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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Today, before we start our proceedings, I want to welcome some special guests to our gallery. Today we are joined by seniors from Alderwood Estates and Retirement Centre in Witless Bay. Along with them are their chaperones Judy Power and Katreia Hilton.

Also attending with the group today, we are honoured to have the mother of our Member for Ferryland joining us today, Theresa Hutchings.

Welcome to our gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Mrs. Hutchings, we will assure you, your son will be on his best behaviour today.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Burgeo – La Poile; the Member for the District of Cape St. Francis; the Member for the District of Exploits; the Member for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune; the Member for the District of Lake Melville; and the Member for the District of St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for the District of Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I rise today to congratulate Ms Patricia (Teresa) Simms of Burgeo on being awarded the Canadian Cancer Society's Provincial Certificate of Merit Award for 2013.

Teresa was nominated by the Western Regional Office for her numerous years of volunteerism with the society and other non-profit organizations in her community.

Teresa began volunteering as a Sunday school teacher in Burgeo at the age of fifteen. She has been a confirmation teacher, vestry member with the church, envelope secretary, member of the altar guild, and has been preparing floral arrangements in the church for the past eight years. She volunteered with the Girl Guide movement and became a Ranger leader. She has held various offices with the Lioness' and she started the Sunbeams program in Burgeo twenty-eight years ago for children aged three to five years.

Teresa became involved with the Corner Brook Relay for Life in 2005 where she held the position of Luminary Chair. In 2009, Teresa was inspired to bring the message to her hometown. Teresa and her team created a third-party event called Hoping for a Cure, which has been held annually and raised approximately \$80,000.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join with me in congratulating this tremendous lady, Ms Teresa Simms.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department on their thirty-nine years of service to the communities of Torbay and Flatrock.

On Saturday, April 27, I had the pleasure of attending the 39th Annual Firemen's Ball where they recognized a number of firefighters for their service to the department.

Mr. Speaker, there were members who received pins for five and ten years' service. This year, Mike Matthews was recognized for twenty years of commitment and service to the department.

Mike is also the training officer for the department, making sure they have top-notch training and equipment.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate Ray Clarke who was named firefighter of the year. The William Manning Award was presented this year by Mrs. Joyce Manning. Mr. Manning was the first Major of the Town of Torbay.

I ask all hon. members to join with me in congratulating Chief Mike McGrath and the fire department for thirty-nine years of service to the Towns of Torbay and Flatrock.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, for almost three decades Cora Stanley worked as a librarian with the Bishop's Falls Public Library and on September 25, 2012, the library board held a reception marking her retirement.

Mr. Speaker, Cora was born and raised in Bishop's Falls, and in July of 1983 began working part-time as a library clerk, now referred to as a library assistant, and in 1995 she accepted the position of librarian. Cora also taught school for a couple of years and was always involved with children's activities including teaching Sunday school at her church.

Mr. Speaker, Cora admits the biggest change in the library was when they became automated and older children began visiting for e-mails and Internet services. However, she was interested in the technology and overcame the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Cora Stanley for her contribution to the community and her retirement from the Bishop's Falls Public Library.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Mr. John George, who was inducted into the Newfoundland and Labrador Volleyball Association's Hall of Fame last June for his exemplary leadership in school sports.

A dedicated teacher and administrator during his career, Mr. George volunteered tirelessly with the youth of Harbour Breton, coaching many types of sports such as basketball, floor hockey and volleyball. His small school at St. Joseph's captured 2A, 3A and 4A level championships, and also won medals at the Newfoundland and Labrador Volleyball Association sponsored tournaments.

Among some of the most notable achievements include a gold medal in Wabush, 1982, at the Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games, and a silver medal in Corner Brook at the 1986 Winter Games.

Mr. George was co-founder of the Coast of Bays invitational volleyball tournament back in the 1980s, and over the last twenty-five years students from all across the Island and Labrador have come to play in this major event for a rural small town which Mr. George still helps to referee from time to time. This is one of John's many volunteer commitments.

I ask all members of our hon. House to join me in congratulating Mr. George for becoming a Newfoundland and Labrador Volleyball Association Hall of Famer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the passing of two great leaders of Sheshatshiu.

The passing of Ponas Nuke and Joseph Riche has led to the Innu of Labrador losing two great leaders who worked their entire lives to achieve a better future for the Innu people; and my heart goes out to them.

Ponas Nuke was an elder who guided many members of the Innu community with traditional knowledge and wisdom. It is with this wisdom that many of the decisions about the future of the Innu people are decided. Elders like Ponas Nuke helped raise leaders like Joseph Riche who had a vision for the Innu people.

Joseph Riche, a man I consider a friend, was that type of leader who brought a vision for his people of a better life. He understood that the Innu could embrace new ways for a better future, yet hold onto the teachings of the elders. Both men were vital in achieving the Tshash Petapen Agreement, but their respective importance in the community will be missed.

Tshinashkumitin Ponas

Iame nuitsheuan Joseph.

I ask all hon. members of the House to join me in celebrating the lives of these Innu leaders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, I had the pleasure of attending

CHANNAL's open house. CHANNAL is the Consumers' Health Awareness Network of Newfoundland and Labrador and is the only consumer-led mental health organization in the Province. Their main office is in the heart of St. John's Centre with other locations across the Province.

It is incredible what a handful of hard-working staff and volunteers have done to help this organization grow into an invaluable hub of peer support for folks struggling with mental illness. They talked to me about their challenges, their hopes, and their determination to help each other. They were particularly concerned about the limited mental health services and housing challenges so many face – issues that are often huge factors for people coping with mental health issues.

CHANNAL offers peer support groups based on the concept that those who have experienced mental illness are in the best position to pass on knowledge and support. They are experts in their own lives. The peer support teams work hard to combat isolation and to educate the public on issues relevant to mental health. They also do incredible advocacy on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I invite all members to join me in saying bravo to CHANNAL.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 rise in this hon. House today to highlight the tremendous work that took place at the Offshore Technology Conference, which I

attended in Houston, Texas last week. This was a valuable opportunity for me to not only discuss offshore technology with other leaders in this industry but also support our Newfoundland and Labrador delegation of 180 offshore service and supply sector companies who were there to market their products, skills, and services.

At the conference again this year, our Province received many accolades and praise about the work that is taking place right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, the quality of service from our companies, and the calibre and skills of our people who work in the offshore.

Companies, Mr. Speaker, from all over the world recognize that this is an exciting time to be doing business in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially in our offshore.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to make strategic investments in our offshore, to grow this industry, to build our prospects, because there are still many benefits lying under the ocean floor, waiting for us to harvest.

That is why our investment in our own provincially-owned energy company is so important. By establishing Nalcor we ensured that the returns from our energy sector are better now than they have ever been in our Province's history.

For example, Mr. Speaker, through a \$30 million investment in seismic work in Labrador, Nalcor was able to leverage \$65 million from a renowned geoscience firm and we are getting every cent we invested back and more besides.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Even more important than that, Mr. Speaker, the results of this seismic work are incredibly interesting, incredibly exciting, and companies from all over the world are vying for access to this data.

This investment by our government shows our vision and plan for this Province, Mr. Speaker. This seismic data will mean billions of dollars

for Newfoundland and Labrador in the long run and a secure future for our children.

Mr. Speaker, every oil project we have negotiated, we have generated more and more revenue and benefits for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to be steady and sure, do our research, and make sure that all of our decisions on offshore activity provide the maximum benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege to respond to this statement today. Indeed, we do whatever we can on all sides of the House, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians of all stripes; we do whatever we can to promote this Province. We have seen the success, for instance, in the tourism industry when we do that. Promoting our Province is the right thing to do and it can create significant external investment, too, when we do this properly.

It is important, though, that every opportunity we get we do whatever we can and we maximize the benefits of all our natural resources, I say, Mr. Speaker. We continue to talk about oil and gas, and primarily right now it is oil. As the gas developments are happening around the world, we still wait and see where we will fit into this global picture.

The Premier mentioned the employees. No matter where we go, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians hold their own and they are held in high esteem, I say, Mr. Speaker. We have some of the best employees. I am not surprised that in Houston, Texas they are finding this out as well.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me today not to mention that we have seen many successive Administrations, including this one, that has

built the oil and industry where it is in this Province. We and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians look forward to a bright future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

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

I find the statement from the Premier quite interesting. I am very glad that she was at the conference; obviously, it is important to be at that. We all know that we have a burgeoning oil and gas industry; we know where it has come. Once again, the government puts everything over the top. If it was so wonderful I wonder why the Minister of Natural Resources was not with her, by the way.

