aspirations – because universal daycare is something we all aspire to. Who could be against universal day care? We have to be able to afford it. Sometimes projects like the Upper

Churchill Project contribute to some people doing more than we are able to do in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I point out to the Premier that in this Province things are not fair and balanced.

Mr. Speaker, government has squandered the people's money because of lack of planning. For example, the Adult Dental Health Program was set up in January 2012 with a budget of \$6.7 million, when the actual cost of the program last year was almost \$21 million. The caps on basic dental service and denture care will ensure that the preventative health aspect of the program will be lost.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Why does she continue to put out programs so poorly planned that she is forced to cancel them when people try to access them?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Adult Dental Program has not been cancelled. We continue to invest millions of dollars in dental health for adults in this Province, as we do with children.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the NDP constantly refers to the squandering of money in this Province. She is going to have to get better examples than the Adult Dental Program; home care, where we invest tens of millions of dollars; payment of our public service, which the last raises added over half a billion dollars a year to our bottom line.

We continue to invest in the people in this Province. We continue to invest in infrastructure in this Province. We continue to invest in business for the people of this Province, Mr. Speaker. None of it is squandering.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This year's Budget is based on a so-called 10-Year Sustainability Plan, the purpose of which appears to be little more than a plan to slash jobs and programs. Year two of the plan calls for a review of health and educational systems. What is needed are reviews based on the principles of good health care and educational program delivery that will efficiently meet the needs of the people.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier assure this House that the reviews will involve all stakeholders in a true consultative process, not a continuation of the ill-thought-out sham that led to this year's Budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are given the responsibility when we form the governing party to be good stewards of the public purse. We have a stellar record to point to in the last ten years in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

We have rebuilt the Province in terms of infrastructure. We have made tremendous investments in people in this Province, Mr. Speaker. That return is visible everywhere you go.

We have driven the economy. We have negotiated the best terms for benefits agreements for the people of this Province than ever before in our history, Mr. Speaker. I only refer the Leader of the NDP to the front page of today's *Telegram* if she wants to know how Newfoundland and Labrador is doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, a recent memo prepared by school administrators from across the Province ask government to reverse the staffing reductions and school layoffs that are planned for September. School administrators say they fear that schools will not have sufficient resources to deal with bullying and children who may be under threat of violence.

I ask the Premier: Does she believe that this is a sufficiently compelling argument against her education budget cuts?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting for this question from this member.

Mr. Speaker, when a member puts out a piece of information that is not correct and has not seen fit to say it was a mistake or a misunderstanding, then I think people should question his intent sometimes in his questions.

Mr. Speaker, in response to the question posed, we, as a government, decided – and I can remember the day we sat down, when the Premier said: We are not touching caps. Mr. Speaker, that meant we invested in that very front line service.

The services this member mentions and references, that we were going to cut services to

autism and these types of things, are incorrect, Mr. Speaker. We invested right where it is needed, in the students.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I will take no lessons on misinformation from somebody who said he would keep the Marystown fish plant open if he got elected.

This government's cuts will deprive principals of the resources they need to keep our students safe. The Minister of Education will not listen to any reason here.

Will he agree today to take full responsibility if his misguided cuts to schools result in personal harm to one of our school children?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Wow, Mr. Speaker. Personal responsibility to bring harm to the children of this Province – that is shameful. That is totally, totally shameful.

Is he saying there are some people on this side who are looking to bring harm to the children of this Province? Mr. Speaker, I am not, nor is any member of this side.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in 2010, NAPE negotiated a four-year contract on behalf of home support workers. Home care agencies agreed with increases of seventy-five cents in the first year and fifty cents for the next three years, bringing

pay from \$11 per hour to \$13.25 by July, 2013. At the time, government indicated its support for the agreement; yet, it is now not matching those increases.

I ask the minister: Will she commit to matching the cost negotiated in the collective agreement so agencies can continue to provide this necessary service?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we invest more in home support than any other government in our history has invested in home support in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the numbers will speak for themselves. We invest \$160 million of new money in home support, the previous government \$38 million.

In terms of long-term care in this Province, Mr. Speaker, the previous government invested \$120 million; we have invested \$600 million. We are talking about an 80 per cent increase in terms of what we are investing in this Province through home support, other community supports, long-term care, and so on; in our personal care homes, \$21 million. Mr. Speaker, we are firmly committed to this particular area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Four thousand and five hundred home support workers are employed by agencies across the Province. Agencies are warning, clearly, loudly warning, they cannot continue without increases

from government to match the four-year collective agreement. This government still has not developed a publicly funded and publicly administered home care program. Without these agencies, vulnerable people, mostly seniors, will have to arrange their own care, trying to find someone, scheduling, and training them with no supervision or monitoring of that care.

I ask the minister: What is she prepared to do to ensure we do not lose these home care agencies?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, home support agencies negotiate privately, not with government, but with the people they employ. That is totally within their prerogative to do. This is private business. That is what private business does.

Our commitment to home care in this Province, Mr. Speaker, has been substantial, as I just outlined when I addressed the previous question. There is no question in the minds of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that home care is an issue of concern. That is why we continue to address it. We address it in a number of different fashions, from our personal care home support, to our long-term care support, to our community support, to our home support programs, et cetera. We continue to invest.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I, on Wednesday, will be moving the following private member's motion:

WHEREAS the well-being of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador depends on their ability to use reliable transportation links, whether by road, air, or water, to access employment, government services, and business, as well as to foster cultural and social benefits; and

WHEREAS after ten years in power this government has failed to properly develop and maintain vital highway and ferry services in many parts of the Province; and

WHEREAS this government has failed to follow its own ferry strategy; and

WHEREAS the people of Newfoundland and Labrador continue to suffer from an unacceptably large inventory of unpaved gravel roads, aging bridges, culverts and highways; and

WHEREAS this neglect has resulted in the Canadian Automobile Association listing five of the eleven worse roads in Atlantic Canada as being found in our Province;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly call upon government to develop an advanced transportation strategy for road and ferry users.

This motion is seconded by the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, this motion, of course, will be read, with leave, tomorrow as part of Private Members' Day.

MR. SPEAKER: Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

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

WHEREAS there has been an agreement between the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and the Government of Canada to recognize the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band; and

WHEREAS persons submitted applications, with the required documents, for registration in the Band up to the application deadline of November 30, 2012; and

WHEREAS the reported number of applications received by the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band is in excess of 100,000; and

WHEREAS the reported number of applicants now registered as members are approximately 22,000; and

WHEREAS the agreement between the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and the Government of Canada for recognition of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band is scheduled to end on March 31, 2013; and

WHEREAS Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band Chief has requested, but has not received, an extension to the agreement to process the remaining applications; and

WHEREAS to date, there is no decision on how to deal with the remaining applications;

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

Newfoundland and Labrador to work with the Newfoundland Federation of Indians and the Government of Canada to provide a fair and equal review of all applications.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, somewhere in the order of a month or so, I have been presenting petitions on behalf of individuals; this is the same petition by a number of individuals. They keep coming in; they keep showing up. People keep distributing them, signing them, and sending them to my office.

Earlier today in Question Period, I heard the Premier say that government would not interfere unless people requested assistance. Well, Mr. Speaker, what is a petition if it is not a request for assistance? What is a petition presented in the House of Assembly that calls on the House of Assembly to ask the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to take part, to assist and to intervene, if it is not a request for assistance?

Mr. Speaker, clearly, this must be the most basic, the most fundamental, and the original request for assistance that one would ever find in the Western World in a democracy. Mr. Speaker, these people who are signing these petitions from all of these communities – generally, the ones that I am presenting are from St. Barbe district, but people are from all over, and they are absolutely concerned that their request will not be reviewed; they will not an opportunity to be fairly assessed as others have.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, if the individuals who are affected are requesting, by way of a petition, assistance through this House of Assembly that must represent a request for assistance. I urge the government, on behalf of these people, to intervene and ask the federal government to extend the deadline.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS students of the Adult Basic Education program at the College of the North Atlantic do not wish to attend privatized educational facilities; and

WHEREAS College of the North Atlantic has the most accredited Adult Basic Education program in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS students are concerned as to the availability of private institutions and whether or not they can accommodate additional students;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reverse this damaging decision to students and reinstate Adult Basic Education programming at the College of the North Atlantic.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to first thank the Clerk who signed off on the 112 pages that are here in this petition. There are over 1,500 petitioners from across Newfoundland and Labrador, and I understand there are additional petitions that are coming. This is not just noise, as has been suggested. This is certainly a compelling argument in itself.

Students have the right to attend a private training institution if they chose, but this decision denies Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the right to chose to complete Adult Basic Education in their own public college and that is disservice to some of the most vulnerable Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Government's rationale for this decision has been at best unclear, inconsistent, and bordering on incoherent at times. Government has

suggested that the cost of Adult Basic Education at the College of the North Atlantic is too expensive compared to private training institutions; but I note, Mr. Speaker, that in the Business Transformation Report that was recently released by the Department of Advanced Education and Skills the cost of Adult Basic Education is just less than \$5,000, contrary to double that, which is the number that the Premier has used here in the House.

There are a lot of outstanding questions about this. People are very dissatisfied with this decision. Government should at least provide a more clear, consistent, and coherent rationale for this decision. This is a decision that denies Newfoundlanders and Labradorians their right to choose to attend an Adult Basic Education program at their own public college. I urge members of the House of Assembly to urge the government to overturn this foolhardy decision.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

WHEREAS the residents of the community of Fox Roost – Margaree, of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, must use Route 470-10 on a regular basis for work, medical, educational and social reasons; and

WHEREAS Route 470-10 is in a deplorable condition, such that the shoulders of the road continuously wash away and there are huge potholes on the road; and

WHEREAS the condition of Route 470-10 poses a safety hazard to residents and visitors to the community of Fox Roost – Margaree; and

WHEREAS the Department of Transportation and Works is responsible for the maintenance and repairs in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS the local division of the Department of Transportation and Works does make periodic repairs to this route but these repairs are only temporary patchwork and this road needs to be resurfaced;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to support the users of Route 470-10 in their request to have Route 470-10 resurfaced.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a similar petition I had for a number of roads in my district, which unfortunately are not in great condition. It is funny because Fox Roost – Margaree is actually a fairly small community. I am willing to bet I have just about everybody in the community signed on a petition of some sort.

I know this is something the minister deals with on a daily basis, which is complaints coming in for roads, but I am duty bound and I would be remiss if I did not bring this one up. This road is in absolutely terrible condition. In fact, it is washed away to the point that at certain junctures there is one lane.

I have had complaints brought to me, not just by the residents of this community, but by business owners and people who service that community. I have one gentleman who runs a bus route, as well as taxis in and out of the area. He tells me himself: Look, this is terrible and somebody is going to get killed. Somebody is going to get hurt because of this route.

I feel I need to put this forward to the government to have some consideration. I know the Transportation Budget Estimates will be taking place tonight and I am hoping this is something that will be discussed at that point. I

am hoping the Provincial Roads Program is something that will be discussed. We need to have something done.

This road has not had any monies allocated for some time; very patchwork, small repairs. You get a number of complaints. I know the minister gets them from constituents and from people who have had damage sustained to their vehicles. I am not worried about the damages sustained to vehicles; I am worried about the lives of people, and their safety and well-being. If somebody gets hurt, then it is going to be a very serious situation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

WHEREAS transgendered people face high risk of discrimination, violence, underemployment and lack of access to housing and other services; and

WHEREAS a recent EGALE Canada survey found that 90 per cent of transgender youth hear transphobic comments regularly from other students, and one quarter hear such comments from teachers; and

WHEREAS the Public Health Agency of Canada reports that nearly half of trans youth seriously considered suicide and one-fifth attempted it in the previous year; and

WHEREAS all individuals should have equal opportunity to live their lives and meet their needs without being hindered or prevented by discriminatory practices based on gender identity or gender expression;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to amend the Human Rights Act to include gender identity and gender expression in the list of prohibitive grounds of discrimination.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy once more to stand in this House to bring this issue before the House. Last Thursday, the Premier, our own Premier in a media scrum accused me of constantly presenting this petition and talking about trans rights, gay rights, and lesbian rights.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I will continue to stand in this House to push for the rights of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, particularly now when the budget of the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission has been cut by 50 per cent in the past two years, the very agency that is responsible for not only protecting the rights but doing public education. Obviously, there is still a need for this public education.

Our Human Rights Code act must be changed, as is the general thinking of human rights Legislatures all over the world. It is happening across the country. It is shameful at this point that this government and this Minister of Justice will not see fit to do the right thing to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society. They are not only the most vulnerable; they are our brothers and our sisters. They are our doctors, our lawyers, and our teachers. They may even be our politicians. They sweep floors. They wash windows. They have babies. They raise families.

These are the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who not only deserve but have the right to this protection, and it is shameful how this government and this Premier even to accuse me of constantly standing up and advocating for their rights. I will stand up every day if I have to, to defend the rights for this.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

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

WHEREAS there is no cellphone service in the Towns of St. Paul's, Cow Head, Sally's Cove or Trout River, all of which are enclave communities in Gros Morne National Park; and

WHEREAS there is either very poor or no cellphone service in most of Gros Morne National Park; and

WHEREAS visitors to Gros Morne National Park, more than 100,000 annually, expect to use cellphones when they visit the park; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is an important safety feature for numerous travellers, hikers and others in the park; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is necessary to modern business development;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to partner with the private sector to extend cellphone coverage throughout Gros Morne National Park and the enclave communities within the park.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition that came in a little late; however, it is not so late because the service still is not provided. It is a real irony that the people in Gros Morne National Park in the enclave communities – which are not actually park communities, they are communities that are on provincial land that was reserved for residents so that people could continue to live in the general enclave area.

We see a big hullabaloo about people who are really concerned about economic development, drilling, fracking, and they have all sorts of concerns about the park and no concern for the people. The people in these enclave communities will clearly benefit from economic development and that economic development would include benefits such as cellphone service, high-speed Internet that many of them do not have, better schools, better services generally.

It seems like there is a situation whereby it is okay if you live in the park and the park enclave communities, you can do without these services; but if you want any economic development which would generate these services for you, then outsiders will say no, no, now we do not want those services, do not go anywhere near the park with economic development because we want to leave it a wilderness park.

Mr. Speaker, nobody wants to turn it into a wasteland, but clearly, people want the services, people need the services, and it can only come through government assistance or through economic development.

The people who signed this petition are primarily from Cow Head, Parson's Pond, Sally's Cove – there are no Trout River names here – but they are really pressing for cellphone service, for the reasons stated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of AES, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 2, Bill 4, and I further move the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this bill be now read the first time.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 2", carried. (Bill 4)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 2. (Bill 4)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first.

When shall the bill be read a second time?

MR. HUTCHINGS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 4 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to this Budget and speaking specifically to the deficit that is proposed and the services that are proposed to be cut in this Budget, we need to go back to where the seeds of this Budget and this proposed deficit were sown. It was not in the last year or last couple of years; it was in the last five or six years.

Five or six years ago when revenue spiked, government had more money than they realistically imagined that they could have. When they took more conservative estimates as to the price of oil and then the price of oil spiked, they reaped a windfall.

Mr. Speaker, instead of being prudent with that windfall, they increased spending; they accelerated spending. They also failed to spend in areas that were important and were critical. Some of those areas, even though we hear ministers congratulating themselves on doing such a job with fiscal management, they did do things like repair buildings that were owned by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, buildings that are held and managed by Transportation and Works. Such that, when this government came into office, the deferred maintenance on buildings that have a replacement cost of approximately \$2 billion was approximately a quarter of a billion dollars, and that actually has accelerated to more than a half a billion dollars.

The genesis for the deficit and the Budget that we are looking at today came about in the order of five or six years ago when the government had more money than it reasonably expected to have. Now, Mr. Speaker, approximately three years or so ago, various individuals and government began to warn that our spending is unsustainable – our spending is unsustainable – and more repeats that our spending is unsustainable. Warnings were made by the former Auditor General. Warnings have been made by the economist Wade Locke, who consults with government. Sometimes government takes his advice when they like his advice, such as Muskrat Falls. Sometimes when he gives advice for the pharmacists and they do not like that advice, then they do not listen to the advice. Even though I have no reason to dispute Mr. Locke's credentials, and he is entirely credible, government only accepts his advice when they like the advice that they receive.

Approximately three years or so ago government began to say, and the current Premier began to say, this spending is unsustainable. We cannot keep spending like this, but government did keep spending. Mr. Speaker, who were they warning? Were they warning the people? I suppose they were warning the people, but the people were not the ones with the cheque book. Were they warning the Opposition? Maybe they were warning the Opposition, but the Opposition

is not spending the money. It is the government that is spending the money.

The government has been spending money. It has been on a spending spree for a long, long time, five or six years at least. With warnings of the 'unsustainability' of the spending, which I agree with, then we came to the 2011 election. Governments do not like to cut spending in an election year. They were holding a massive majority and wanted to maintain that massive majority. They continued to spend and to spend and to spend. They were successful in the election.

Immediately after the election, they warned more than a year ago that this spending is unsustainable. Everybody listened, everybody believed. A figure in the order of 3 per cent was tossed as this is the most that we could expect for increases. We have to look at ways to save money. Government gave the warnings but they did not heed the warnings. The only one who had the ability to be able to do something about the spending was the one who gave the warning and was the one who did nothing about the spending.

Mr. Speaker, a year or so ago when we were going into the last Budget, I think it is a fair assessment to say that people were expecting cutbacks, people were expecting retrenching, people were expecting shrinkage of government by attrition, all of the reasonable ways that government can shrink spending, but that did not happen. I remember last year speaking to the Budget and saying that I felt it necessary to do a DNA test on the Budget because I knew the then Minister of Finance, I have known him for a long time. Last year's Budget was not a very conservative Budget. It was, in my view, a very spendthrift Budget.

Last year when the warnings were given – and it is almost like the story of the boy who cried wolf, you cry wolf so many times and after a while nobody believes you. Last year, undoubtedly, the spending was unsustainable. Government issued warnings. They did not heed the warnings themselves and they kept on spending.

This year, immediately before Budget time, we had warnings that were even more extravagant, warnings that were even more outrageous. I would go so far as to reference what I will call the \$1.6 billion hoax or the \$1.6 billion boondoggle. Government, in what appeared to be an attempt to maybe threaten, scare, or intimidate public employees coming up for contract negotiations time, talked openly about a deficit of \$1.6 billion this year, \$1.6 billion next year, and another \$1 billion or so the year after, and essentially, Mr. Speaker, lost all credibility. It is a very bad thing when government loses credibility because if people do not believe any more, then they do not comply.

If government issued warnings last year and did not do anything, and issued even bigger, more extravagant warnings this year, and then all of a sudden, instead of the \$1.6 billion shortfall, we are looking at a shortfall of a whole lot less than that, less than half that amount. Now people are in a position of ridiculing government because they say, well, your spending has been out of control for a long, long time. Three or four years ago you started to warn us about this when you are the one with the cheque book. Last year we believed you when you were re-elected. You could easily have put the brakes on spending last year, you did not do that. This year you say it is even more extravagant, an even bigger deficit. So why should we believe you this year?

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that this spending is out of control. However, when spending is out of control you cannot treat government completely like a business. With a business, Mr. Speaker, you might have to take severe corrective action or a business would go bankrupt. Although balancing the books is important, there is more to government than simply collecting money and balancing the books. There is the human cost and a social cost that has to be considered.

This government went in an absolute freefall in public opinion polls, was extremely concerned about the level of spending, and they panicked, Mr. Speaker. They panicked and they took action, which I would say was not corrective action. It was more like corrosive action

because they went so far. The items they decided to slash were critical items to the proper functioning of our economy, the proper functioning of our government, and the proper functioning of our society.

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine a situation where a government that claims to be a law and order government would cut the number of sheriff's officers at the courthouse in St. John's by 50 per cent? People who work for the Sheriff's Office were already heavily loaded up with work. I have spoken with many of them in years gone by and some of them in other areas as recently as this year.

To cut the number by 50 per cent, sheriff's officers who provide security – not just in court. They provide escort services from the Penitentiary to court. These individuals are guarding people who judges have said are too dangerous to let out. If a person is too dangerous to let out, they do not get out on bail. They are retained in custody. Bail is denied and sheriff's officers have to escort them from the Penitentiary, from holding cells to court.

When you cut the number of people who provide that level of security, there is something drastically wrong. We also saw the number of prosecutors slashed. We also saw the number of legal aid lawyers slashed. Mr. Speaker, that is not the way to reduce the amount of spending of government.

Government took corrective action immediately when they saw how they had overstepped. It was a big, big problem. The Minister of Justice, to his credit and to the credit of government, realized they made a serious blunder. They decided to put on the brakes and look at it more closely. I am not certain yet the problem has been completely resolved but it is much better than what the Budget would have been with the original projection. However, what does that do to credibility? It makes it look like nobody is in control, nobody really knows how much we can spend, how much we are spending, where do we need services, what can we cut and so on.

The problem of cutting in the wrong area, cutting too deeply and cutting without consulting and then having to have a complete reversal means that people lose confidence in government. Confidence in government is absolutely necessary for proper governing and proper functioning.

Other areas where the government went which show a very poor sense of where the best dollars are spent were with Adult Basic Education. Mr. Speaker, if you look at a service like Adult Basic Education and you slash that service and you try to get off on the cheap – nowhere has government said the service we are providing is as good as it can be, the service we are providing will not be downgraded. They say it is costing so much here, we can do it in the private sector for cheaper; therefore, this is the way it is going to be. The amount of uncertainty put into that system has been completely unacceptable, but even more so.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at, I will say the client for the Adult Basic Education dollar, the Adult Basic Education service, this is somebody who has not finished their Grade XII education. They may have eight, nine, or ten. This is someone who has not had the basic public education that we know is necessary to get ahead. This is not for university. This is not for post-secondary. This is for somebody looking to get on the first rung of the ladder to go upward to improve themselves.

If such a person may have had a setback, may have had an illness, may have had a death in the family, might have had emotional issues, may have had substance issues, this is someone who has gone the necessary distance to get back into the system, to stop working, to take a chance to go back to school, which in itself is a huge change for somebody. When you say to that person, we do not know if you are doing this right, we think you should have some company do this or we do not really know where we are going with it, then that creates uncertainty for the person.

If you look at the handful of years that it takes to invest in somebody for Adult Basic Education,

two years, three years, four years – in some cases, more – I would say that the longer it takes to get somebody through Adult Basic Education, the more desperate is that person's need and the more that person will need supports through his or her lifetime.

In the case of Adult Basic Education, we may be able to get somebody from not being able to hold a job or only ever able to hold a minimum wage job to be able to go up the ladder, to become more productive, someone who will require less support over time, someone who will earn more, contribute more, have a better happy life and someone who is able to access government benefits on an easier manner, someone who is no longer functionally illiterate, someone who can maybe complete an application for a job, someone who can prepare a resume.

By slashing the most vulnerable areas, it is not a good reduction in spending because the individuals who are being displaced we still have a responsibility to look after for a long, long time.

Another area where government has been extremely short sighted is in the manner that it has approached our public education with our school boards. Now, clearly, being the Education critic, I have been keenly interested in this. Even in the questions posed and the answer given, or not given today, shows that the minister has a very basic misunderstanding about the Schools Act and about the function of school boards.

Mr. Speaker, hearing the minister say today that essentially he can just do it and he does not need to change the legislation means that either he has not read the Schools Act or he has not had his legal department look at it, or he is ignoring what there is – unless he is going to change the English language, unless he is going to get a hold of different meanings for existing words, he must change the Schools Act.

That means he has not bothered to consult the Schools Act. How else can it be that under Part IV it says deals with School Boards and Part V

deals with French First Language Schools? If the French First Language School is separate and the remaining is Part IV, School Boards, school boards mean more than one. "Boards" means at least two.

Section 52 says, "The province shall be divided into school districts as set by order of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council and the Lieutenant-Governor in Council may by order alter the boundaries or change the name of a school district." It goes on to say, "Where there is a dispute as to the boundaries of a school district, the minister shall determine those boundaries and that determination shall be final."

Mr. Speaker, how can it be boundaries of school boards if we have only one? If we have only one school board, there is no determination for boundaries. In order to change all of our school boards down to one school board, we do not have to worry about the boundary. This action by the minister to collapse the English-speaking school boards or the public boards into one board is an absolute opportunity and is an invitation for somebody to submit an application for judicial review in the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, for a judge to have to determine whether the minister is violating the law. Clearly, the government has an opportunity to introduce legislation, and I would say in this case must introduce legislation in order to be able to collapse our school boards down to one school board.

Section 54 of the act says, "For the purpose of ensuring that all parts of a district are represented by trustees, the board shall divide the district into 2 or more zones and shall define the boundaries of those zones."

Mr. Speaker, if you are dividing into districts and if you are dividing into zones, it must mean there is more than one school board. If there is only one school board, then we do not have to worry about the act. The act is the law. The law is in place. Anything that the minister does, which is pursuant to the act, has to consider the act. If he is not going to amend the act, then he is really setting himself up for a situation

whereby somebody will have a school board challenge and cause additional chaos throughout.

Mr. Speaker, the only logical course of action for this government and this minister with respect to the school boards – and authority is also provided in the act – is that the minister has the authority to extend the term of school board trustees. He can extend the term past September and say we are going to make certain changes. We do not really know what they are yet. He has already acknowledged he does not know what changes he is going to make because he is going to appoint a transition team.

Here it is almost the end of April, children will be in school in September, and the minister has not appointed a transition team to collapse all of the school boards into one board, apparently in defiance of the act. If he were to say, and it might be viable to say, let us extend by a year, he might want to reconsider. The amount of savings that he is considering is not very substantial.

Other areas he needs to consider is how education will be delivered in Labrador. Labrador is a very serious and special case. There are communities in coastal Labrador that are not accessible by road; for a significant period of time in the winter they are not accessible whatsoever, except when aircraft when can fly, which is not always.

This move by the government, or the proposed movement to collapse all the boards into one, is clearly in my view misguided. Even if a case can be made for it, the government certainly should extend the time. Now, if they were to say, boards are not working very well and it seems like the only area where the boards are not working well is that the boards are not doing exactly what the minister wants them to do, and this came about as the result of proposed school closures.

Mr. Speaker, the boards are not supposed to be the rubber stamp of the minister. School board trustees are elected by parents and they are elected to be able to communicate with

government and communicate with the minister. Communication needs to be a two-way flow, not just a one-way flow, so to wrap up all of these boards in this misguided action in this Budget seems like it is premature, misguided, and it may well be against the Schools Act.

If he is not going to introduce legislation to change it, he is inviting a summer long of individuals who will do applications for judicial review and attempt to stall the process. Ultimately, a judge may well say, yes, the government can do it but have to introduce legislation. Where are we then? Will the government then introduce legislation in the fall, next fall? Will they have acted against the law in changing the boards?

Mr. Speaker, I would say based on a simple reading of the Schools Act, the government appears to be getting set if it is not going to introduce legislation to amend the Schools Act, then it is going to violate its own law.

This, Mr. Speaker, shows some of the ways that government has panicked. They have panicked because they realize spending is out of control. They are dealing with discussions with our public employees for wage increases. There is a significant and troubling pension deficit that we are were looking at. All of this needs to be considered not in a hasty fashion, but in a reflective, contemplative fashion, and get this right. The problem that we have with the deficit is not just the government's problem. The problem with the deficit is a problem for all of us, for all of our taxpayers, all of our families, all of our old people, and all of our children.