The Premier talks about the strategic investments in our offshore. Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier to rethink about the investments in the people. They have just let go over 1,000 workers. We have a crisis with our home care workers right now, with workers who take care of our disabled people and senior people being told their jobs are going to be gone because they will not put their salaries up by twenty-five cents or something.

I am not impressed. Once again we have all the eggs in the basket of oil and gas without any talk of diversification of our economy. This Premier is promoting what she has here in this statement without thinking about the fact that they have planned so badly with the billions we have already gotten that we are now in deficit.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. John's South, by leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: No leave.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize National Police Week which runs until May 18. This occasion provides us with an opportunity to acknowledge the valuable work performed by policing services, and to promote awareness of law enforcement and the community working together to provide a safe and secure Province for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Throughout National Police Week, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police organize and take part in activities to increase awareness of the services they provide the residents of our Province. To coincide with this, Mr. Speaker, we encourage the public to work in partnership with police services by reporting crimes to assist in creating safe, positive communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

To officially launch National Police Week this morning, I had the great pleasure of attending a cake-cutting ceremony with officials of the RCMP and the RNC at Holy Cross Junior High right here in St. John's. I would like to thank everyone who was involved for making this a special event for all who attended.

Every year, May 15 is recognized as International Police and Peace Officer Memorial Day and it is a time to honour those officers who have died in the line of duty. This year, Mr. Speaker, a service will be held at the Seventh Day Adventist Church on St. John's on Wednesday morning. I will be attending on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, our government has made significant investments in recent years in policing services throughout the Province. Since 2004, we have invested approximately \$920 million in the RCMP and the RNC and we have

seen more than 140 new officers added back to the system. The total annual policing budget has increased by approximately \$50 million during that time.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we demonstrated our continued commitment to dealing with the criminal element by investing \$1 million through Budget 2013 to create a new provincial Task Force on Child Exploitation and Drugs. The team is a joint effort between the RCMP and the RNC to strengthen the fight against child exploitation, illegal drugs, and organized crime in our Province.

In Newfoundland and Labrador and across the country, members of our law enforcement services make sacrifices in their personal lives and often face difficult and dangerous situations.

I ask all hon. members to join me in thanking all members of the RNC and the RCMP for the work they do each and every day. We are very proud of their accomplishments and we are fully supportive of their efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. On behalf of the Official Opposition, certainly we would also like to recognize the great work done by police officers in our Province, whether that is with the RNC or with the RCMP.

No matter where you live in this Province, we all know of officers, besides the tough job that they do, they give themselves fully to their communities, whether getting involved in volunteer activities or presentations at schools. I am so happy to see that and see the effort that they put into making this Province a better place. May 15 will be a solemn day as we recognize

those officers who have given their lives in the line of duty.

Again, I was very happy to hear about the investment made by the Province in the new provincial Task Force on Child Exploitation and Drugs. I think it is a great thing. Unfortunately, I was not so happy to see the significant gutting of the rest of the Justice Department that also took place in this Budget. I am hoping that the good work being done by these officers is not counteracted by all the cuts in the rest of the system, whether it be the removal of courts, prosecutors, legal aid, sheriff's officers. I am happy to see this on one hand, but on the other hand we know these police officers may often be taking certain elements off the streets and putting them into a court system that can barely process them.

Thank you for the opportunity, and thank each and every one of the members of the RNC and the RCMP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I too thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I also would like to commend the hard work of our police services in this Province, including those who have been injured or lost their lives in the line of duty, and who will be honoured on International Police and Peace Officer Memorial Day. I would also like to thank them for their dedication, commitment, service, courage, and compassion.

There is no doubt that our police services have benefitted from increased financial support over the last decade. Notably, that support has enabled the police to be trained in violence prevention and mental health issues, and now to the creation of the Task Force on Child Exploitation and Drugs. This makes it all the more baffling that while this Minister of Justice cut the Family Violence Intervention Court – this was a vital program supported by the

women's community, the legal community, and the police themselves. They fully understood the role this court played in the reduction of recidivism and the increase in safety for victims of family violence, particularly women and children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Emissions Trading.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HEDDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this hon. House on the continued work of our government to support our communities as they combat the impacts of climate change and help to turn back the tide.

The Office of Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Emissions Trading developed a Municipal Government Carbon Calculator, an interactive and innovative tool to help municipalities understand the carbon footprint of their operations. This initiative is instrumental as our municipal governments in the Province continue to identify ways to reduce electricity and fuel costs. The calculator is easy to use and get employees, councillors and other community leaders more engaged in recycling, reducing the amount of waste going into landfills. Mr. Speaker, the calculator is available on the Turn Back the Tide Web site.

To encourage municipalities to get involved, we launched the Carbon Calculator this past weekend at the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador Symposium in Gander where my officials successfully demonstrated it before a large group of our community leaders. To complement the calculator, we launched the Carbon Footprint Challenge in partnership with the Department of Municipal Affairs. Once municipalities calculate their carbon footprint they can enter to win one of three \$5,000 prizes

after they explain how they would use the prize money to lower those results. All of those contest details are available at: turnbackthetide.ca.

Mr. Speaker, we know every dollar matters to our municipalities and this tool can be used to identify areas where efficiencies can be found and directed to other areas of need. This is just one initiative our government is working on to lower greenhouse gas emissions, a key goal of Moving Forward: Climate Change Action Plan 2011.

Consistent with government's commitment to integrate climate change into decision making, the calculator will also be incorporated into the Tidy Towns award from 2014 onwards.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that climate change is one of the greatest long-term challenges facing the world today. We are committed to doing our part, and I encourage all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to help us turn back the tide on climate change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of the Ministerial Statement. I, too, attended the symposium this weekend in Gander, and it was a good symposium. I guess one of the parts about it is when the minister got up on Friday at lunch to speak about this proposal he spent the first fifteen minutes praising up the Premier and talking about why people should not pick on the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I found it kind of amusing. You were out trying to promote waste and carbon footprint but you had electricity going on for fifteen minutes talking about that, Mr. Speaker.

The problem we have in the municipalities, Mr. Speaker, is the lack of funds for a lot of municipal leaders to do the duties. That is why we need this complete package for municipalities, this fiscal arrangement for all municipalities, so they can do this kind of stuff.

Mr. Speaker, as we noticed, we are talking about the carbon footprint, I am still waiting since 2010, the waste management disposal site is supposed to be up and running in Western Newfoundland but that is still not done. That is delayed until 2016-2017.

My only wish, Mr. Speaker, on the point the minister put through on this calculator, is that it is going to be much better than the electric calculator he used for Muskrat Falls. Mr. Speaker, if it works better than that, I am all for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is one thing that can be said for calculators: this government does love calculators; that is for sure.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. At the same time, I think there are a lot of things that you can do right, a lot of little things, I guess, like this that can go to make an impact on the world.

I have to note, first off, there was a news story on Friday that broke through Bloombergs talking about a little monitoring station on the top of Mount Kilauea that, for the first time in our human history, picked up carbon emissions that measured past 400 parts per million – for the first time in human history. That will tell you about the impact we are actually having on this earth, that we are polluting it and we are

slowly killing it if we do not step forward and do something.

I want to thank the minister for that, and at the same time, just to remind him too that while we are doing something positive here for municipalities –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

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

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is evident from the tragic loss of life last week in Labrador the gap still exists in search and rescue in this Province. This time the federal search and rescue resources were unavailable as three Griffons were in maintenance in Goose Bay. Last year if you remember, in 2012, two were unavailable.

I ask the Premier: Was your government aware that the Griffons stationed in 5 Wing Goose Bay were not available for search and rescue, and were you aware that it is not a priority for search and rescue in this Province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I bring the hon. member's attention back to last week when I answered a number of questions in this House, particularly from himself in regard to search and rescue. What we are asking the federal government is to act now. We need action now.

In regard to your private member's bill on Wednesday, all you want to do is study it again, but we need action. If those Griffons are out of service then we need something to complement that service. I gave the hon. Minister of Defence some initiatives that he could enact pretty quickly to enhance the service that is currently here in the Province, and it is up to him. I wrote him again today imploring him to take action, and action now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, it does not take much action for someone to pick up a phone and say we have three Griffons stationed in 5 Wing Goose Bay that are not available to respond to a search and rescue. That was my question, if the minister was aware of it.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that search and rescue is not a priority at 5 Wing Goose Bay and that national defence places it third behind combat services and wing command. It took another tragedy to discover there was no helicopter available at 5 Wing and that a replacement had to be flown in from Quebec.

I ask the Premier: In your regular conversations with the Prime Minister, have you let him know just how important it is to inform the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when search and rescue assets are not available?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: I met with the minister last week, Minister MacKay. As well, I wrote him at various times. One of the things I have asked for in regard to those meetings was detailed data from the JRCC site in Halifax. I want to know the condition of their aircraft. I want to know the availability of their aircraft. I want to know all the data surrounding all of the incidents and wheels-up times. I have asked for all of that. I

am expecting to get that because he had indicated he is willing to participate with the Province in regard to the search and rescue issues in this Province, as well as the rest of Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Lake Melville admitted last week the Province does not have the capability to carry out aerial search and rescue activities during the night time.

I ask the Premier: Why are we leaving the people of this Province without search and rescue capability even from the Province during the time when it is needed the most?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, that is no different than anywhere else in Canada, or just about anywhere else in Canada, in regard to provision of night flying. That is provided by the military in various parts of the country and all of the provinces, especially here in Newfoundland and Labrador in the North.

We contract helicopters that fly in daylight hours, and we contract them at a minute's notice when asked to provide them. They are provided through a private source. We have them in various areas in the Province, six in total I believe, that we have access to at one call. This is no different than anywhere else in Canada.

The 103 Search and Rescue team out of Gander complements that service in regard to night service and night vision services. So that is no different than anywhere else in Canada, I say to the hon. member.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, we talk about having a gold standard, a world-class search and rescue. Simply because it is not available anywhere else in Canada is not reason enough. We need to know when the assets are not available; we need to know in parts of this Province that you can actually reach somebody in the night time.

The latest death confirms yet that there are still serious shortfalls in all aspects of search and rescue, including provincial ground search and rescue responsibility, shortfalls that the federal Auditor General did not address.

I ask the Premier and this government once again: Will you call a public inquiry into search and rescue to identify all the gaps that exist so we can prevent more tragedies?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, we have twenty-five ground search and rescue teams across this Province to provide a great service to the people, especially in times of tragedy and in times of loss. They are well-trained, well-equipped and continue to train. As a matter of fact, back in my former life I did a lot of training with them, so I do know their capabilities.

Is he questioning that there is something wrong with our ground search and rescue teams? That they need to be reviewed? There are great volunteers in this Province that I have a great lot of respect for. I know our government has a great lot of respect for them. I know that our Premier has a great lot of respect for them.

Are you finding or are you saying something here in the House that I am not understanding, that there are issues with our ground search and rescue teams in this Province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, that is an absolutely, shameful response. This was never about the volunteers. We have twenty-five great ground search and rescue teams in this Province. My question was that even with those great people available, there are serious gaps within the system around search and rescue.

That was my question: Will you do an inquiry, not to determine if we have good people, but to determine where the gaps are?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, he did not listen to my response. What I want to know from him, where are the gaps? I have been a part of that for sixteen years in regard to the Canadian Rangers. I know exactly what is happening out there in ground search and rescue. I helped train many individuals in the Canadian Rangers.

If you know where there are gaps, lay them out to me. You know my number; you can cross this House as soon as Question Period is over and let me know exactly what they are.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing is that is what the inquiry would do for a start, it would identify those gaps. The minister knows when you cannot respond to a significant inquiry about that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: – three or four hours are not good enough I say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it was revealed late Thursday night that the former deputy minister was paid almost \$425,000 in benefits when he retired. That \$425,000 was paid leave, pension, and severance.

I ask the minister: Will you provide this House with a complete breakdown of the \$425,000 in retirement benefits paid to the former deputy minister?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

That is right, Mr. Speaker, in the Estimates on Thursday night we talked about that particular issue. This was an executive level public servant who had a lengthy tenure with this government in the status of a deputy minister position, and in the last five years was seconded as the Director of the Council of Atlantic Premiers for a five-year rotation. After that lengthy tenure, Mr. Speaker, he would have been entitled to considerable benefits, as the hon. member pointed out. Mr. Speaker, anything he got at that particular time, he was entitled to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I would assume, based on the comment, that the minister would not have any problems tabling the information that I asked for.

The Premier announced on Budget day that she would be the new Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. The Minister of Finance said that that would occur on June 1, yet late Thursday night the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs said that he does not know when this is going to happen.

So I ask the Premier: On June 1, who will be the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Mr. Speaker, my answer to the Leader of the Opposition is to wait and see. I am the Premier of this government, Mr. Speaker, and members of Cabinet serve at my pleasure. When I am going to do a Cabinet shuffle or transfer responsibilities, at the immediate time I am going to do it, I will advise him and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador at the same time.

We said that in due course we would do the transition on the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Speaker, and we are doing that. As soon as that work is completed, I will be making an announcement to that effect.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the Minister of Finance said June 1, so we took the Minister of Finance at his word that it would be, so that was my question. It does have Budget implications, I would say, too.

It is in the media today that the government secretly spend \$150,000 for public relations advice. The objective was to develop a strategic plan on communications with a priority on the Premier's office.

So I ask the Premier: How do you justify spending \$150,000 in taxpayers' money on a public relations makeover, while we are laying off thousands of hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was nothing secretive about this, and we were not seeking public relations advice. What was taking place here is that there was a review of the communications personnel and the communications departments within government to determine whether or not they are in line with best practices as seen throughout the country; also to determine whether or not they were as efficient and as effective as possible, in line with the core mandate review.

I do not think I need to remind the member opposite that communications personnel in government are not political staff; they are members of the public service. They are not involved in political events such as fundraisers, and they are not involved in political speeches.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a function within government that deals with a division that is important, and it was simply a review to see if we could better deliver services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, government has over forty communications staff, as well as a separate communications branch in Executive Council – and they are good people – even with all this in-house expertise, the Premier went to a Toronto-based PR firm to spend the \$150,000.

I ask the Premier: Your Budget cut programs in Education, in Justice, in Health, are these not as important to the taxpayers as a public image?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This did not have to do with public image, nor did it have to do with public relations advice. It is not in relation to the political functioning of

ministers. What it is relating to, Mr. Speaker, is how messages are delivered to the people of this Province on a daily basis, whether it be in forms of news releases, setting up Web sites, the information that people need to know. There is nothing secretive about it, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the review included a review of best practices in other Canadian jurisdictions.

I am not aware, Mr. Speaker, of a review like this having been conducted in the past. It was simply a part of doing business and, like everything else, trying to determine if services are being delivered as effectively, as efficiently as possible; and if not, were there savings that could be found.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Well, I am glad the minister mentioned there is nothing to hide behind because this question is probably one that I do not even need to use now because the \$150,000 that was spent for PR advice, you refused to release that document.

I ask the Premier: Will you continue to hide behind Bill 29 or will you release this document, a \$150,000 document that you paid for from this PR firm – will you release this document to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this document being referred to, this review, is one that forms part of advice given to Cabinet and that is excluded from provision under the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It is clear here that it is part of an official Cabinet record and in that respect should not be disclosed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Tonight the Eastern School District in a public meeting will be forced to reverse itself on a decision to close two schools at Whitbourne and Heart's Delight-Islington. This was because they failed to consult with parents and they met a court challenge.

I ask the Minister of Education: Did the Eastern School District get a legal opinion as to what they were doing when they closed these schools? If so, did they provide him with a copy and will he tender it so people can read the copy?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, as I have said in this House on a number of occasions, we have an elected school board. These are trustees who have made a decision and now they have gotten some advice that they need to consult further with the parents. Mr. Speaker, I have not interfered with that operation up to this point, and I have no intention of interfering up until they make their decisions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, last week in the Education Estimates, the Minister of Education said that he had obtained a legal opinion as to the legality of him closing the school boards, like he plans to do. He said that he would provide a copy of that legal opinion. He has not yet provided a copy.

I ask if he would provide a copy of the legal opinion supporting school board closures and tender it in this House.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, he asked for it last week and I told him I would get it to him. He has not gotten it yet, but let him rest assured, he shall receive it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, given that the legal opinion and the actions of the Eastern School District failed in the face of a court challenge.

I ask the Minister of Education: What guarantee can he give this House that his decision to close the school boards will not also fail the test of a court challenge if it comes between now and September?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, these are elected trustees who have made a decision, who will carry that process through. We have not interfered. We will allow them to continue their work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Advanced Education and Skills have stated that ABE students at the Waterford will receive the same ABE instruction as they do now, at the same location.