Mr. Speaker, there will be other opportunities to discuss the Budget, but I would urge the government in the Schools Act to slow up a little bit and consider looking at the legislation, consider not making the changes you are proposing right now because it will not be as beneficial and it may well be harmful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the listening audience out there, it is a pleasure for me, as this is my first attempt to speak to the Budget during the Budget process. This morning, of course, we had Estimates where we had a committee of the House of Assembly members. Sometimes we talk about committees. Sometimes you will hear from the Third Party that we do not have committees; that we do not have to respond to anything.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you this morning we had a three- hour process whereby I sat here with officials from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation. We saw both parties with unlimited questions that we went through. It took three hours. They could have asked any question on any item as part of the budgetary process. I just want to say it went very well this morning. They had a number of questions; we gave a number of answers.

That is part of the parliamentary procedure, Mr. Speaker, that the general public out there do not see. I just wanted to point that out. That is part of the whole Budget process. In every department in government the same thing happens, whereby committees are struck. In our case, it is the economic committee. They appoint members, and questions are asked and answered. I just wanted to point that out. It is part of the Budget process that, unfortunately, people in the general public would not know. That continues on into this debate which we are having now, into a total of seventy-five hours that we have to debate the Budget. That is all part of this whole process.

We brought in the Budget, for those listening, and then the Opposition has the right to an amendment and then a sub-amendment. What we are on now is a sub-amendment of the Budget. That is what I will stand to speak to. Of course, each member can speak as often as they like, only once on every amendment. I am

speaking on the sub-amendment. Hopefully, I will get a chance again later on as the debate goes on to contribute more to the Budget debate that we are having.

Mr. Speaker, the sub-amendment, and some of this stuff can get a little crazy really and a little technical but basically what we are debating now, the amendment that was brought forward – for your listening audience out there, this is what we are debating right now. It is a failure to present a Budget that reflects the possibilities which exist in terms of addressing the needs of the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that one would think that. Obviously, with the demands you have on a government – we have a significant Budget now, expenditures exceed billions of dollars. Obviously, when you have billions of dollars it is all about the choices that you make. Now, there are different parties with different choices, but the bottom line is you only have so much coming in and you can only pay so much going out, unless you are certain parties. Certain parties do not believe in fiscal management. We are a party that has prided ourselves on fiscal management. We have done very, very well.

We have run a number of surpluses over the last number of years, but the reality of it is that there was a downturn in the amount of oil produced off our shores, Mr. Speaker, which lessened our revenues, and we have done a couple of other things over the last little while that has reduced our revenues. We are hopefully going to be back in good shape again in a couple of years out, so in this Budget in particular we had to make some adjustments. For example, I can quickly tell you that we put half a billion dollars - \$500 million - back into the pockets of the people of the Province, Mr. Speaker, to spend on anything they wish, through tax reductions.

This is as good a time as any, I guess, to point out the difference between this party and the Third Party, Mr. Speaker. We have to make adjustments right now in our spending, but the Leader of the Third Party has just been asked, when pinned down by the media: What would you do with a big surplus? The first time it was

asked, she was not really quite sure. She talked around it a little bit.

Mr. Speaker, when it was out, question after question, it was quickly established that the Leader of the Third Party would raise personal income tax. So, what that would mean is that the more you make, the more you would pay to the coffers of this Province. That is the difference in this party's philosophy and the Third Party's philosophy, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that is what the member said and led to, that she would increase taxes.

I will say one thing for the NDP; they are one sentence away from promising thirteen beers in every dozen and a chicken in every pot. Now, that is where they are, they are one sentence away from that commitment. Mr. Speaker, they want to be everything to everybody, which means thirteen in every dozen in my world. A good friend of mine used to say that all the time, about some colleagues on the opposite side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, when pinned down, the Leader of the Third Party said, no holds barred, she would increase taxes. We reduced revenue to the Province by \$500 million because we put it back in the working people of this Province so they could spend it how they saw fit to spend it, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: I will take you back, Mr. Speaker, to a district in Labrador West, a very well to do district. People are working. They want work. They are industrious people. They work hard for their money, and rightly so, they deserve every nickel they will get.

Mr. Speaker, I remember one time during an election there were inroads by the NDP being made because they are seen, they like to be seen, as supporting labour. Now, I can tell them, I think it is \$42 million in this Budget by this government, Mr. Speaker, to support labour and labour initiatives. Aside from that, they like to trumpet that they are the labour party.

People in that part of the Province, in Lab West were saying: Well, we have to take a hard look at the NDP. They seem to be speaking for us. Somebody in the community decided: Does anyone know what their take is on taxes? All right, let's get the book out. Let's see what the NDP is on taxes.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in a vibrant area like Lab West they quickly discovered that their policy was to increase taxes. What should happen? To the credit of the people of Lab West, they quickly discovered, aha, if that is the party I am voting for then it is more money coming out of my pocket to do the things they want to do. So that is the difference, Mr. Speaker.

You know, maybe sometimes the NDP should be the TAS party, the tax and spend party, like what happened, Mr. Speaker, in Ontario. The NDP became the TAS party, the tax and spend. It is very easy to spend money when you are spending someone else's, I can tell you that. The Leader of the Third Party knows it. That is exactly what they want to do. They want to take more money out of the people of this Province and spend, spend, and spend.

Mr. Speaker, they cannot tell you one thing, the hon. members opposite, of where they would save money or things they would – no. No, they are still on the thirteen in every dozen philosophy. That is what you get when you get the Third Party opposite. That is what you get.

Mr. Speaker, the Third Party talks about recently corporate welfare. This is a government, through our Department of IBRD, we do not make any apologies to anybody for investing in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to invest in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We will not be in looking for more money out of their pockets, but we are going to invest in rural Newfoundland and Labrador because people in this Province like to work. Whatever we can do to create employment and invest in labour in this Province we will certainly continue to do, I can assure you of that.

Mr. Speaker, two areas – when I was going down this road I heard some noise from the

opposite, so I had to branch off a little bit. I can quickly give you \$1 billion of how things have changed. Of course, the income tax, we put \$500 million right back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The other piece that we have done is we have increased the wages by almost over 20 per cent, which I think is another \$500 million over time.

Mr. Speaker, we have made a lot of investments in this Province over the last number of years in issues where the Third Party likes to think they own. Poverty Reduction, a \$150-million strategy we heard from the minister this year. They would like to think they own that issue. We are heralded across the country as being one of the best in the country in how we deal with poverty reduction, so I just wanted to point that out.

Mr. Speaker, the parties opposite like to continue to talk about the things that we are not doing. Well, you cut this, you cut that, you cut something else. These were difficult decisions. These were very difficult decisions. Let me tell you, when you reduce payroll costs and so on, these things are not nice. When you have to find efficiencies, well, let me tell you, we struggled with it. It was not an easy decision, some of the decisions that we had to make.

Mr. Speaker, another point on this, we are not running a surplus here this year. We still have a half a billion dollar deficit. The point that is lost on some of the members opposite is that we have a half a billion dollar deficit. It is not like we are running around with all kinds of surplus cash and just doing this because we like to do it, quite the contrary.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, to get off on a little bit better note I think it is important that we point out some of the things that we are doing, in my particular case, in the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, and explain some of the good things that we are doing in that department. So, it is not all bad news. We are still spending billions of dollars annually. I think it is almost \$7 billion our budget is this year, if I recall correctly. It is not exactly as if we are spending nothing and we are starving everybody out, Mr.

Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I would like to start with culture if I can, our cultural industry and our cultural heritage sector in the Province. There was some talk recently, Mr. Speaker, that the proverbial arse was out of her in the cultural industry. I remind the members opposite that is not quite the case. This year alone, Mr. Speaker, we are planning on spending \$17 million in the cultural sector in this Province – \$17 million. We have actually invested, since Creative Newfoundland and Labrador, our cultural strategy for the Province, we are after investing \$87 million in the cultural sector in this Province, so it is hardly something to sneeze at.

Let me give you an example. When we took over the government a number of years ago, the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council in this Province was getting somewhere between \$700,000 and \$800,000 a year, if I recall correctly. Last year, the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council got \$2.1 million. Have a guess how much they are getting this year: \$2.1 million; no cuts from money budgeted last year to money budgeted this year. This is a great organization. They particularly look after the creative piece of the artists in this Province, Mr. Speaker. I stand with them and support them. They are a good organization, they work hard and they do deserve the support of government, and they do contribute a lot to the economy of this Province.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Film Corporation – again, the proverbial arse was out of her in the arts community, Mr. Speaker. Last year, they got a budget of about \$700,000. This year, they were budgeted \$700,000. To say that we are eliminating spending in the arts, nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, the annual allocation for the Art Bank, \$125,000; the allocation this year: \$125,000. MusicNL – a commitment of \$350,000 in the previous fiscal year - this year, a commitment again of \$350,000, Mr. Speaker.

VANL, the Visual Artists Newfoundland and Labrador, recently held a public meeting and they were very disappointed; however, Mr. Speaker, their organization received money last year of \$70,000 from the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This year they will also receive \$70,000 from the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

WANL, the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador, received \$80,000 in the previous Budget the previous year. They are going to receive \$80,000 this year, Mr. Speaker. The list goes on. The Newfoundland independent film corporation, Mr. Speaker – the LSPU Hall, some would say the heart of cultural activity in the St. John's, downtown core area of the Province received \$100,000 last year, will receive \$100,000 again this fiscal year. The list goes on and on and on and on.

Sometimes when they like raising the flag and saying that the proverbial arse is out of her, well, Mr. Speaker, it is like the old song, it starts off boy, she is bad, but when you talk it right around, well it is not that bad after all. It is not that bad after all.

AN HON. MEMBER: It is actually good.

MR. FRENCH: It is actually good. Yes, it turns out actually good.

Mr. Speaker, I talked to members opposite – money that we spend in their districts. We are not even political about some of this; we are not political at all. I have money here for Gros Morne Theatre in Cow Head. They received money, Mr. Speaker, in previous years and will receive money again this year. Rising Tide received money previous years and will receive money again this year, Mr. Speaker.

The Stephenville Theatre Festival – I am always a supporter of the Stephenville Theatre Festival. I have been for decades, Mr. Speaker, and will continue to be. New World Theatre, the same thing; Festival 500, the same thing; Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra, the same; St. John's international film festival, the same; the Nickel Film Festival, the same; the March

Hare literary festival, the same; and the Writers at Woody Point, which happens to be one of my favourites, will receive the same as they did in the previous year.

All of these, Mr. Speaker, are significant groups, significant events, in the arts community that the other crowd likes to think is not on. Let me tell them, Mr. Speaker, we have done everything we can to look after the creation of art in this Province and, obviously, support it and promote it. We do put our money where our mouth is, and that is evident right there with the list of things that I just laid out.

Mr. Speaker, if I could talk about tourism for a minute – and I know my time is running by and there are a couple of points here that I would like to make about tourism. There is no secret that this year we took a reduction in our tourism marketing, because again we are not a tax and spend group, like the Third Party. We are not going to raise taxes to spend. Because you can be anything to anyone, if you have the cash. Fortunately – and this is something that we did not do lightly – we realized the importance of tourism marketing and that is why this year we are investing \$9 million in tourism marketing. We are outspending by the way –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. FRENCH: Nine million in tourism marketing. Our budget is upwards of \$16 million for tourism in general, Mr. Speaker. We are outspending places like Saskatchewan. We are outspending places like Manitoba, people with much bigger populations than Newfoundland and Labrador. We are outspending the Province of PEI which was at one time the tourism mecca of Canada. All the while, we have to be conscious and remind everybody that we have invested \$94 million in marketing for this Province since the Find Yourself Campaign and with the \$9 million this year, we will have invested over \$100 million in marketing in this Province since the Find Yourself Campaign in 2006.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, I was asked earlier: Has anyone done an analysis on what you put in and what you get out? Well, it is quite obvious what we get out of it. It is quite obvious to me. We have invested \$100 million since the Find Yourself Campaign started in 2006.

Right now because of the hard work of the industry players out there who have invested their money, their time, their education, their knowledge, their work which in many cases is eighteen, twenty hour days in the tourism industry, especially when they are in the busy seasons and the season extension piece that we are doing, but right now because of the work of the industry and because of the investment of \$100 million in the marketing of this Province, we now have a billion dollar industry in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, not that the tourism industry can ever replace the fishery – and I say this to people all the time when I speak. I remember a few short years ago when the fishery became a billion dollar industry. People were saluting it, taking their hats off to it, and celebrating it, and I agree, but right now the tourism industry is a billion dollar industry in our Province. That is something we should all be very, very proud of and celebrate. It is because of the investment that government has made, led by some great entrepreneurs and people in this Province. The people of the Province, of course, Newfoundland and Labrador, there is nobody who is not a good ambassador to Newfoundland and Labrador.

I always tell people, I give them a joke. I say walk onto some wharf in Newfoundland and Labrador and look and find what looks like the crookedest person you can find on that wharf. I guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, by the time you walk off that wharf you will be having a chuckle and a laugh with them. I can assure you of that. That is just the way it is.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to clue up now. My time has come to an end, but I certainly hope

to speak again. I want to remind the people of the Province before I sit down, it is an important point that I wanted to make here today. We are not a tax and spend government. We have to be fiscally responsibly. We can be everything to everybody by putting up taxes, Mr. Speaker. We choose not to do that. Some parties opposite, when pinned down on how they would come up with extra revenue, said they would look at increasing taxes.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that the people of the Province know this is a government that is against tax increases. Quite the contrary, we put half a billion dollars back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We do not believe in tax increases to find extra revenue, like some people opposite, Mr. Speaker.

This Province is in better shape now than it has been in a long, long time. We have lower unemployment, Mr. Speaker, higher wages. We are leading the country in job creation and many, many other things. I think this is a government that is on the right path. Sure, because of oil production and the nature of commodities, Mr. Speaker, our Budget is reflecting it this year and next year, but we will be better off.