I ask the minister: Will the College of the North Atlantic continue to deliver this program at the Waterford?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, as we have said, the ABE program will continue in Newfoundland and Labrador; however, it will not be offered by the College of the North Atlantic.

One of the sites where we deliver Adult Basic Education is at the Waterford Hospital. The program will continue at the Waterford Hospital; however, it will not be delivered by the College of the North Atlantic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, in an article in *The Telegram* this weekend it was stated by the Department of Advanced Education through a press release, very vaguely, that the government will provide the same ABE service at the same location, which would imply that the College of the North Atlantic would be providing it.

I ask the minister: Why is a press release being released from your department so vague, implying that the College of the North Atlantic might still offer that program?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the ABE program, there is a prescribed curriculum that is developed. That same curriculum will be delivered. We also have a student-teacher ratio. That same ratio will be maintained and it will be delivered at the same location. The only difference will be, and as we have said all along, is that it will not be offered by the College of the North Atlantic. Other than that, the same program at the same location with the same student-teacher ratio will be offered.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, we saw the botched efforts by the government when they took over the Abitibi mill. In Estimates, I asked the Minister of Transportation and Works of the cost for security and maintenance for the last several years. The minister at the time committed to give me the numbers, the cost for the thirty-eight employees that the government hired.

I ask the minister: What was the cost for the thirty-eight employees who your department hired for security and maintenance for the last two years at the botched takeover of the Abitibi mill in Grand Falls?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We retained a number of former employees of the Abitibi operation in Grand Falls-Windsor to carry out maintenance and to review the site from time to time. They did some upgrades to the perimeter fencing. They also provide some security services.

There was a large number – if memory serves me correct, I do not have it here in front of me, Mr. Speaker. There were more than two dozen employees. Some received some work and had some hours, and some had very few. There were actually some of them as I understand in the last year who never created any hours or did any work there, even though we still had them available to us. We still have those employees available to us should the need arise to have them or to utilize them on the site there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

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

Over the past sixteen months we have experienced three incidents within provincial

jurisdiction that have led to questions about our search and rescue capabilities; two in Labrador, both of which ended in tragedies, and one in the Grand Falls-Windsor area.

There should be two internal reports already in place which government has not made public. We assume that this government will do the right thing and investigate the latest death, that of former Innu Nation Chief Joseph Riche.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: When is her government going to deal with its responsibility for search and rescue on the land and in the waters of this Province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Clearly, the hon. member does not understand the responsibilities for search and rescue in this Province, nor in Canada. Marine is covered off by the federal government, and then the ground and search rescue teams are covered off by the Province, which we have twenty-five ground search and rescue teams in the Province.

We have, and I have, met with the federal minister only last week. I have written him on several occasions and I wrote him again this morning. I will keep pressing him to provide the proper and adequate service in Newfoundland and Labrador, through either the military, or augmented with private industry, whatever it takes. We want adequate search and rescue in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I point out to the minister that marine means the water that the Island is in. I am talking about the

water that is on the Island and on Labrador. The people of the Province want actions, not words, which we have just gotten again, Mr. Speaker, from the minister.

I ask the Premier: Will she please tell us what their plan is to improve provincial search and rescue capabilities?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious issue for the Province and I am appalled that people in this House are questioning the credibility of our ground search and rescue teams in the Province. There are twenty-five well-trained volunteer groups across this Province providing great service in conjunction with the RNC and RCMP, and have done a fabulous job for over twenty-five or thirty years that I have been involved with them. Now, to have people in the House up questioning their integrity and the service they provide, I cannot believe it.

I will continue to press the federal minister in regard to the services the federal government provides not only to this Province, but also the rest of the other provinces and Territories in Canada. I will keep doing that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

This government has engineered a crisis in this Province today regarding home care. Home support workers across the Province are receiving letters from their employers saying

they will be out of work on June 30. Some businesses are fearing closure.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Why is this government refusing to take responsibility and work with the agencies and the union on this issue?

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, our home support agencies are private businesses in this Province. They set their own terms, they negotiate with their workers, they set their wages, et cetera. That is not our responsibility. That is the work they do and we are not party to any of those decisions.

Home care is very important to us in this Province, Mr. Speaker. That is why we invest up to \$160 million every year in home support. There is still a Home Support Program available in the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2007, I was asking questions around the extremely high employee turnover of home support workers, and at that time government increased workers' salaries approximately by twenty-five cents an hour. Now we have the government refusing to acknowledge that support for workers is still needed, and many may lose their jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Has she done an analysis of what this situation will do to people who need home care and on the possible impacts to the health care system?

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, I must remind the member opposite again that she is talking about a private business association in this Province. What we are concerned about is the home care that is needed for the people of the Province. We still have our self-managed component of that care in place and it is something we are exceptionally proud.

Mr. Speaker, we serve more than 8,200 home support clients a year. Any of the disputes that happen outside within the home support organizations are just that. Those are disputes within their organizations themselves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All the minister is doing is listing off facts which have nothing to do with the fact that they know they were involved in helping the agencies to be able to give the salaries that they were giving.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: When is this government going to produce a real strategic plan for dealing with the long-term and home care needs in this Province?

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, it is unbelievable that the member opposite should ask what we are going to do about long-term care in this Province. Mr. Speaker, there is no other government that has ever invested as much in long-term care as this particular government has.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Mr. Speaker, in terms of our investment around long-term care, around home support, and around any of the programs that we have put in place we are second to none, Mr. Speaker. I would venture to say it – in fact, I know it to be a fact from when I am attending any of the meetings that I do with my provincial counterparts, they are constantly looking for our input, our direction, and how it is that we are accomplishing what we are accomplishing here in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

I find it absolutely appalling that somebody from our own Province would criticize what the rest of Canada (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Home care agencies in Newfoundland and Labrador negotiated a four-year collective agreement giving small incremental increases to home care workers. Historically, the government gave an adequate adjustment to cover the rise in cost to service delivery. Last year, government provided only half of what was needed and there is no commitment for this year. Already one agency has notified its workers that it is closing and there are rumours of more to come.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will she provide the resources needed for an adequate adjustment for fee for service to 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, I suggest that she consult with her leader when they are putting together questions because the same question was just asked.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, it is not our responsibility to get involved in negotiations between private business and their workers. Mr. Speaker, if private business wants to go out and negotiate something with their employees, then they really ought to check and see if they can afford what it is that they are negotiating. That is not our responsibility. It is the responsibility of the business itself.

Mr. Speaker, we are offering home care in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, these agencies are providing that service on behalf of the government; the government sets the service fees.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's department is telling seniors and some of our most vulnerable people they will have to do self-managed care for home care if agencies close.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Hiring and supervising their own home care workers.

I ask the minister: In the absence of a universal home care program and with home care agencies in communities closing, how will the minister provide safety control and case management for some of our most vulnerable citizens?

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, I wondered how long it would take her to get to universal again. It is the same mantra we hear in this House day after day after day; no idea how anything is going to be paid for except the taxing that the leader talked about on Open Line the other day, taxing of the population to pay for whatever it is that we are going to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS SULLIVAN: We are offering home support in this Province, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the self-managed care is availed of by at least 50 per cent of the population. Not only is self-managed care a very viable option but it also offers more hours of care for those who need it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the Comprehensive Arts and Science Transfer program at College of the North Atlantic allow students to save

thousands of dollars while completing their first year of university in or near their home towns.

Can the minister confirm that college funding cuts will not impact the number of seats or the cost of tuition for the CAS Transfer college university program?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, the College of the North Atlantic introduced what is known as CAS, the course that bridges students sometimes between high school and the college, and we are very proud of that program. It does support many students in this Province. The College of the North Atlantic will continue to offer programs where there is capacity to offer these programs and to provide the best service possible to the students of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, this government is also committed as well to a tuition freeze to ensure that people who attend our public post-secondary institutions, whether Memorial University or the College of the North Atlantic, have the lowest tuitions in Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the transition program is not the transfer program, so I encourage the minister to familiarize herself with the calendar for the College of the North Atlantic.

Resource facilitators who provide services to students with disabilities are among those who have lost their positions with government's program destroying cuts to College of the North Atlantic.

Who will provide supports and accommodations to students with disabilities at the college now that these positions have been cut?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, the College of the North Atlantic provides excellent service to the students who attend that facility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, the college will continue to offer programs that help meet the labour market demands of this Province to be able to enable its students who graduate to be able to take up and fill in the gaps of this labour market.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, the students who are at the college this year, the students who will be there next year and into the future, will continue to receive that same excellent quality service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's North, without a preamble, a quick question.

MR. KIRBY: Did the minister realize that she would be targeting students with disabilities when she decided to gamble with the future of the college with these program-destroying cuts?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, for a quick response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, this government has invested more in post-secondary education in

this Province than any other government in the history of this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: To hear the member talk about the fact that we may not be able to accommodate or facilitate or provide excellent services to people with disabilities is absolutely pathetic, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe, the Chair of Public Accounts.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the first report of the Standing Committee of Public Accounts.

I can advise this hon. House, we reviewed the entire Auditor General's report last year and met with the Auditor General early in the year to hear from his audit officials on every item. We wrote to all of the entities that were covered by the Auditor General, and we had hearings on five of the entities. Three were full-day hearings; two were half-day hearings.

Mr. Speaker, I can also advise that the person who has the most institutional knowledge, in my view, dealing with this is not mentioned in the report, and that is Ms Murphy. Our committee is absolutely indebted to her assistance in putting together this report and in running public accounts over the course of the year.

I can advise the House, Mr. Speaker, in spite of people of differing political affiliations, every decision was arrived at by consensus. In addition to the report, the committee put together a practice and procedures manual because we were operating in a manner more or less like by hearsay or by common law or by

past practice. So, in addition to the report there is a full practice and procedures manual available for this year and for coming years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, seconded by the Member for Port au Port, do read the following motion for debate on our next Private Members' Day:

BE IT RESOLVED that the hon. House supports the establishment of a task force on child exploitation and drugs, a joint effort between the RCMP and the RNC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. 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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the offshore of the West Coast of the Island of Newfoundland is recognized as a region containing potentially billions of barrels of oil; and

WHEREAS hydraulic fracturing could be an accepted and effective method of petroleum discovery and exploration, and is compatible with the protection of the natural environment and water sources when executed within the context of a comprehensive regulatory framework; and

WHEREAS the petroleum exploration sector needs the certainty and confidence of a stable regulatory regime; and

WHEREAS with that regulatory regime, oil discovery and industry development could proceed, unprecedented economic opportunity, and bring people home to a currently economically challenged region; and

WHEREAS the undersigned support property-regulated exploration and development of oil and gas resources in the Province;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce a regulatory framework immediately under which hydraulic fracturing could proceed safely, and move this industry forward in Western Newfoundland.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell by the addresses but also the names of these individuals, they are actually from the Port au Choix area. The end of the Green Point shale formation ends in Bellburns and that is approximately sixty or seventy kilometres by road and probably less by water to Port au Choix.

This is an area maybe three-quarters of an hour drive north of the northern most extension of the Green Point shale formation. There is significant interest in the Great Northern Peninsula that this development proceed; that it proceed reasonably and responsibly but that it proceed. The residents in the region are very concerned that the project be stopped or that the oil companies lose interest or feel that they cannot proceed because they are not provided with adequate regulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: 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 the Adult Basic Education programming at the College of the North Atlantic.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker this petition is signed by nearly 400 constituents of mine from St. Anthony, Goose Cove, St. Carols, Green Island Cove, Green Island Brook, Great Brehat, Cook's Harbour; there is also a signature from Forteau, Labrador, and Mary's Harbour.

There are a number of people who are quite concerned because on the Great Northern Peninsula, for hundreds of kilometres, the College of the North Atlantic in St. Anthony was the only location where they could actually access Adult Basic Education. I had written the

Minister of Advanced Education and Skills with this concern and there is no guarantee, based on the response, that Adult Basic Education would be offered in St. Anthony. We see enabling legislation with "may" and "shall" and when we hear of things that may be offered, well there is no certainty.

I am very concerned. The loss of Adult Basic Education in my district, in an area that has a high number of people who do not have a high school equivalency, this is something that is essential, it is important that this service be provided, and the petitioners are asking for this decision to be reversed.

This is the second time I have presented such a petition and I know that a number of other members of this House, including the Member for St. John's North, have presented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

WHEREAS home care allows the elderly and people with disabilities to remain within the comfort and security of their own homes; home care also allows people to be discharged from hospital earlier; and

WHEREAS many families find it very difficult to recruit and retain home care workers for their loved ones; and

WHEREAS the PC Blue Book 2011, as well as the 2012 Speech from the Throne, committed that government would develop a new model of home care and give people the option of receiving that care from family members; and

WHEREAS the government has given no time commitment for when government plans to implement paying family caregivers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement the new home care model to cover family caregivers.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition that is mostly signed by constituents of mine who reside in Burgeo, where I happened to be the weekend. One of the things that actually came up while I was down there is they asked about this home care program, since it was something we brought up in Question Period. They said: It is funny because we were promised this in the election and then we were promised it in Speech from the Throne. They said: Well, something must be happening because they actually put some money aside for it in the Budget.

It was a very specific amount. It was \$6.1 million this year and \$8.2 million next year. If you are putting specific figures like that in, you must assume there is something very specific lined up. Upon questioning, we have still actually had no answers as to when we are going to see this. I am one of the many people in this Province who is sitting here waiting to see when the government is going to live up to this promise. Now, we know it was announced in the Budget and hopefully we would have heard something. It was good news amongst the sea of bad news that was the 2013 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, we have asked about it. We keep getting answers that range from very soon to very, very soon. I was assuming we might have seen something perhaps in June month, given the figures and if you pro-rate them. We have had no commitment and I am not aware as to whether there is any planning. I hope I am wrong. I hope something is going to be done. I hope government lives up to this as-yet-unfulfilled promise.

Thank you.

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

MR. MURPHY: 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 the process of slickwater hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, injects hazardous chemicals into rock formations to extract oil, and is polluting groundwater and air across North America; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has commissioned an assessment of the potential environmental impacts of shale oil and gas extraction in Canada, including fracking; and

WHEREAS Quebec, Nova Scotia, and a number of US states have halted fracking, and others are introducing regulations specific to fracking; and

WHEREAS it is incumbent upon the provincial government to ensure our natural environment is protected from harmful industrial processes;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to impose a moratorium on slickwater fracking until it develops comprehensive regulations and ensures each proposed project undergoes a conclusive environmental assessment to determine whether it is safe for the environment, the integrity of water supplies, and human health.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, again I stand in this House to present this petition asking for a moratorium, amongst other things. The people have been responding from the West Coast, the Port au

Port and Stephenville area, Noels Pond, St. George's, Corner Brook, and I could go on.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to belabour this point too much, but I will say this: UNESCO will be discussing the state of conservation for the Gros Morne National Park at its conference. The thirty-seventh session of the World Heritage Committee will be meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia between June 17 and June 27, 2013 on the topic of Gros Morne Park, and the state of conservation there has become an issue to UNESCO.

Now, I cannot say it any plainer than that, the risk to the tourism industry that is going to be occurring on the West Coast, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: Again, I present this to the House of Assembly on behalf of the people concerned here. This concerns all areas of the Province and indeed these people are speaking on behalf of people generally worldwide who are concerned with the fracking industry. It is time that government acts. UNESCO is going to be paying attention to this one in June month.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As per Standing Order 32, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that we move to Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that we move to Orders of the Day.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, just to remind the House by way of notice that the private member's motion shared a few moments by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island will be the one that government will table for debate this coming Wednesday, Private Members' Day.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, Motion 6, pursuant to Standing Order 11 that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Monday, May 13, 2013.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KING: Further, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, Motion 7, pursuant to Standing Order 11 that this House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. today, Monday, May 13, 2013.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 13, 2013.

It is further moved, according to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Monday, May 13, 2013.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, at this time in Orders of the Day, we will move to Order 2, Concurrence Motion. I call section (b) debate on the Resource Committee report from Estimates.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will stand today just to have a few words on the debate on the Budget, the Concurrence debate here today.

Mr. Speaker, the first item I am going to speak about is the Kruger mill in Corner Brook. I am going to have a few words on that today because, as we know, it takes in part of the district in Corner Brook, and the Bay of Islands. It is very vital to the economy in Western Newfoundland and Corner Brook in general, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say starting out is I would like to commend the Minister of Natural Resources, the former Minister of Finance, the Member for Humber West, myself, and the Member for Humber Valley, that we all worked together to try to keep this mill viable for Western Newfoundland and the integrated sawmill industry – not just the mill workers, but the whole industry in Western Newfoundland.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, we worked well. There were times we had some heated discussions and debates on it. There were many times when the discussions, we had to be very careful because it was a nip and tuck if this was going to succeed. If we were going to come up with a plan –

MR. MARSHALL: It is not over yet.