I say to the people of this Province to be careful about some of the others, some of the promises and commitments they are making to people across this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

I recognize the Leader of the Third Party.

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

I am very pleased to finally be able to stand and speak to the Budget that was brought in on March 26.

Before I go into the main points that I want to make, I do have to make some response to my colleague from Conception Bay South. He does

not seem to understand what government is all about, Mr. Speaker. He keeps talking about tax and spent.

I would like to refer him to page ix of the Estimates booklet in which we have a summary of where the government revenues come from. We see it gets 10.2 per cent of its money from the Government of Canada. I wonder where the Government of Canada gets its money from, from taxing the people of Canada. You have 5.9 per cent, Corporate Income Tax. You have 2.3 per cent, Tobacco Tax. You have 2.4 per cent, Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation. I wonder where they get their money from, tax that people pay on the liquor they buy; Gasoline Tax, 2.8 per cent; Sales Tax, 15.7 per cent; Personal Income Tax, 17.4 per cent, and Offshore Royalties, 32.3 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that is the nature of government. Government raises its money through taxation in all kinds of ways, but it is always taxation. Why does it raise the money? It raises the money to spend it on the Province and on the people of the Province.

I find the insistence of my colleague on tax and spend very, very disingenuous, Mr. Speaker. That is how government raises money. Government raises the money to spend on the people of the Province. What this government has forgotten, Mr. Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: - is that it is the people who are the focus. The people of the Province are the focus of their programs. The people of the Province are the focus of their planning. The people of the Province are the focus of their services. The people of the Province are the focus of everything that a government does, Mr. Speaker. What I find is that this government seems to forget that, that is what they are all about is taking care of the people of the Province.

I find it very interesting, Mr. Speaker, when this government says: Oh, we spend so much money of our budget on education, or so much money of our budget on health care, or so much money on the delivery of services. Well, Mr. Speaker, that is what a government is supposed to do.

I am going to take just one area. I did a little bit of digging here, Mr. Speaker. This government, right now, in the Budget that we have in front of us – I am just going to take one area where the money goes, which is on page x; 35.4 per cent of the money this year will go to health.

Now, I have heard members of the government talk about this exorbitant amount of money we are putting into health. They quote the 35 per cent or whatever per cent it is every year. This year it is 35.4 per cent. So I decided to look a bit at some other provinces. When I did, I found out, well, Prince Edward Island spends 36.1 per cent of their budget on health. I do not hear them in the news saying, oh, we are spending too much of our budget on health. Nova Scotia spends 40.2 per cent of its budget on health. Alberta spends 45 per cent of its budget on health.

Mr. Speaker, health is absolutely essential. Health is at the core of what keeps our community going. If people are not healthy, then we have a real problem. We would have a problem socially; we would have a problem economically. If people were not healthy, could not work and could not support themselves, we would have real problems. So it is not unacceptable that 35 per cent of our Budget goes on health. It is a given that a large lump of our money is going to go on health. Another large amount is going to go on education, just like we have, Mr. Speaker, because it is government who pays for it.

We are in, here in Canada, a social democracy. We are. We are a country that believes it is government's responsibility to deliver health. It is government's responsibility to deliver education. We believe that as a country. We have an expectation around government delivering. We, as a party, call ourselves social democrats, and we believe that, but we also

believe we are in a country that is also socially democratic because of that belief.

This is what this government has to start doing, is recognizing that, lo and behold, it is their responsibility to spend. Now, the big issue is how they spent. The big issue becomes the priorities that they set, and I find those priorities very interesting. I find, for example, that you have the Member for Conception Bay South talking about taxation. I want to talk to him, Mr. Speaker, about what this government has done in this Budget with regard to the increase in fees.

They call them fees, but a fee is only another way to tax people so that when they do their calculation of how much they may have increased taxes this year, they are not going to show how much they have increased fees. Yet, when we look at the backgrounder – and I am very grateful for having this backgrounder on the increases to fees because it gives us a lot of information when you look at it, and you do not have to look at it too quickly to get that information. As you look at it – and I am going to go through some of it, Mr. Speaker – you see that a lot of the fees have to do with living in rural Newfoundland and that is where fees have gone up. They are not going to say oh, we are taxing rural Newfoundland, but they are. The thing is if they think that they are fooling people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, they have another thing coming because people know the difference.

The people, for example, who have to pay for some of the services that are here now, they know the difference. For example, farm veterinary services – currently it varies by service, but there is going to be a \$10 increase from current fees. Well, I do not think we have many farms in the heart of St. John's or the heart of Corner Brook. I wonder where the farms are located.

The farm laboratory service, once again an increase from current fees, from \$1.50 to \$50. That is a lot of money for somebody on a farm requiring laboratory services.

We look at another one, Mr. Speaker. We come over to ferry rates. It is okay to say well, expect some raises, 10 per cent is not that much, but when you are living on an island and you are regularly on a daily basis going back and forth and you are on a fixed income or you are in a job where you are not getting cost of living raises every year, a raise of 10 per cent becomes a lot of money. We cannot look at a raise of 10 per cent and look at it simply from the perspective of an average salary, and so that is not that much money. You have to look at the circumstances of the people.

When you look at the circumstances of the people, 10 per cent, when you are paying that every single day, every single time you want to leave your island, that becomes a lot of money. Living on an island should not be something that people have to be ashamed of, but they are. People in the Province who live on islands are made to feel that they are a burden.

Whereas I look at other provinces – I look, for example, at British Columbia where they have made it a part of their culture to live on islands on their coastline. People in British Columbia feel really good about living on islands, and they do not have governments that have said to them over the years, you are a burden on us. No, they have the BC ferry service which caters to every kind of island or out-of-the-way place where people live. People are proud to be there, it is part of their culture, and it is seen to be a cultural thing. They have a ferry system that works for people no matter where you live on the coast of British Columbia.

That is not true for here, Mr. Speaker. People really feel, people on islands besides the main Island of Newfoundland, and we all know that is not easy either when it comes to CN, but people who live on the islands off the Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, these people are made to feel they are a burden. That is not what our Budget should be about, government making people feel that way. Government is supposed to be there showing how they are enabling people to live where they are.

Then there is another one, Mr. Speaker, another fee. I will not go through all of them, but I want to go through some more that are specifically hitting rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and that is the highway access fee. It is not much encouragement to somebody who wants to build a business, a small business, in a rural community if they have to pay \$500 as a permit fee to access the highway from where they are going to put their piece of real estate.

It is not much encouragement to individuals who want to stay in the community, especially younger ones who want to stay in the community and build their homes, to have to pay \$100 for a permit. There is no fee there now. That is not encouraging people who want to go on living in rural Newfoundland. If this government were honest, it would tell people we are taxing you for living in rural Newfoundland, instead of using the euphoric fee and saying we are not increasing taxes.

Mr. Speaker, you look under Tourism, Culture and Recreation and places where there were no fees before when it comes to going to provincial historic sites. It is wonderful that we have the kinds of provincial historic sites that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have so much to celebrate, but now a senior going to a historic site in this Province will have to pay \$4. That is a lot for seniors who are on fixed incomes. Children and youth from six to sixteen, their parents will have to pay \$3. Students with valid ID will have to pay \$4.

Mr. Speaker, these fees are unacceptable. If we really want to encourage people to go to our historic sites, many of which are in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, not right in town sites or in the cities, but in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, we are not giving them much encouragement if every time they go they are going to have to spend the amount of the money that is outlined here.

A family, two adults and two youth, for example, having to pay \$15 while now it is only \$5. That is going up by two-thirds. That is quite a hike, Mr. Speaker. Especially when we are talking about rural Newfoundland and

Labrador where unemployment is much higher than in the cities and on the Northeastern Avalon, where we have a much higher rate of unemployment, where wages are lower, Mr. Speaker, and where we do have a large number of seniors on fixed income.

Mr. Speaker, I find it curious when I hear people from the government side and the Premier herself because I have heard her say it a number of times now, that we really care about people. Then the thing, Mr. Speaker, is this backgrounder with these fees in it does not show that they care about people.

Something else I would like to pick up on here, Mr. Speaker, because I have mentioned a number of times how this government does not show much of a commitment to the fisheries. Mr. Speaker, when I look at, for example, the fee for fish buyers and processing, that their licensing fee is going up to \$1,000. Right now it varies from \$500 to \$750. If you are \$500 and going up to \$1,000, that is doubling. That is real encouragement to somebody who is in that industry.

Species licences are going up, Mr. Speaker. They are now \$300 to \$2,000. They are going to go up from a range from \$500 to \$4,000. That is a real incentive, isn't it? That is a real incentive to stay in that industry and to be in rural Newfoundland and Labrador working in this industry.

The same way with the aquaculture sites, Mr. Speaker, which they say that they support by the way. They are proud about how they support it. Even there, the licensing is going up from \$100 for salmon to \$500, and for mussels from \$100 to \$250.

That is not tax, Mr. Speaker. That is not taxing people. That is not raising taxes. No, Mr. Speaker, that is raising fees. Wow, I love that. I love the way to use language. That is what this crowd over here, Mr. Speaker, are so good at, using language the way they want to use it, using words that come out of our mouths, and interpreting them the way they want to. I have news for them; people hear when they are doing

that, Mr. Speaker. They hear when they are doing it.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at something else.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: I am going to sort of just change tact a little bit here, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: This government talks about caring for people. What I want to look here, Mr. Speaker, is one of the things that is in this Budget. I am just using it as an example. Just like my friends on the opposite side of the House use examples, I am using this example.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS MICHAEL: Well, they have told me that they do not a friend, and that is fine. That is very good, Mr. Speaker.

I want to look at a couple of things in our Estimates 2013. I am going to compare a corporate grant with something that is being cut. In this Budget, Mr. Speaker – and I am not saying they should not be doing this, but I am making a comparison – the provincial government is paying for hydrometric research, which means river flow rates, for Vale on alternative energy possibilities for their Voisey's Bay mine. They are going to be giving Vale \$170,000.

Mr. Speaker, for people who do not know, Vale is the largest mining company in the world. It was their goal to get there and they got there. They are in major places in the world, here in Canada, especially in Labrador, in Latin America, especially in Brazil where they started. I have seen their operations in Brazil. Another key place is Mozambique in Southern Africa.

The largest mining company in the world and they are getting \$170,000 from us, Mr. Speaker. I am saying us, a decision made by that government from us, the people of this Province. Yet, at the same time that they are getting \$170,000, this government is cutting \$100,000 from the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement for families with pregnancy or infants on Income Support. Mr. Speaker, how can that government sit there and not be ashamed of that? How can they do that?

In the Municipal Affairs release it says, “\$170,000 to allow for two additional hydrometric stations established for Vale Newfoundland and Labrador Inc. to explore potential alternative energy sources for the expansion of the Voisey’s Bay project, and three additional hydrometric stations established for NL Hydro to explore potential alternative energy sources along coastal Labrador.”

We have not given enough to Nalcor that we also got to be giving extra money to NL Hydro too, Mr. Speaker. I cannot understand how this government justifies this kind of thing.

The Nutrition Supplement – “Appropriations provide for the Department’s commitment under the Early Childhood Development Agreement to provide an income-support benefit to low-income families upon confirmation of pregnancy.” This government says it believes in early childhood development. Well, one of the most important things for the development of a child is good nutrition from the time the child is born, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS MICHAEL: If they really meant it, I cannot believe that they could take \$100,000 out of that program and justify it.

AN HON. MEMBER: It is shameful, absolutely shameful.

MS MICHAEL: When you put it up against \$170,000 going to Vale and to Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro it is shameful, as my colleagues here on this side of the House are

saying, as the members of my caucus are here saying. It is shameful that we are taking \$100,000 out of a program to help low-income families have better nutrition for their babies and for their children.

Mr. Speaker, I am flummoxed by this one. There are going to be more issues like that over the rest of this Budget debate that I will be bringing to the floor. The two big things today, no, they do not increase taxes for low-income people and middle-income. No, they have just increased fines and they do not give a damn when it comes to children and low income.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the first point I would like to make for the information of the Leader of the Third Party is that the NDP certainly does not have the monopoly on caring for people. I think she ought to know that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: People on this side of the House, I can certainly speak for myself –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: – and I know I can speak for all my colleagues that we certainly do care for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

MR. KIRBY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John’s North, on a point of order.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, when the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, was standing and speaking to the Budget a few moments ago, the Member for Mount Pearl North was yelling out across the way: Tell the truth, tell the truth. As all members are aware, it is not appropriate to be suggesting that members here are not telling the truth or are lying.

I know there was an incident earlier where –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: – the Minister of Natural Resources stood up and he apologized –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South, to continue.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, before I was interrupted, I was saying that the NDP certainly do not have the monopoly on caring for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I can tell you that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of points I wanted to make here, but I have to respond to some of the things I have heard from across the way. The first thing I want to talk about is it is interesting that the Member of the Third Party should talk about the various ways that government collects funds, and certainly taxation is part of that. Nobody is arguing with that.

I think it all comes down to, though, the level of taxation and I think that is where we disagree, fundamentally, with the Leader of the Third

Party is the degree of taxation and who we tax and how we tax. One of the points she did allude to was royalties. She talked about the fact that we collect money from royalties. Where do those royalties come from, I wonder? Where do those royalties come from?

I would challenge her to stand up and tell us all right now where these royalties come from. If she does not want to do it and it is obvious to me that she does not want to do it, then I will tell her where they are coming from. Those royalties come from development, that is where they come from. They come from development like the oil and gas projects. They come from development like the projects being undertaken by Vale Inco and the Iron Ore Company of Canada up in Labrador. They come from all of the projects that we are certainly hoping are going to develop over the next number of years in Labrador, the mining projects as a result of Muskrat Falls.