MR. JOYCE: – and it is not over yet, I say to the Minister of Natural Resources. I agree, it is not over, but I have to commend everybody involved.

Mr. Speaker, I have to take exception to some things members of the Third Party made. It has

been at me for a while and now that we are at this stage. I took personal exception when the Member for St. John's North Tweeted that I was trying to work with the government to break the unions in Corner Brook. That personally bothered me, Mr. Speaker. That personally bothered me because for him, the Member for St. John's North to send out Tweets all across this Province saying that I am in cahoots with the Member for Humber West, the Member for Humber East, the Member for Humber Valley, to try to ruin our family and friends in Corner Brook is irresponsible. It is not true.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that after reflection he did apologize. There was no Tweet sent out saying it was not true, he just apologized. So, that bothered me for the longest time. I confronted him on it. I asked him for any proof, he could not make any proof because it never happened.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that bothered me more and more about all of this, as I was trying to work with government, which we did do, and the Member for Humber Valley was working with everybody, is when we had the heated debate about the mill. We heard the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for St. John's North – and I know at the time when they were going off questioning government, questioning my integrity, they never met with the union once.

To me, that was a personal reflection on these members who, at the mill out in Corner Brook, were saying: Okay, if it survives we did it by raising all the issues. If it went down under: Oh, we told you so. Mr. Speaker, I personally took offence to that, because I have no problem whatsoever, if we are going to do something, let's stand up and say we are going to work together and let's stick to our guns on it.

Mr. Speaker, again, I had to bring up that issue. The Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Humber Valley, put out the stipulations on the loan itself, so I do not need to go over them again. I just wanted to speak on that because it was an issue that was close to me. That was an

issue I took personally and that was an issue that was absolutely, categorically, positively false.

Now the Member for St. John's North, I hope, will publicly stand up and say it was false. I hope the Leader of the Third Party will stand up now and say with all their ranting going on about the mill in Corner Brook, at the time she was making it, Mr. Speaker, they never met with the local mill unions once, never met with them once.

Mr. Speaker, I have to tell this story because if it is all right to put out false information about the Member for the Bay of Islands which is absolutely, categorically false, let me tell you about the Member for St. John's North, the meeting he had with the union. Let me tell you about the so-called meeting he had.

He went out on the long weekend. He called one of the guys up and said: Listen, can we get together and have a chat? He said: Well, boy, it is a long weekend. Let's get together and have a chat. This is factual, this is facts. He said: Okay, boy, we will meet you at the Local 64. I will call one of the boys. One of the guys showed up. They sat down for two or three minutes. They discussed NDP things because they just had discussions with the party.

The Member for St. John's North said: Oh, I have a phone call; I have to take it. He walked out through the door and never walked back into the meeting. He never walked back in, and he has the audacity, Mr. Speaker, to put out on his Twitter that I was out trying to break the union, after doing that.

Mr. Speaker, I will not dwell on that any more, but once again it is not over yet. It is not over yet, but I have to say this is a prime example of where government and Opposition are working together. We made a commitment that we would stick together and work with the mill, and I know I am speaking –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I am speaking for the Member for Humber Valley, that we will honour our

commitment and try to work this through so that we can do the best we can for the people we represent. Put partisan politics aside and do what we can. I commend both members from Corner Brook for that, and the Minister of Finance at the beginning.

I remember we had a meeting at the time with the Minister of Service NL about the pensions. I remember it was a heated discussion. Do you know one thing about it? It was very heated. It was an intense discussion. Some people may think I am pretty quiet but sometimes I can speak my mind, Mr. Speaker. At that meeting I was adamant. The minister at the time was arguing back at me. Do you know not once was politics ever entered, it was the issue. Guess what? We got it resolved; all of us together got it resolved.

I will not speak on that, Mr. Speaker, any more, but guys let's all work together to ensure that we fulfill this.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Now I am going to speak about the hospital in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday night I heard the Minister of Health making comments in this House saying, I do not want the hospital. I have always learned – and you learn as a very young person but you grow out of it when you are about eight or nine. I grew out of it when I was about eight or nine years old. I was told by my parents when I was about eight or nine that if you cannot attack the argument, attack the person. What kinds of statements are made by the Minister of Health saying that the Member for Bay of Islands does not want the hospital?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: I do want the hospital, but I want the right hospital. I want the hospital that was committed to. I want a hospital that is going to satisfy the needs of Western Newfoundland, people in Labrador, all around, Mr. Speaker. That is what I want.

For the Minister of Health or anybody else in this House to ever refer that I do not want what was committed to the people of Corner Brook, to the people of Western Newfoundland, to the people of Bay of Islands, for all the people that this hospital will serve is absolutely, categorically false. It is ludicrous.

What I say to the Minister of Health who is still over there, Mr. Speaker, she has not stopped. I tell the people, she has not stopped again. Every time I stand up and speak about the hospital, instead of discussing the facts that I put forward, is attacking me.

Let me tell you something. I will tell you a small little detail about me, Mr. Speaker. You can attack me but if I think I am right, I do not give up. I say to the minister, you can attack me as much as you like. You can come on and you can say what you like –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Direct your comments to the Chair, please.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you.

Can you tell the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, that she can attack me as much as she likes, she can call me whatever she likes, she can stand up and make all these ludicrous statements, I will not give up on what was promised to the people of Western Newfoundland and to the people of Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I say to the Minister of Health, attack the arguments, not me. This is bigger than me. This is bigger than the Member for Humber West. Collectively, this is a project that is going to come back on all of us. This is why I am bringing it up, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I went through this whole scenario before on the hospital. I am going to have a few more tries at it, because once the Request for Proposals comes out it is going to be too late. Once it is out, it is too late.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Health, in Estimates – no, in Question Period, sorry - how many surgeries have been cancelled in Corner Brook Western Hospital because of a lack of acute care beds? I never got an answer.

When you are making a decision of something which is so gigantic and important to the people of Newfoundland, wouldn't you know that? You should know that. These are the questions that are being asked of me, because people who were directly involved, residents of Western Newfoundland who had surgeries cancelled, are saying: How many surgeries were cancelled? I do not know, but I will ask the minister.

Guess what? I cannot get answer. I know there is not zero. I know there are surgeries cancelled. Are there ten a month? Are there two a month? Are there fifteen a month? I do not know, Mr. Speaker. I honestly cannot get that statistic.

I think that is an important point we should know if we are going to make a decision. If the minister does not know, God bless the people out in Corner Brook who do not know. The minister should have that, Mr. Speaker.

Another question I asked the minister who could not give me the answer. I even asked in Estimates, also. I gave him a second kick at the can three days after I asked. I know the Member for Humber West is over very attentively listening to this. He knows this because it is going to rely on all of us. What is the readmission rate for Western Newfoundland as compared to the Province? What is the readmission rate?

Guess what, Mr. Speaker? When I asked that question in Question Period and in Estimates, they could not give me an answer. This is in Hansard. This is not the Member for Bay of Islands standing up and just giving some statements that are just out of blue. These are questions I asked in Hansard, the public record, and I could not get the answer. I could not get the answer.

Then the bigger question: How can you make this decision on the hospital and the number of

acute care beds, which has decreased by about twenty-two or twenty-four beds, confirmed – how can you make a decision of this magnitude without having that information? How can you do it?

Do you know what I was told in Estimates? When the Estimates are typed up, I am willing to share with anybody in the media. I am willing to share with the Member for Humber West, the Member for Humber East, and the Member for Humber Valley, or anybody. I will say it again because I am only going to have another few opportunities to push the need to make sure we get the hospital that was committed to and that is going to serve the needs of Western Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker. We were told the rate people are being admitted in the hospital, the time of stay and post-surgery, will be decreased by 25 per cent. That is in Hansard.

The Member for Burgeo – La Poile was at the meeting also. That is in Hansard. I have to ask the question: If there is an issue that the wait time or the time spent in hospital can be reduced by 25 per cent, how can you guarantee the people that it is going to be effective? How can you guarantee the people in Western Newfoundland that the services are going to be in the communities? How about if you have someone up in the Northern Peninsula who do not have access to a doctor, how about if you have someone in some remote part of Western Newfoundland who does not have access to home care, how can you guarantee that the services are going to be there, that you are going to rush them out to hospital by 25 per cent more time – even people in Western Newfoundland now are very concerned; they feel that they are moving out of the hospital quicker than they are actually ready to go to the hospital because of the lack of services, medical services, support services within their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I am willing to bet, because I know the facts in this, that if you look at the readmission rates for Western Newfoundland, it will support it now that the highest admission rates in this Province is in Western Newfoundland. We are going to rush them out 25 per cent quicker. What is going to happen?