Muskrat Falls, by the way, that the Third Party voted against; they were not in favour of it. It will come from development opportunities on the West Coast, which the Third Party is also against, which is pretty obvious. It is going to come from all of the oil and gas developments, and thankfully, we have good contracts in place that we are certainly not prepared to tear up, as are the Third Party.

All of this development, Mr. Speaker, that is where these royalties come from, and those royalties are very, very important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Thank goodness we have a government in place that is willing to sit down with these companies and willing to develop our natural resources to the benefit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: That is all I can say, Mr. Speaker, thank goodness that we are able to do that. Because we know where we would be to if we left it to the Third Party, there would be no development. As I said, Mr. Speaker, in the past, they are actually known now as the no

development party. That is a very important point to make.

Now, when we talked about fees, I heard the Leader of the Third Party talk about fees. Sure, Mr. Speaker, we have to charge fees for services. We have to do it at this level. We do it from the municipal level. I served for eight years on a municipal council. We had to charge fees for certain services. We charge fees in private industry. We charge fees in municipal government, federal government, and we charge fees in provincial government. There is nothing out of the ordinary with that, Mr. Speaker. We all cannot ride for free. When there are services delivered, and specific services delivered, there are costs associated to that.

As a society, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that we have to be, unlike a business, we cannot always charge 100 per cent fee for service. We understand that. In the business world, sure you can, because your business would go bankrupt if you did not. You have to recover your costs, but we are not running a business. We are running a government. We recognize there has to be degrees of subsidy and there has to be balance. We certainly do that, Mr. Speaker.

That being said, there also has to be reasonable levels of fees for the services received. The reality of it is that if you are offering a service for an individual, for a group of individuals, whatever the service might be, if that is being subsidized then the next question is: Who is paying for it?

If it cost \$1 million to operate a particular service and the users are paying \$200,000, who is paying for the other \$800,000? Where is that money coming from? It is coming from the rest of us. It is coming from the collective taxation base, whether that be the business community, whether it be the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it be from the large developments, but ultimately the rest of us are subsidizing these services. I am not arguing against that. I think it is the right thing to do.

I think we have to be cognizant of the fact that some areas are not doing as well economically

as other areas. I think we have to recognize geography. We have to recognize history and people's attachment to particular areas and the challenges they have. Absolutely we do, because we are all in this together. We are all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This is not an overpass syndrome piece, certainly not for me.

All the members on this side, if they are not representing rural districts, they certainly have roots in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I stood up in this House of Assembly in the past and expressed that. I have many, many family members from rural Newfoundland and Labrador. My father was born in Englee on the Northern Peninsula; it does not get any more rural than that. My mother is from Wesleyville, Bonavista North; it does not get any more rural than that.

I have family members in Labrador, I have them in Gander, I have them in Corner Brook, Stephenville area, Bay Roberts, all over the Province, Bishop's Falls. I have family members and I have friends all over the Province. I think we are all in this together and we have to find a reasonable balance, but it must be a balance, Mr. Speaker. Everybody cannot ride for free and you cannot have everything for nothing.

I believe the Leader of the Third Party talked about laboratory fees on farms. That is what I wrote down. I think that is what she said. Now, I cannot remember what the number is that she said. I thought she said it went from \$1.50 to \$50. Maybe I missed that one, but I thought that is what she said. I would simply suggest though, if that is what she said that we are charging \$1.50 for laboratory fees, my God, what can you do for \$1.50? You cannot even buy a can of pop for that. We have to be reasonable when we look at these types of fees, Mr. Speaker.

We talked about a \$500 fee for businesses gaining access to highways, she talked about that. Certainly, I do not have all the details here, but I can tell you from my municipal background in the City of Mount Pearl, if you

have businesses that are operating along Topsail Road or wherever the case might be, they have to pay fees and levies.

I know when we expanded Mount Carson Avenue, we widened Mount Carson Avenue there were businesses and people there, landowners who had to pay additional fees. It was called the Mount Carson widening levy or something to that effect. They had to pay an additional levy to pay for that infrastructure. Somebody has to pay for the infrastructure.

Again, it comes down to the fact, Mr. Speaker, that if somebody is going to be developing an area, whether it be residential, businesses, whatever the case might be, and they are going to be developing it and changes have to be made to the infrastructure, upgrading has to occur to the infrastructure, well if they do not pay for it, who is going to pay for it? Who are they expecting to pay for it? Are they expecting me to pay for it?

I am like the Member for St. John's North; I do not have two jobs. I cannot afford to pay everyone else's taxes all the time. Mr. Speaker, I cannot afford to do that.

MR. KIRBY: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. John's North can heckle away all he likes. It really does not bother me, I can tell you that. We talked about historic sites fees. When we talk about –

MR. KIRBY: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask for protection very shortly from the Member for St. John's North.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: The member who does not heckle, according to him.

MR. KENT: At least he shows up, though.

MR. LANE: He does show up, yes.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about historic sites. I would challenge anybody to go to anywhere, any province, any state in the US and so on, whether it is historic sites or different operations, where you can go and see things and so on, on your holidays, your vacations for tourists. It is not free. There is cost to this.

When we develop these sites, we have to staff these sites. We have to maintain these sites for a tourism perspective and so on. Again, Mr. Speaker, if it is going to be free to the users, the rest of us have to pay for it. The rest of us have to pay for it. Who is it that we are talking about, Mr. Speaker? Who is it that is paying for all of this?

When we talk about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are paying for it – and I want to bring this around, as I did one time in the past. I want to bring this around to the average person, the average working person, the average working family. A husband and a wife, they get married. They start a life together. They buy a house. A lot of them have to rent an apartment until they can save up for a house, whatever the case might be. They buy a car. They have a couple of kids and so on. They have to put the child in school. They have day care issues. They are paying their taxes and working very hard.

These are the people that I like to call the forgotten people, quite often. I like to call them the forgotten people because this is the group of people that will always say to you: Do you know what? I do not get a lot of breaks. Because I am getting up every morning and I am going to work and working hard, and I am making a few dollars for myself to support my family, I do not qualify for any of the programs. I do not get a drug card. I do not get baby bonus or child tax credit and so on. I do not get any of those programs. I do not qualify for the home heating rebate. They do not qualify for all of that.

They will tell you, and this represents the average person certainly in my district. They will tell you, I do not get any breaks. I have to pay for everything. It is true. It really is true, they do. They are the people who are driving

our economy. They are the people paying the taxes. We have to be responsible for those people as well. Do we have to make deals with corporations? Absolutely.

When I heard the Leader of the Third Party talk about the money, \$170,000 to Vale, apparently we paid \$170,000 to Vale for a study to look at alternative power to provide to them, you have to ask yourself: Are we simply giving them \$170,000 or is this an investment? What are we getting in return? There is a big difference between simply spending money and squandering money than investing money.

If we are going to invest in these projects, but then they are going to return millions and millions of dollars in royalties, if they are going to create thousands of jobs, and the people working in those jobs, besides having an income for themselves and their families, are also going to pay taxes and fees to the government to provide for services that we all require, and if it is going to provide spinoff in terms of when these industrial projects get developed, there is all kinds of spinoff. There is spinoff in the service industry in terms of accommodations, in terms of meals, in terms of fuel, and in terms of supplies. There is all kinds of spinoff, and that spinoff in itself creates jobs.

I certainly, as a member of this government, make no apologies whatsoever to anybody for investing in economic development – absolutely not.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: I make no apologies as a member of this government that we have invested in the aquaculture industry. Look at the people on the South Coast, how they have benefited from that. Look at the money that is coming back to the Province tenfold in terms of employment, in terms of taxation, in terms of spinoff, and so on. I make no apologies for that.

I make no apologies for supporting Muskrat Falls to provide stable energy for our people in the future, to bring us a royalty source in the future, to provide green energy, and to break the

stranglehold that Quebec has had on Newfoundland and Labrador. I make no apologies for all the jobs, the mining operations that are going to flow from having Muskrat Falls, all of those jobs, all of those royalties, and all of that spinoff.

It is very easy for the Leader of the Third Party to talk about the fact that, well, because you invested \$170,000 in this particular piece of business, and then on the other hand say, but we could have invested that \$170,000 in a couple of new houses for someone who needs social housing, or we could have increased some other social program with that bit of money. It is fine to look at that if you are just looking at that in black and white, but that is not the way it works. You have to ask yourself the \$170,000 that you invest, what are you getting back in return? That is what you call making wise investments, not just for today, Mr. Speaker, but for the future.

I have to believe in my heart that the Leader of the Third Party understands that. I cannot fathom that she would not understand it. I just have to believe that it is just politics; I have to believe it is politics. I certainly hope that is what it is. It is not good politics, but I have to hope that is what it is, that she actually knows the difference.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing she mentioned was alternative power for the coast. I would challenge her to stand up and talk about this one; she talked about the fact that we were giving money to Nalcor. Who is Nalcor by the way? Who is Nalcor? It is the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are the only shareholder. We can always spin it oh, we gave money to Nalcor. Giving money to Nalcor is not like giving money to Walmart or to GM or somebody. Giving money to Nalcor is giving money to ourselves. We are taking that piece of money that she had a problem with – I think she said she was flummoxed or something like that was the word she used.

AN HON. MEMBER: What was the word?

MR. LANE: I think flummoxed was the word she used.

Mr. Speaker, by the fact that we were going to give money to Nalcor so that we could look at an alternative energy source for the people of the Coast of Labrador, people who are now dependent on diesel generation and the costs associated to that which we have to heavily subsidize, not to mention what that is doing for the environment. She is flummoxed by the fact that we are going to look at alternative energy means for the people of the Coast of Labrador.

That is what she said; I did not say it. That is what she said. I would be interested to know what she has to say about it. I would certainly be interested to know what Mr. Borlase has to say about it as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: That would be interesting.

MR. LANE: That would be interesting.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I had a number of things I wanted to talk about, things in my district, great things that we have done in terms of infrastructure, education, health care, investment in communities, but I ended up getting sidetracked because of the comments made and I felt it was my responsibility to respond to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope to get the chance to speak again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just stand today to have a few words on the Budget, but before I get into my speech, I know on behalf of all Members of the House of

Assembly, I would just like to pass on the condolences to the victims in Boston last week and a speedy recovery to all the people who are injured.

I know that Newfoundland always had a long-lasting connection with the people in Boston. Years ago, when we were still not a part of Canada, a lot of people here moved down to the Boston area, Riviera Beach, and some of us can trace back a lot of relatives down there. So, a speedy recovery of the victims and our prayers and thoughts are with all of the people injured in that tragedy.

The second thing before I get into my actual few words on the speech, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to recognize all of the volunteers in the Province. As we all know, this is Volunteerism Week. We as parliamentarians know the contribution that volunteers make throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Without the volunteers, we would not be able to have a bank big enough to do the services and provide the services that they provide.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I look at the firefighters, the firettes, the coaches, the volunteer groups in the churches, you look at a lot of ordinary citizens who go out and give their time to help the needy. So, I am sure on behalf of the whole House to all of the volunteers in the Province, thank you very much for your time and contribution. Keep up the good work because you are making a difference in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak today on something that is out in the Corner Brook area, very near and dear to me, and it is the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. As we know, there was an announcement April 17 concerning the \$90 million loan to the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. This is an industry we all know, it is just not Kruger; it is the integrated sawmill industry for Newfoundland and Labrador. Without the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, we would not have the integrated sawmill operations in Newfoundland. It would not be viable. This goes well beyond Kruger.

Mr. Speaker, of course, \$90 million is a lot of money. I agree to that and I accept that. As I mentioned many times in this House and in public, I worked there. I have a lot of family who worked there and I still have family who still work at the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. I support the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

Mr. Speaker, of course, a lot of people have been asking: What do you think of the deal? Do you support it or don't you support it? Sometimes you have to take a stand. I have said it publicly before on many occasions, I support the \$90 million put in but there are some stipulations for my support. I am sure the members opposite will agree to most of this, and I said it to the workers themselves. This is not something that is coming out of the blue because I have said it on many occasions, that in order to get some kind of assistance there has to be some rules and parameters put in place for this fund.

Mr. Speaker, my first condition for this \$90 million is that it has to be a repayable loan to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The time to take a grant and just give it to Kruger is gone. We have to be responsible as parliamentarians for the funds. The money that is going in, this \$90 million, and as the government already said in a press release, will be a loan. I just want to let people know that in the Province, that it will be a repayable loan.

The second condition, Mr. Speaker, for me to support this deal is we have to have securities in place to ensure that if there is any problem, if the mill does collapse like we seen in Stephenville or in Grand Falls, that we have some securities on the loan. I think we all agree that we need to try to protect the taxpayers' funds.

They do have some assets. We can look at the Deer Lake power plant. We can look at some land already in the municipalities that is around which is an asset, that municipalities can take and sell, subdivide, but we have to try to get security for this loan in case something happens. We all agree, any time we give out a loan we always try to ensure that we protect the taxpayers' money to the best of our ability. In this case, we cannot make any changes to that.

We have to try to ensure that we have securities in place.

Mr. Speaker, the third condition I would like to see in this loan, and I will be looking for it also, is if we remember about six, eight months ago, one of the big concerns out on the West Coast is the pensions for the pensioners, the unfunded liability in the pension plan. Mr. Speaker, we have to encourage Kruger, and we can put whatever weight we can on them to ensure that there is a certain portion of this fund that is put into the unfunded pension plan.

We have to remember, there are 400 to 500 pensioners in Corner Brook who conceded to give them a break and support the government, give Kruger a break, a ten-year deal to pay back this unfunded pension. So with some of these funds, I feel very strongly that the government has to put pressure on Kruger to ensure that some of these funds are put back into the pension plan to show a true commitment to the pensioners of Western Newfoundland in the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

Mr. Speaker, as we know, there is a ten-year plan to have the unfunded liability topped up again to its original amount. Mr. Speaker, the only way we can guarantee there is going to be longevity in the pension plan itself is to ensure that some of these funds are put into the infrastructure at the mill in Corner Brook. If you speak to the workers in Corner Brook, which I have, if you speak to some of the union reps, which I have, and I still speak to a lot of the boys who work at the mill, the infrastructure has deteriorated. Absolutely, no doubt, you can ask anybody in the mill.