Their readmission rates are going to go higher and we have less acute care beds to handle that.

Mr. Speaker, this is not me; this is fact.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not what we were promised.

MR. JOYCE: Not what we were promised.

I heard the Minister of Health say on many occasions: Well, how come no one else is talking about it? Well, I will just let the minister know there is a public meeting Wednesday night. Fly out to the meeting Wednesday night and hear some of the concerns that the people have. Wait until the petitions start coming into this House, if you ever keep it open long enough. Keep it open long enough and see the petitions that are going to be coming in from people in Western Newfoundland.

The meeting is organized by Israel Hann on Wednesday night; the same person, Mr. Speaker, when the long-term care facility – the Member for Humber East and the Premier was saying was a great health care advocate for Western Newfoundland. Let's see how great he is going to be now when he organizes this meeting, how many of the government members are going to go out and show up at the meeting and listen to the concerns.

This is not attacking government. Mr. Speaker, if this health care facility met the needs of Western Newfoundland, from the information that I was given, to all the people in Newfoundland, all the health care professionals, I would be out supporting it, like I am doing with the mill. I would be out supporting it.

I say to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, you want to get the facts? Let's look at the readmission rates. Look at the number of decreased acute care beds and how many surgeries are being cancelled because there is not enough now and we are going to take in a bigger geographical area. That is not me. Everything I am saying here is in Hansard. It is in Hansard. It is the official record of this

House. So once it is in Hansard, you can go on what you have been told.

Mr. Speaker, there is another (inaudible) – and I hear the Minister of Health again; she just continuously attacks me. Attack the issues, produce the number of surgeries that were cancelled in Western Newfoundland, lay it on the table here, lay it on the table what the readmission rates are, lay it on the table the number of acute care beds are going to be cut in Western Newfoundland, lay it on the table, Mr. Speaker. Where are the reports? There are reports.

So instead of standing over there and attacking me, lay it on the table, all the facts for the people in Western Newfoundland – do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because what I am saying is correct.

Mr. Speaker, in Estimates I asked the Minister of Transportation and Works for the two copies: the Hatch Mott MacDonald report on the initial design of the hospital, and the Stantec. The Minister of Transportation and Works committed to giving me those two reports, over two weeks ago. Guess what? I still do not have the reports. I asked the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, in Estimates: Can I get the two reports? She said: Well, I have to check with the Department of Transportation because they are co-authored reports. I said: He already said yes. Well, I will check with him.

That was a week ago. That was three weeks ago when she first committed, a week ago when she said she is going to check with the minister. She is sitting next to him in the House every day for the last three weeks, but do not have time to ask should we give him the report. So, I am going to rely upon the Minister of Transportation and Works and his good words, which are in Hansard, that he will give me a copy of these reports.

I am shocked. When you want to talk about something that is so vital to the people of Western Newfoundland – their health – and I have to stand in this House and fight to try to get the reports to see what is being offered. I have

to actually now keep on struggling to try to get reports to show the people of Western Newfoundland what health care facility is going to be built so people could have a look at it and make up their own judgement.

You just heard the Minister of Finance earlier talking about some communication: We have nothing to hide. People of Western Newfoundland cannot get a copy of those two reports so we can sit down and say, okay, here is the report that was done, here is the report when Stantec went in to downsize the hospitals, here is the reason why – we cannot get it. You just cannot get it. There is a commitment made to me as a member in this House that I would have it. I still cannot get it.

Once I get it, who is going to have it? The people of Western Newfoundland; that is who I am fighting this for. It is the people of Western Newfoundland. One of these days, I am sure I am going to need this facility. I am sure the Members for Humber West and Humber East are going to need this facility. Guys, we have to get it right, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Minister of Natural Resources, the Member for Humber East when he talked about the long-term care facility, when the beds were decreased from the original size down to a lower size. When the minister quoted himself, and I have the quote here if the minister would like to refresh his memory – when he said: We made a mistake with the long-term care facility, we cannot make a second mistake.

I agree with you, you corrected it. Why should we have to go through the mistake? Why don't we do it right? The minister said we corrected it. That is why we are building an extra 100 long-term care beds now. That is what should have been in the initial one. We corrected it, but we should not have to go and have it corrected.

I say to the Minister of Natural Resources, who I am sure is concerned about health in Western Newfoundland. I am sure, there is no doubt. I am not saying you are not. I am definitely not. The Member for Humber West also, there is no

doubt, we all are. There is absolutely no doubt. I am not disputing that one bit, I have to say.

Why have the people of Western Newfoundland through me have to fight with this government to get a copy of the reports to see exactly what facility they are going to get after being committed to by the Minister of Transportation and Works? Why? If there is nothing to hide, lay it on the table. Here is what was committed, here is what we planned, here is what the Stantec report did, and here are the reasons why. Then we could have an informed discussion.

Mr. Speaker, I will have another opportunity to speak about other things plus the hospital at a later date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was listening intently to the Member for Bay of Islands as he was speaking. I do like his reference to the idea where he is willing to cross party lines sometimes for the good of certain things, to be able to make things work and cross these lines. I also refer to potentially that there were other times when he does not cross the line so easily and maybe a more open mind might help with some things. I will say most times he has an open mind.

Unlike the Third Party, I remember sharing a panel interview with a member of the Third Party in the beginning. I was impressed by something she had said. The member mentioned that we come to office now and we are going to be more concerned about being a proposition party than an Opposition party. I doubt if there is very much proposition comes from the Third Party. It is easy to talk that talk, but when we try to ask them to walk the walk or to put it in practice, or to explain their plan, or to tell us

how they are going to do it, we end up with a lot of fertilizer for the money tree.

The purpose today is to talk about Concurrence Motions for the Resource Committee. I would like to make a comment about the Chair of the Resource Committee, the hon. Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: His organizational skills and his ability to manage time effectively made him a very effective Chair of the Committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: I would like to also mention the ministers and the officials who attended many of these sessions. I give you some indication for our listeners in TV land today. The Resource sector met in Estimates Committees for some twenty-one or twenty-two hours plus. For all of these hours, the ministers and their officials were asked questions. It is almost like a Question Period. It is like a search for answers, and many answers were forthcoming throughout the Estimates.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third time I have been on my feet talking about the Budget in some ways. It is always great to be able to stand up here and express my viewpoints, the viewpoints I hear from the residents of my district. We realize everyone has ideas, everyone has opinions, and everyone can put it up when it counts, but it is always important to know that everyone should have that open ear and should be able to listen.

In the Resource sector Estimates, we met in five departments: Advanced Education and Skills, and the total expenditure in that department is a whopping \$935 million –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CROSS: Nine hundred and thirty-five million dollars.

Environment and Conservation department, although the amount of money spent there is a

fair degree lower, is a very important department. In that department, we discussed the Estimates of some \$41 million. In the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, we talked about \$34 million of expenditure by this government. In IBRD, we talked about some-\$94 million. Natural Resources, again the number went up, \$635 million we discussed. Tourism, Culture and Recreation, we discussed some-\$65 million, for a grand total of \$1.8 billion.

The Opposition members and government members could ask questions of the ministers and their officials on every line item for \$1.8 billion. That \$1.8 billion represents 23 per cent of our budget allocation, approximately a quarter of the Budget.

Government Services sector also has about 20 per cent, which leaves the largest amount of about 60 per cent of the Budget for the Social sector Estimates. Of course, we know the Social sector Estimates include the Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Community Services which takes the biggest chunk of the Budget.

One message, Mr. Speaker, that I am not sure which minister I can relate this back to for the most part, which minister I can carry this comment back to, but there was something mentioned by one of the ministers, and it was not in the Estimates Committee but it was through some questions here in the House. It may come to our Minister of Finance, when he was defending some of the Estimates right here on the floor of the House a few days ago. He made a statement, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I probably corrupted this a little or got it in the information for dummies section for this, but basically the comment means, you cannot do the same stuff with the same people in the same way any more. We have to respond to things differently today. We have to change the practice of how we do things. We have to change the focus of how we do things. We have to, in any way, attempt to change our outcomes.

That is what this is all about. It is not much point for us to sit down and discuss options of occurrence or options in our Estimates Committees if we do not have the goal that we, at the end of all of this, are going to change the outcomes. If you look back at this and say: We cannot do the same stuff with the same people in the same way any more.