This government has to ensure that some of this \$90 million will ensure that the infrastructure of the mill is improved to ensure the longevity of the mill. Like one pensioner – and I do not mind saying his name, Gerald Parsons – said to me: We signed a ten-year deal to ensure that our unfunded pension liabilities are brought up, so we need the mill to have some infrastructure to ensure that longevity at the mill continues.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the conditions that will get my support for this loan. Once again, I do not think these are unreasonable. I feel strongly that we, as parliamentarians, have to support each other on this because it is a big industry in Western Newfoundland, not just in Corner Brook. Also, we all agree that if we are going to put public funds into Kruger or into the integrated sawmill industry in Western Newfoundland, we have to try, to the best of our ability, to secure the funds to ensure the longevity of this operation so that we can move on into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be on record for that here because I refuse to shy away from the issue and I refuse not be on record as to my position on Corner Brook Pulp and Paper because we hear some of the backlash from some groups in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I personally want to be on the record supporting this \$90 million with the conditions that I feel must be – and these conditions are not just from me as the Member for Bay of Islands. These are from the workers who work at the mill. These are from the pensioners who are from the area. These are some community leaders who are out and involved with this on a daily basis.

I am sure the Member for Humber West and the Member for Humber East will do their best to ensure the public purse is being responsible and it is going to be secured in some manner to the best of their ability. Mr. Speaker, as I said before on many occasions, there are many times that we differ in views, but there are times we must come together for the better part of the people who elected us. I feel we have to put our collective – which we did, and I have to give members opposite some credit.

When there was an issue with the pension, we had a very open dialogue. Myself and the Leader of the Opposition had a very open dialogue with members opposite, the government, and the Premier on that. Just to let the people know, we did all work together to try to resolve this. I am sure this is going to work out.

AN HON. MEMBER: Did you meet with the workers, Eddie?

MR. JOYCE: Oh, yes. People asked if I met with the workers. Oh, yes, I met with the workers. I know I was criticized for some other things. I am trying to be very nice here, but I encourage all members to meet with the workers and have a chat with them.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to move on to another issue, is the hospital in Corner Brook. I know I am bringing this up again, but it is very important to me to bring this up. The issue I am going to bring up is not too bad, and we are talking about the openness and accountability of government. I asked many questions on the hospital in Corner Brook in this House. I had many speeches. I have been out publicly on many occasions on the hospital. Then people ask why I keep asking questions.

Mr. Speaker, it was sad that in order for me to get the information on the cost and when what work was done, I had to go under the Freedom of Information. All of the questions that I asked, all the information I was trying to get for the people of the West Coast, that was the only way I could get it, instead of freely giving the information. If everything was so upfront and everything was moving ahead as planned, if everything was as we say, as the government was saying, here is what is happening, it is sad I had to go through Freedom of Information.

I will just give you something, Mr. Speaker. This verifies what I have been saying for so long. I do not mean to say that I told you so because I am fighting for the people of Western Newfoundland and the people of Corner Brook. Hatch Mott MacDonald architects, Forge architects, were doing a lot of work on it and the Minister of Environment and Conservation – I said in this House before that I gave him a lot of credit because he was the only one who was up front with me on a this issue where the design work was.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to let the people of Western Newfoundland know this. When anybody in this House or anybody thinks that

the Member for the Bay of Islands is just playing politics, just listen to this, Mr. Speaker, to do the pre-design work, the functional design and the conceptual design, they paid Hatch Mott – Forge architects \$2,362,757. The project ended September 2011. That was to do the design of the hospital in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker.

December 2011, Mr. Speaker, two months later, they went out and they hired Stantec consultants to go through this whole report. They have spent \$2.5 million to get it done. The Premier goes out, has a secret meeting with the city council of Corner Brook, and says: Guys, it is too much; we have to bring it down. They turn around and they hire Stantec consultants two months later. The \$2.5 million that was done, Mr. Speaker, and anybody can have a copy of this – \$2.5 million to do the pre-design work and the conceptual design work and it is just because it was too much.

The question has to be asked: What was taken out and what was cut back? If you go out and hire someone for \$2.5 million and they come up with a conceptual design, why do you need someone to go out later and say oh, we have to cut back on this and we have to remove some of this? Mr. Speaker, they are cutting corners; they are rightsizing. Mr. Speaker, after I received this Freedom of Information, I understand what rightsizing means.

I understand now when Councillor Leo Bruce with the City of Corner Brook said in the private meeting he had with the Premier that she said there has to be four to five – \$100 million. If it is any above that, it is not on. Then in the Freedom of Information, the work was done, the work was complete, Mr. Speaker, and it was changed.

I am just glad, Mr. Speaker, that I obtained it. Too bad I had to get it under Freedom of Information, Mr. Speaker, because this is an open and accountable government for the hospital in Western Newfoundland. I am sure, I am very confident, that no one went out and told the people of Western Newfoundland: Oh, by the way, we have the conceptual done of your new hospital, but we are going to turn around

now and hire someone else to rightsize it, bring it down to a much lower cost, much lower services than what we committed to. I bet you it was not done. I have it here on the Freedom of Information what was paid, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of people out in Corner Brook are still waiting for the construction, as we know may start in 2015; it just happens to be another election year. That is 2007, 2011 election and now the 2015 election, another commitment for the hospital in Corner Brook. The question that has to be asked: Will it be changed again? Will the design be changed again? Can anybody commit to me that it will not? Can anybody commit to me that the design is done, that is not back on the drawing board? It cannot be done.

That is why I am raising the issue. Mr. Speaker, I can go back over Hansard on numerous occasions. When there is something positive for this Province, I will be the first one to stand up and say this is good for the Province. I have no problem with that, absolutely none whatsoever. I feel that we should work together; I feel that we should compliment each other when things do go well. I think at times when we need to raise issues like the hospital in Corner Brook, we should. I know some people are saying: Oh, here he goes again. I do not mind that because that is what I am elected to do. I do not mind that.

When people can give me the guaranteed commitment that what is going to be put in place and everybody in Corner Brook and all the professionals who will be using say yes, that will satisfy our needs for the next thirty, forty years, I will be the first one to say okay, government good job. Until then, Mr. Speaker, I need to raise the concerns.

I raise this concern today – and I know we hear people out criticizing me and putting out on Twitter that I am not appreciative and it is insulting that I am not appreciative. What am I not appreciative of, Mr. Speaker? Is it promising in 2007 to start the hospital that is not done? Is it promising in 2011 construction will start in 2012, until the Minister – who I have to give credit to – of Environment and

Conservation was the Minister of Transportation and Works and was very up front and honest and said no, we are only in the pre-design stage? Should I be happy with that? That going into the third election now there is nothing even started at the hospital in Corner Brook. That I got under the Freedom of Information that we paid \$2.5 million for design work that we know was changed after the Premier's private meeting with the City Council of Corner Brook – is that what I should be happy about?

When the members opposite Tweet about me not being happy and you cannot please me, what am I here not to please? Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to put this on record. I called the hospital – and I just want the people of Western Newfoundland to know this. There are 199 beds at the Western Memorial Hospital. When you take out the twenty-five now, seniors who are waiting for long-term care, we are down now to 174. This new hospital, this brand-new hospital, is going to service all of Western Newfoundland. There are going to be 160 acute care beds. So we are going to have a decrease in acute care beds.

Now, the question that I asked, and I ask the Member for Humber West later when he stands, and not in a derogative way. I need it explained to me. The Member for Humber East says he is a big proponent of this hospital. He is not going to quit until the hospital is built. I ask him, here is the question: How many surgeries have been cancelled at Western Memorial Hospital in the last six months because of a lack of acute care beds? How many? That is the question. I know there have been many surgeries cancelled.

When you have a hospital being built to service all of Western Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker, then when you have the hospital and you have less acute care beds than what is at the old hospital now, and you have X number of surgeries cancelled per month and per week because there is not enough acute care beds, how can you justify putting in less acute beds?

The people of Western Newfoundland have to realize – and I said it to the Minister of Health. I asked the Premier. I asked the Member for Humber East. Let us go out and consult, have a

public meeting or have meetings. Let us ask the people who are going to be directly responsible for this, your input. Let us ask for your input so we can get the best of what we have. That is what we need to do. We need to do it together.

I would go out, and I would not play any politics. I would sit down and meet with the providers who are going to provide the services and the health care. Let us go meet with some nurses who provide a lot of services. Let us go meet with some concerned groups. When we do it, let us make sure it is done right.

I see my time is up, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure I will be back again. My only concern is, let us build a hospital correct for Corner Brook before it is too late.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the Member for Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a privilege to be able to get up and speak on the Budget today. First, it is National Volunteer Week and I would be remiss if I did not mention the volunteers in our Province, Mr. Speaker. I was fortunate enough to be at an event in Grand Falls-Windsor on the weekend, on Friday and Saturday. It was the district convention for the Lions Clubs of the Central and Western part of the Province, Mr. Speaker. There were about 120 or 130 Lions members there, 140 maybe, and just to listen to the work they do in the Province, along with the rest of the volunteers, Mr. Speaker. We can go on, of course, with the minor sports programs and the volunteer firefighters and so on.

I happened to be there Saturday night, and they talked about the groups they sponsor such as the cadets, air cadets and minor hockey, but the big one is the Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp for

persons with disabilities. That is huge. It happens to be out in Central and it happens to be in the Exploits District. So, I am really proud of that.

Just Saturday night, Mr. Speaker, the different Lions clubs contributed \$35,000 that night, different cheques from different clubs, \$1,000 from this one and \$1,500 from that one. Saturday night alone, there was \$35,000 passed over to the Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp. I commend them for that, Mr. Speaker, and all of the volunteers in our Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Yes, I think they are worth that. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the Budget. Sometimes some of the things you do are not always that easy to do but some things that need to be done. I know since I have been here for the past eight years, this government has certainly contributed and invested in this Province big time, Mr. Speaker. I recall, and I guess for me to be able to put it into perspective I would have to bring it back to a district level, because when I see what was invested just in the District of Exploits, Mr. Speaker, this government has made some strategic investments and it has been good, fiscal management.

This government and our Premier have always concentrated on the needs of the people, and especially what was needed for the front lines. In health care, I know I can relate to people with kidney issues who are on dialysis, and people who need MRIs and things like that. As a matter of fact, I have family very close who have had to avail of that. Mr. Speaker, we have gone from seven dialysis machine sites now to fourteen. Even in Central, in Grand Falls-Windsor at the site there, Mr. Speaker, we still have wait times.

I recall when my brother-in-law went on dialysis seventeen years ago, the only place he could go was Corner Brook or St. John's. There were not many choices, but there were not as many people on dialysis either. Today, there is a site

in Gander, which is very close, eighty kilometres away from Bishop's Falls, and there is a site in Grand Falls-Windsor. Both sites are filled and they have people waiting, Mr. Speaker.

That is why this government is investing in another site that should be up and running late this year. That is in Harbour Breton on the South Coast, a very much needed site, Mr. Speaker. I am sure the people of the South Coast, when this is up and running, will appreciate it. They will be able to get their service in their community and not have to travel to Grand Falls-Windsor. Of course, that will also free up some of the spaces that will be in Grand Falls-Windsor for people in that area who are waiting to use the unit, Mr. Speaker.

MRI, I know we only had two. I know when I was elected eight years ago there were only two. Now we have five, Mr. Speaker. We have one in Central in Gander, we have one in Corner Brook, and we have three in St. John's. The wait times are cut down to almost maybe three or four weeks, two or three weeks compared to what the wait times used to be. We have invested in the right areas, Mr. Speaker.

I was listening to our Minister of Transportation, I believe it was last week; \$225 million this past year in investment in roads and bridges, Mr. Speaker. The reason I bring that up is because this year the announcement was made for the Sir Robert Bond Bridge in Central, across the Exploits River. Actually \$23,800,000, but that is as close to \$24 million, I guess, as we are going to get. That was a great announcement for, actually, all of the people in the Province, because it is a vital link right across the Province and even to the country. It is a national link as well. That is a lot of money to invest in roads, especially in much needed upgrades to bridges. The Sir Robert Bond Bridge is going to be totally replaced.

I know, Mr. Speaker, you are not very far away from my district and you have received similar calls as I did, that this is great news and finally it is going to be done. It is going to take a couple of years. However, one tender has already gone out, thanks to our Minister of Transportation.

One tender has gone out for the construction of the access on both sides of the river. The roads will be done, the interchanges will be done. That is a huge contract.

Then I understand that soon the next tender will go out for the actual bridge itself. That is going to be a much needed project when it is finished. It will be certainly welcomed by all the travelling public, especially the people in my district and in the Central region, Mr. Speaker. It is very much needed.

I would like to stay with, basically, the investments that we made as a government. I know I have had this discussion only recently with our Premier as well, the investments that we need in our districts. She understands, Mr. Speaker, the investments that are needed.

I have been very fortunate in the past eight years. This government has invested well, strategically in municipal infrastructure, in roads. The Province has benefited. Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, have benefited from this government and the investments we have made. The District of Exploits has been on the receiving end as well.

I know they get up here and they question education, and they questioned the Education Minister today. Well, just recently, Mr. Speaker, we had a tender that was let and awarded to a construction crew or business that is replacing the roof on Leo Burke Academy in Bishop's Falls, \$388,000. This was welcome news to the people of Bishop's Falls, and especially the students and the teachers there. Now they know they are going to have a safe environment and it is going to be sustainable. It is something they have been looking forward to. This government and our Premier know the value of investments and where they should be. It is always for the front line.

Staying with education, there is another school in my district, Mr. Speaker, in the community of Botwood, Botwood Collegiate. The tender is now gone out to repair that roof. That should probably come into maybe around \$300,000. In the past eight years that I have been there, that is

only a small portion of the money that has been invested in infrastructure in the Province, and certainly in the District of Exploits.

We have invested in the education system regarding free textbooks and school fees eliminated, and more so the skilled trades. The skilled trades in the high schools are probably one of the best investments we will ever make – one of the best investments we will ever make.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: I recall when this government it in and brought in the skilled trades into high schools. I cannot recall the exact number, but I think it was around twenty-six pilot projects at that time. I was fortunate enough that we had one of those pilot projects in Botwood Collegiate in Botwood in the District of Exploits.

I can still remember what one of the teachers said to me after they started up the skilled trades. He said: I had one student there, Clayton, and I did not know what I was going to do with him. He had no interest – none. When we put in the skilled trades, he put him in the carpentry shop and he said he was at home in the carpentry shop. That is what he wanted to do.

We have done the right things. We put skilled trades in high schools where now they can actually have hands-on electrical, carpentry, plumbing – the trades that are going to be needed for the future. Things have changed in our education system. We are getting the information out there and the proper infrastructure there for the students at a younger age.

It was a long time ago, I say, Mr. Speaker, when I went to school, but I decided to go to trade school as well and I did for a couple of years. When I left the school that I went to, in a small community, I was going to a trade school and I barely knew what a trade meant and for sure I did not know what all the trades actually entailed, which was a better trade for me. I had to go by the leadership and the direction of my teacher. He said: This is what you should do,

Clayton. Not because I knew exactly what I wanted to do, because I did not. We never had the opportunities; it was not there.

Today, it is there; the opportunities are there and the students can see for themselves if they would like to do a trade. It is there in the high schools for them to study it and then decide on whether they want to be an electrician, whether they want to be a carpenter.

As has been said by this government and our Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, by 2020 we are going to need 70,000 tradespeople. That is a lot, 70,000. If we can get them to train in the schools before they actually get out into the trade schools, then they will know exactly what they want. This government as well, when they get out of trade school, they can now get funded in an apprenticeship program that the employer does not have to pay the full salary when that student or tradesperson gets out of trades school and starts his apprenticeship towards his journeymen.

Only recently, I had the pleasure of having the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of AES in my district in Bishop's Falls, Mr. Speaker. It followed up with the trades and it was the mentorship. Now the ratio for journey people verses apprentices was one journeyman, two apprentices. If an industry or a business now takes advantage of the mentorship, they can bring on a journey person who can actually get paid by the program, by this government, and you can have up to five apprentices on that site and one journey person, because what that journey person is doing is actually just training the apprentices. This, Mr. Speaker, is what this government is doing concerning the education in this Province.

Something else that is certainly near and dear to me and a lot of people I know in this Province, Mr. Speaker, and that is the rural broadband. Every district out around the rural areas, I am sure, are looking for high speed. Well, the District of Exploits is no different. We have a couple of communities out there that were after me for the past number of years. When are we

going to get high speed? When are we going to get it?

This government has invested quite heavily in the past couple of years in broadband, Mr. Speaker. Our rural broadband received funding of \$7 million in 2011 and \$2 million in 2012. Our Minister of IBRD, and responsible for broadband, announced in the 2013 Budget an additional \$6.3 million to be spent over the next two years. We are investing in the right areas, I say, Mr. Speaker.

This particular time around, we were able to offer high speed to a couple of communities in the District of Exploits. Now, I think just about all of the people in the District of Exploits are receiving high speed thanks to this government, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: I do not have a lot of time left; I have a couple of minutes. There are so many things that I could talk about: what this government is after doing, what we are still doing, the investments that we have made, and the right investments, strategic investments and good fiscal management, Mr. Speaker.

In this Budget, what is very important to us, important to this government, definitely important to our Premier and this government, and definitely important to me, is our commitment to seniors. It is very important. We know we have an aging population, Mr. Speaker, but we still provided \$3 million to continue just one particular one, a 35 per cent reduction in driver's licence and vehicle fees.

If you were, or anyone actually were to look at the commitment we have made to seniors and some of the fees and discounts that we put in place for seniors, and I would just like to mention a couple of them. There are actually two or three pages of them. I probably would not have time right now. My time is growing short.

Big Game Licence, Mr. Speaker, has gone from \$40 down to \$26; our Province-wide seasonal

sites, \$20 down to \$13; driver's licence from \$100 down to \$65. Then there is the discount on the all-terrain vehicle, the trail bikes, snowmobiles, transfer registry of ownership. All of this stuff, Mr. Speaker, all of these is our commitment to the seniors. I am sure, as time goes on, I will have more time to explain some of the things out of this year's Budget.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for St. John's North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like my colleague before me, I want to extend my thanks to volunteers in the Province, and particularly in the District of St. John's North. There are lots of people who give seemingly endlessly of their time. In fact, tomorrow morning we have a fundraising breakfast at Larkhall Academy organized by the school council there. It is a school fundraiser. I encourage people who are able, to get out after 7:00 o'clock tomorrow morning and come to Larkhall Academy, one of the greatest schools we have in Newfoundland and Labrador, and help contribute to that cause.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows the story of the little boy who cried wolf. I think in some instances we have to question whether we have a government that cries wolf. I want to read from a letter that was published in the St. John's *Telegram* last June 16. It is almost a year ago now, or getting close up. It says, "Minister wants to correct the record", and it is a letter from the Minister of Education. It says, "Allow me the opportunity to correct misinformation provided to the public by MHA Dale Kirby (NDP-St. John's North) in a June 14 letter to the editor..." et cetera.

I think really we have the Minister of Education who cried wolf here because he has no other tool in his tool kit, I do not believe. Maybe just reading lists and lists of information, but he has been constantly accusing me and members over here of misinformation. He should try to find something new. I will get into some of the information about the Budget.

The morning the minister held a press conference to explain the almost \$27 million in cuts to the Department of Education, cuts to classrooms and schools, I say, that morning he was going to clarify things. I got a message from someone, and I will not say who it is, basically telling me that all of the program specialists at the Eastern School District had been called into a meeting that morning and told that all of their jobs are now redundant. They all now have to reapply for their positions at the minister's new supersized English school district. The minister brushed that off. He pretends we are going to be able to have the same number of program specialists with less money, which is not the case, and he brushed that off.

I say to the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Education was told one day that his position was redundant and he had to go to the people of Burin – Placentia West and reapply for his job, I think that would be a big deal to the minister; but it is not a big deal that all these people are basically on tenterhooks now waiting to see if their jobs are going to be continued, and it is not a big deal to all those parents out there who are going to wonder if schools are still going to have the same level of resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Then he also brushes over and glosses over the fact that Student Support Services in the Education budget has been reduced from \$1.4 million last year to just under \$700,000. That is a cut to a Budget line item for children with special needs. That is a cut. Math is math.

I would like to read, Mr. Speaker, as well, for the record from – this is a memo, and I will talk about this at length later if I have time. This is from the School Administrators’ Council of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers’ Association, some 592 principals, vice principals, and program specialists, I say.

This memo says in part, “Perhaps the most significant reduction in teacher allocations to schools is the loss of special education teacher support. While government has publically announced its reductions to the teacher workforce in other areas, they have not admitted to a reduction in the numbers of teachers allocated to serve the needs of our most vulnerable students. ...government has said that the allocation of special education teachers is done on the basis of need. However, it is difficult to comprehend reductions in these allocations when the need of the population has not changed yet the amount of time to serve the need has changed and is reduced.”

So do not take it from me. Maybe the minister would like to go out in the media and have his people accuse the NLTA of misinformation if he does not believe that is the case, but that is a fact, Mr. Speaker.

To go on, I would say that all of this idea around the school district consolidation; we have not heard any end of it. I was on the phone for an hour and a half with somebody about it this morning. We know there has been no consultation. We spent three hours in Estimates the other morning with the Minister of Education. I asked him a question –

MR. JACKMAN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Education, on a point of order.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the member cannot hide behind the fact that he made a statement which was incorrect. He said that

special education services were going to be cut, Mr. Speaker, and that is not true.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The Member for St. John’s North to continue.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, back to reality again.

I asked the minister in Estimates: Who did you consult? I listed off a ream of people. Who did you consult with? He basically dodged the question. We had three hours. We are meeting again next Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. I suppose we will meet until midnight or so, but I will certainly try to get some answers for the people who are asking me, but it has basically been no consultation.

Now trustees at the Western School District, Nova Central, some in Eastern are speaking out about these cuts and this consolidation. There is a front page story today in *The Western Star*, “Western trustees preparing to take a stand against consolidation”.

It says, “...they believe the provincial government must stop the consolidation from four English school boards into one....” It goes on to quote the Western School District Chair; he says, “...We cannot let this go with the belief that this is a good, sound educational decision.... You cannot do justice to this between now and the beginning of the next school year.”

That is what the Chair of the school districts over there – a member of the board also said, “Government is scrambling. They made a hasty decision. They haven’t a frigging clue what they are doing. They are all running around like chickens with their heads chopped off wondering what do they do next.”

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the member is quoting from a document, but that does not allow the member to still use what I would consider to be unparliamentary language. The use of the word frigging is unparliamentary and I would ask you to withdraw.

MR. KIRBY: I apologize if I offended anyone, Mr. Speaker. I notice the Government House Leader used colourful language here the other day and there was no point, so I just thought if you were quoting from a document –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member's comments amount to an affront to the Speaker and a challenge to the Speaker's ruling. I would ask the member to withdraw his last comments.

MR. KIRBY: Sure, I withdraw.

May I continue, Mr. Speaker?

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you.

I withdraw the comment in any case.

The person says, "Clarity is not there, it doesn't exist." Now, this was in *The Western Star* today, but there was another story I will get to in a minute. I will go to that one now. There is another story, because increasingly, school board trustees are speaking out. There were a number of motions made by the Western School District and one of them was to express its disappointment in the consolidation because people were not consulted.

Also Nova Central School District, their board of trustees issued a press release recently to express members' strong opposition to this consultation. There is a quote in here and I will make sure that there is nothing in there that is unparliamentary. "The Trustees feel this is an ill-conceived decision that was undertaken with

little planning and no real consultation with anyone outside the Department of Education." That is what it says.

It also quotes a Labrador School District Trustee: To go to one English-speaking board for the whole Province, it almost spells the end of public education. It will be a big blow to the support of teachers of Labrador West, as well as the administration of the board offices provided. If there are local problems or issues in the school it may take a longer time to react and get a plan in place to correct it. That is what somebody is saying at the Labrador School District.

A number of retired board CEOs who the minister also did not see fit to consult, they have formed an action group around this as well. They say that one school board for the whole Province is tokenism. Nova Scotia has eight boards. They say, basically, you can make a better comparison between Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan or Manitoba because of the size, I guess, the geographical dispersion of the communities. They say: Manitoba has thirty-eight school boards while Saskatchewan has twenty-eight.

They observed that 65 per cent of the schools in Newfoundland and Labrador are located in rural communities. They basically call this a sham. They say it is an arbitrary decision to abolish regional schools and they ask government to establish an independent commission to look at this decision and make sure this is being done properly.

I also mentioned to the Minister of Education in Estimates the other day – I asked him: Did he consult anybody down at the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland on that? Because we have a number of noted experts on school district governance down there.

He did not indicate that he did, and that is really interesting because there is a publication I have in my hand called *School Boards Matter*. The publication year is this year, 2013, authored by Bruce Sheppard, a former school board CEO; Gerald Galway, who is a former Assistant

Deputy Minister; Jean Brown; and another academic from the University of Manitoba. I think it is very telling that the minister did not consult these people. They say that through their research, they engaged with numerous trustees and commissioners, district superintendents and education researchers all across Canada.

The participants in this study stressed the importance of retaining local democratic authority for education. Education of children is best served when the diversity of local community needs is taken into account. They say: Data from this study support a position that school board consolidation and restructuring, coupled with increasing government control and oversight, have comprised the ability of school boards to focus on authentic student learning and to meaningful connect with their constituents.

This is interesting because the Minister of Municipal Affairs was, I believe, on the radio recently talking about the need to locate the headquarters of this new supersized English school district in the City of St. John's because that way the minister will have a better opportunity to have a hands-on, day-to-day involvement in the running of the board.

This paper, *School Boards Matters*, by a number of distinguished people in this area of research says basically that is a big problem to diminish the role of school boards in that way. They say, school governance "is designed to connect locally elected trustees to parents and the broader community and to decouple government's direct influence from local board decisions." That is to go the other way, "to depoliticize local educational operations and policies." We are going in the absolute opposite direction by what the minister has publicly stated and what I believe is really going to happen.

Policy-making should not be handed down in tablets by the Minister of Education; it should not. Policy for school districts should be developed at the local level. That is not going to happen now. That is going to go the way of the dodo, of the great auk, because of the decision

that this government has made with absolutely no consultation with stakeholders in communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Somebody pointed out this morning dating back to 1967 when Phil Warren headed the Royal Commission on Education and Youth, all of those studies, of changes in the organization of schools, school districts, organization and administration in Newfoundland and Labrador since that time have all involved intensive study and consultation. The government has consultation when it suits this government. In this case there was no consultation.

Basically this paper, like I said by people who the minister could have consulted, called *School Boards Matter* says that regional school board governance rejects a one-size-fits-all approach to educational decision making. What could this be described as? It is exactly that. It is a one-size-fits-all, one-school district-fits-all approach to governance of our schools. That is a real problem.

I could go on from this document because it is quite lengthy. I also wanted to pick up on another thing that the minister has said and I would like to clarify. This cut in funding to student support services – last year the minister talked about the importance of the PASS program, the Positive Actions for Student Success program which was funded under that. He went so far in his letter to *The Telegram* about me, he said, "...we have started a pilot we call Positive Actions for Student Success (PASS). PASS is designed to target disengaged youth who have either dropped out of school, or are at risk to do so.

"Both groups are comprised of students with academic difficulties, often associated with poor attendance and personal/social issues." That was so important last year, the minister raised it in Estimates.

I went back to the Annual Report of the Eastern School District. It says: Positive Actions for Student Success (PASS) enabled four student success teachers to be hired in the Eastern School District in Marystown and here in St. John's at Booth, Prince of Wales, and Holy Heart. Student success teachers target at-risk youth who have dropped out of school, and et cetera.

Now somewhere between last year and this year, that lost its importance. When I questioned the minister about it in the Estimates meeting he said, and I could not believe he said this because he said, effectively, they had these pilot projects. We said, well, what is going to happen? Are these programs going to continue? Are we still going to have these student success teachers? He said, well, it is up to the schools. They may or they may not have it, but it is up to them.

It is not up to them. It is up to the minister. The decisions that are made to cut funding to this particular program, to this particular line item, will directly impact the future of that program in schools. If you take the resources away, you take the teachers away and you take the program away. That is basically the way that it is.

I just wanted to also say, I was down on the Burin Peninsula on the weekend and people said to me repeatedly down there, the Burin Peninsula has three PC Cabinet ministers. People said you would not know it. We have the Premier, we have two ministers, three Cabinet members, and you would never know with what is happening down there.

During the last election, the people went down to the District of Burin – Placentia West. Lots of people saw it on TV. This plant has a future. Does anyone remember that? I do, and the people down there remember it, too, absolutely. It is a sad day, really.

The College of the North Atlantic campus in Burin has been particularly hard hit. I will have a lot more opportunity to speak more about that, but I cannot see a community as hard hit as the Burin Peninsula where you have had plants

closing down, significantly large employers in Marystown and Burin.

The last time they tried to close the Burin plant, the Premier, she was on council down there then, was blocking and helping to obstruct access to the place to prevent them from removing equipment from the plant. Now we barely hear a word about it. It is like it is not even happening. The people who realize it are the people who live down there, and some people are listening to those people down there. Unfortunately, it does not appear that any of the three Cabinet ministers from the Burin Peninsula are paying any attention at all.

When we need all of those people to have opportunities for retraining, government cuts the very education programs, Adult Basic Education and the CAS Transition Program, cuts those very programs that give people a second chance. When people are displaced from the labour market, when they need to become reattached to the labour market, need to get back into the workforce, government comes along and cuts the very programs that give people a chance.

The Minister of Education and the Minister of Justice were down there I understand, and met with people down there. They said they were going to take it back to the Cabinet for reconsideration. I really hope the Minister of Education has had an opportunity to do that because the people down there deserve that representation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to get up here today, but after listening to that, I felt I have absolutely no choice. If you are talking about people who work in the best interest of children as opposed to those playing

political gibberish with something, that was the perfect example of it, Mr. Speaker.

I have to go back to one thing, this is so funny. I do not know if anybody remembers it, but we were getting ready to go ahead with the anti-bullying, moving along with developing that and whatnot. The Member for St. John's North was up today and talked about consulting and speaking to people and everything else.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you remember it or not, but this hon. member came in with a definition for bullying and said here it is, take it, and put it in. That is what he did. He wrote his own definition as if he is the scribe who can put this forward. Here is the definition, people of Newfoundland and Labrador, take it and believe me. That is exactly what he did.

He speaks on both sides of his mouth and out of two nostrils, Mr. Speaker. That is about the size of it. There are not enough openings for him to get out all the different opinions.

He accuses, Mr. Speaker, he accuses. Here is a statement in his release, and I do not care if he received an e-mail that said this is happening. He may have gotten it, but, Mr. Speaker, before I make a statement on something I am going to check it out to make sure it is fact. I am not going to receive an e-mail – and so eager with his Twitter and his releases that he snaps it out like that before he checks the facts. Here is what he said, “Today the Eastern School District advised autism itinerant teachers, educational psychologists and speech language pathologists that they would be losing their jobs.”

Mr. Speaker, I am telling you, I have e-mails from parents. I even got an e-mail from a parent of a child who is three years old who will be entering the school system in two years time and was worried and upset because of that statement. It got to the point where the Autism Society put a release on their Web page to say, “Misinformation about the status of student and classroom ‘support positions’ this coming September...”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. JACKMAN: He has been reading off, so I think I will read something to him. I would like for everybody to listen. “...is generating significant concern and confusion amongst members of ASNL and others who have children in the school system that are availing of these supports.”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: Just listen to this one. This is from the Autism site, “Please be assured there are no reductions in special services positions such as Autism Itinerants, Educational Psychologists and Speech Pathologists...”

AN HON. MEMBER: Who said that?

MR. JACKMAN: This is the member who made a statement that they are being cut and it caused so much upset and dishevel – a parent of a child with special needs faces challenges for thirteen years in the school system. They work, but I thought that was totally irresponsible.

Now, he is over there Tweeting something, I would expect by now. You can Tweet what you want but the facts speak for themselves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: There are no morals. It is a quest for power.

MR. JACKMAN: That is exactly what it is. I would ask people who listen to such speakers to see if they are speaking with genuineness or if they are speaking with political ambition. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, that is about politics.

We, on this side, are concerned about the students and the teachers in the system, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, as far as I am concerned, the status quo when it comes to

school boards, just cannot simply stay as it is. We have seen a reduction of 17 per cent of our students since the last reorganization. We have seen the number of schools go down by 12 per cent. We have seen board expenditures go up by 33 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Core mandate exercise or not, we needed to look at this structure. There is no doubt about it. Mr. Speaker, you can put all of the spins on it that you want, here is one thing that we are going to ensure. The thing that we are collapsing under one roof, I will use it as the corporate side. In Gander, in Corner Brook, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the educational focus is what is going to be predominant in those particular areas so that the people who we have on the ground there, they will not be dealing with busing, or school closures and this kind of stuff, their focus is going to be on education. It is going to be solely on education, student achievement, and that is where we have our focus in this restructuring.

Mr. Speaker, go back to see. I had a meeting with the President of the NLTA on the day before the Budget came down. She has a role to do; I accept that. I said to her: Where do you think we were going to find some of our savings? She thought that we were going to tackle the caps and change the caps because she knew that if we wanted huge savings, and 64 per cent of our Budget goes to teachers and that side of education, so she knew if we were going to get big savings that is where we were going to have to go to, to the caps.

Mr. Speaker, did we touch it? Indeed not. We wanted to make sure that those front-line services, that being the cap, teachers and special needs, these, Mr. Speaker, would not be touched.

If the member is suggesting that we should leave the boards intact, let it all go, money is what you need, money is what you get, Mr. Speaker, it is not fiscally responsible to operate that way and it is not operating in the best interest of the students, the teachers and everything else in this Province. It is simply not so.

Mr. Speaker, we will move ahead with this. There will be a transition team in place. I heard on Friday, I believe it was, a Mr. Bill Lee on the Open Line. Mr. Bill Lee was a CEO in the Province for many years and he made the statement that special education services are going to be impacted by this.

Now, I am not questioning the man's credibility, credentials, but those people who speak publicly and put facts out there need to make sure that the facts are correct. If not, what he is doing, he is upsetting those parents who have special needs students. That, to me, is not the way to go, Mr. Speaker.

If Mr. Bill Lee is credible, and I believe him to be – I do not believe I have met the man – but I am going to ask him and I am going to ask those people who the member read out their letters from, we are going to be putting in place very shortly a transition team and if these gentlemen and women have the interest of the students at heart, I would suggest to them that they make their opinions known to that transition team.

Mr. Speaker, that is what it is about. If we are going to have the education system that we want in this Province, we have to have trustees present. We have to have CEOs, present and past. We have to have these people working together so that we ensure that the system that we have in place is there and it is one for the betterment of education in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to take some of the members through some of the facts as to what we have done and what we are continuing to do in education in this Province, Mr. Speaker, and I do not mind repeating them I can tell you that. I do not mind repeating them. Let's take, for example, in this Province our student-teacher ratio is the best in the country – the best in the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, when you walk into a school, one of the things that you will recognize is the impact that is having.

I just want to make a point of note here as well. When we looked at the restructuring of the school board, there was an offer come forward that we take a look at okay, so where are some of the savings. It was suggested that we might want to take a look at secretaries or janitors. Mr. Speaker, again, just as we did not touch classroom caps, we did not touch secretarial time in the schools. The reason being, anybody who goes in the school around recess time or lunchtime will recognize how important the secretary is to the school. You will know it as soon as you step in. The janitors, we wanted clean schools.

No matter what the member opposite talked about – I think I heard him say something about cleanliness. I was not sure if he was calling me a dirty minister or some reference to that. Mr. Speaker, I could tell you that our investment in retaining janitors and secretaries is critical to maintaining a good school.

Take a look at another fact, Mr. Speaker; despite the fact that we have 14,000 students less, our per-pupil investment in K-12 has increased – now we have to listen to this one. Our per-pupil investment has increased from \$7,400 to \$12,426 in 2013. That is a 68 per cent increase. That is per pupil.

Mr. Speaker, the crowd opposite will not probably admit to it, but I know that the people on this side, the day that we brought in free textbooks and we eliminated school fees was one of the proudest days that I have had in this House and I think for the members on this side likewise. Anybody who was a parent or if you were in a school, you knew that when September rolled around what challenge there was on parents. There is fitting them out with new clothing, new sneakers, and then on top of it you had school fees and you had textbooks. Mr. Speaker, to remove that burden of fees and textbooks off the backs of parents was one of the proudest days that I have had in this House of Assembly, I have to tell you that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we invested also in those early critical years. I have been preaching to the Member for St. John's North for the last year-and-a-half. Mr. Speaker, I should mention this; when he started making the few errors around such things as news releases, do you know what I did? I offered an open invitation for him to come over, for me to sit down – not me, I would have some of my staff sit down and explain to him some of the inaccuracies he was pointing out. We wanted to educate him a little bit on education. .

AN HON. MEMBER: Did he show up?

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, he did not show up.

Mr. Speaker, my invitation still stands. I will meet him anywhere.

MR. KIRBY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. John's North, on a point of order.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Estimates is where we ask questions of ministers about the Budget, Mr. Speaker, not some private meeting that the minister wants to hold.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my point in inviting him, with all seriousness, my point in inviting him was I did not want inaccurate information out there upsetting people. I truly, truly did not. There was an invitation. That is what that was about.

Mr. Speaker, I was leading into my trying to educate the member on the investment in the early years. Now, anybody who had children or around young children, all you have to do is look around that two and three years of age and see how much they absorb. Just take a look at

them. These young kids in those early years, very critical years, Mr. Speaker, they possibly learn more in the early zero to three years than they will for the remainder of their life. If you look at them, it is amazing. Just look at how from one day they pick up a language and they go with it. They go with it, and the learning is immense.

All research will show you, if there is a place that you want to invest to have a long-term impact it is in those early years. It is why the Department of Education works so closely with the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, because the two of us have a common interest. It is about the betterment for children. We invest in that educational component and we work as closely as we can with that department to ensure that we are coupling our resources to get the best return for our buck

Mr. Speaker, as much as people talk about other areas of investment, I will certainly never, never make an apology for investment in those very early years. Our investment in that area, I am convinced, will prove returns again and again and again. Our investment in those areas is to be commended, I am certain. I remember when we introduced the Play It Campaign, a video that came from someone outside the Province who recognized what we were doing.

Mr. Speaker, I have about three minutes left. I cannot let this pass. Look at our investment in capital over the past number of years. Mr. Speaker, we have opened up nine brand new schools.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: We have Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Torbay, Placentia, Port Saunders, L'Anse-au-Loup, Port Hope Simpson, Baie Verte, and two in Paradise.

Mr. Speaker, now let's tally up another stat. We have ten more under construction.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many more?

MR. JACKMAN: Ten more schools under construction. We have them in St. Anthony and Carbonear. The Member for The Straits – White Bay North can put up his hand. Mr. Speaker, \$18 million going to schools in St. Anthony.

AN HON. MEMBER: Did he say thank you?

MR. JACKMAN: He has not said thank you. I am expecting the thank you to come on the day we go up and we cut the ribbon officially. He will be there then.

Carbonear, Gander, St. John's – in St. John's we have St. Teresa's. We have one in the Leader of the Third Party, Virginia Park. We have the West End high school. We have planning for Portugal Cove – St. Phillips, Torbay, Pouch Cove, Flatrock, Bauline, Conception Bay South, and Paradise. Mr. Speaker, if you put that with the others that is nineteen schools.

There is one more stat that I am going to get in there. We are doing, Mr. Speaker, twelve major extension and renovation projects. I am not talking about \$100,000 or \$200,000 renovations. These are major multi-million-dollar upgrades to Canon Richards Memorial Academy, Flower's Cove; Pearson Academy, Wesleyville; St. Bernard's Elementary, Witless Bay; St. Peter's Junior High in Mount Pearl; Beachy Cove Elementary; Upper Gullies Elementary; Roncalli Elementary; St. Edward's Elementary in Conception Bay South; New World Island; Riverside Elementary in Shoal Harbour; and St. Paul's Intermediate in Gander.

So, Mr. Speaker, here we go; thirty-one major projects. We have eight additional extension and renovation projects underway.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his time has expired.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, we are up to thirty-nine or forty major construction (inaudible).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, before I move for adjournment, I would like to make all hon. members aware that tomorrow, April 24, the Social Services Committee will meet in the House of Assembly at 9:00 a.m. to review the Estimates of the Department of Health and Community Services.

Tomorrow as well, the Government Services Committee will meet in the House of Assembly at 5:30 p.m. to review the Estimates of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

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

All those in favour of the motion, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

Tomorrow being Wednesday, Private Members' Day, this House stands adjourned until 2:00 p.m. tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.