Let's just look at a couple of our departments. Municipal Affairs – just open your ears for a second and listen about Municipal Affairs. What have we heard for the last year or so from MNL and from mayors and leaders in our communities? That we have to change the way we are doing things. We have to have that open ear. We cannot do the same stuff with the same people in the same way, and what did our minister figure out? We changed the way we use our budget this year in the Department of Municipal Affairs. It has been expounded on so many times – I do not have to go into the details – but we have changed the way we do things. That shall change some of the outcomes of what we need.

Health care: When we talk about the scope of practice of our health professionals, our doctors, our nurses, our nurse practitioners and our licensed practical nurses, we cannot do the same stuff with the same people in the same way forever. We have to change. If we are going to be effective and efficient, we have to change how we do the service.

The same goes for education, post-secondary education and Adult Basic Education, and for Tourism. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, we cannot do the same stuff with the same people in the same way any more. How true is that for the fishery? What would we be able to do if we did not have the foresight to change how we do things with the people we do them with? We would never have this wonderful development that we have in the South Coast with the aquaculture industry in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: I have travelled to the South Coast because I have family there. Like the member from Mount Pearl North, I have family in other parts of the Province as well. They are not just all stuck in Bonavista North. I actually visited the Bay d'Espoir area. It was amazing, over the last twenty years, to be going there on a constant basis and visiting the farms, visiting the sites, the hatchery and in the grow-out sites, out in the bay.

Not only is it a great place for energy and recreation, it just revives you when you are out on the bay down there, but when you see how far things have come from such meagre beginnings you know that this statement is true. That we have changed the way that we do these things. We have changed the people who are doing it and we are not doing it in that same way again.

Innovation, Business and Rural Development: A week or so ago I stood here and we talked about how we have changed the way the suites of programs are offered to the clients in our Province. How we have looked at all the umbrella organizations that there were and now we have twenty-two suites and programs and opportunities and all kinds of different application processes put under two umbrellas for commercial and development partners. By doing it that way, we have changed the stuff we are doing. We have changed the people we are dealing with and the way we are doing it. This government is responding to these things.

I would like to take a few moments, I am sort of shifting gears for a moment, but I really would like to look at one department and how it connects somehow – I just want to introduce a few things. After sitting on all of the Estimates Committees, we were sitting there and you sort of get motivated to say I have to learn a little more about this or I have to dig in a little more about this because I need to know a little more about it.

I started digging a little bit into travel and tourism in our Province. It sort of got peeked when I attended the Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador convention; I was at part of it a

few weeks ago. I just want to share some things that I sort of uncovered, I guess, in travel and tourism and then how some of that will connect to Bonavista North. Then from there, we can look at how it can apply, maybe, to the whole Province and look at the outlook. If I can get through in the next eight minutes that aspect, I will have done about half or a quarter of what I intended to talk about when I stood up today.

You can never pace yourself, you always have to have more information than you know you are going to get to, just in case you run a blank – and I think I did that the last time I stood up at one point, so you need to be prepared.

I really want to mention some of these things now about travel and tourism, how it applies to doing things differently with different people again, and how we can really get some good, positive actions in our Province.

Maybe I should say one other thing. I had a real good friend who was a teacher; we taught in school together. I was the art teacher at Lester Pearson Memorial High a few years ago and in the class next door was Mr. Mike Bragg. We had these thin metal walls that you could almost hear through. So lots of days I heard what Mr. Bragg was teaching and Mr. Bragg heard what I was teaching. He had a saying, after he retired, that I tried to use a little.

He would get his students in class – I hope Mike might be listening today; if not, I am sure some of his family in Greenspond are. Mike had a way of motivating the students. He would say: Okay, my lovers sit up now. Mr. Bragg is going to take you on a little trip. Close your eyes and just turn on your internal PC viewer in your imagination, let it run on your eyelids on the inside, and as I talk about this, you pay attention and you form your picture of what we are talking about. As we get to the Bonavista North part especially of this in a few moments, I would like for you close your eyes, turn on your internal PC viewer, and on the inside of your eyeballs have a look at some of the tourism things that are going on in Bonavista North and in this Province.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. CROSS: I am not sure. It depends on what brain you have. I am sure there is lots of high def on this side. I apologize.

Travel and tourism: We all know and we have all heard about the global recession and everything that has hit us in 2011 and 2012. Despite all of the worldwide economic problems there have been, there was still record levels of travel around the world in 2012. International travel to Canada in 2012 rose by 1 per cent and US customers coming to Canada were up for the first year after a nine-year trend of being lower every year.

It indicates, through some of this, that travel and tourism for our Province has great potential. The two components for the industry, for tourism, in this Province combined last year to break the \$1 billion barrier.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CROSS: The \$1 billion barrier. What a minister!

Of this \$1 billion that was income in our tourist industry, there are two types. There are the 'stay-cations', as my friend Barb from Long Island would say, where you stay in the Province, you travel around the Province, and you keep your money in Newfoundland and Labrador. Fifty-eight per cent of the income in tourism in 2012 was by 'stay-cationers', people from Newfoundland and Labrador who decided to stay home and spend their money.

Mr. Speaker, up almost 10 per cent to 42 per cent for 2012 were the non-residents, the new money. That is not money in our Province. It comes right into our Province and they spend it when they get here. They bring it with them. That was up to 42 per cent. There was growth shown in every single region in the Province, with just over 500,000 people spending that money, visitors from outside.

Of the people who came in, air passengers took care of 71 per cent of the spending. So, 71 per

cent of that spending came in by flights. Seventy-eight per cent of the visitors came in that way. All of it is up 7 per cent to 360,000 people in 2012.

Air travel to Labrador, to the Big Land; Island domestic flights have a lot to do with it I guess with the travel for development and the travel for businesses going there, but the business activity in the Labrador region increased by 27 per cent in 2012 – air travel in that area increased by 27 per cent. That is one way to get there is by air.

Let's consider by sea. We are an Island, we know that 29 per cent of our visitors who came here came by our ferries, or they came by cruise ships. This is a different way of doing things. Really, this is a way that the City of St. John's and the City of Corner Brook – also, believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, about three years ago we had a cruise ship stop right outside of New-Wes-Valley in Bonavista North. A small cruise ship decided to anchor off; they came aboard on their little tiny rubber boats and dinghies. They came in and they experienced the frivolity and things that we could offer in Bonavista North.

In cruise ship traffic, there were 39,000 unique cruise visitors. How do you define a unique cruise visitor? That means that person, no matter which way they came to Newfoundland for 2012, was only counted once. We had 39,000 unique cruise visitors, up 15,400 in 2012. The City of Corner Brook had 30 per cent more than they had – the record year that they had was 2007, and last year they had 30 per cent more than that.

I only have two minutes left, so I have to run through the Bonavista North part of this really quickly. Okay, turn on your inside PC viewers. This is where you are really going to need them. Imagine that you are in Indian Bay waters on the Southern end of Bonavista North, some of the most famous fishing, trout fishing, and skidooning country in the world.

In Musgrave Harbour there is Banting Park, Dr. Frederick Banting. It was a tragedy that his plane crashed and he passed away. His name

now has become synonymous with Musgrave Harbour. There is a Banting Park there which has a replica of the plane; built in Wesleyville, I must say. The plane was built in the marine centre in Wesleyville and it is there.

The Barbour Living Heritage Village at Newtown is something I can spend three hours talking about I guess. It is right out only a mile, a mile-and-a-half straight across the ocean from where I am living. There is very, very much activity there with not one, not two, but three replica houses.

They have a waterfront premises there that was replicated from a big fishing store back in the early years. There is a seal oil factory built indoors with a full size schooner that you can go down in the hold in, all built indoors. It should have a real good connection with what is happening in Elliston on the other side of the bay where my friend from Bonavista South is setting up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: We have the Greenspond Courthouse. We actually have the real Random Passage trails on Cape Island, because that is where Random Passage was written and where Bernice Morgan lived. We have the Gander River Development with the lodges, and hunting and fishing. Beaches, have we got beaches, in Musgrave Harbour, Lumsden, Windmill Bight, and Cape Island.

Have we got festivals; we have the Muddy Hole in Musgrave Harbour, the Salmon River Days in Indian Bay, the Crab Festival where you can meet Seamore the crab, or Beothuk Bob in New-Wes-Valley, or the Celebration by the Sea in Lumsden, or Come Home Year this year in Centreville-Wareham-Trinity.

I am trying to create a tourism ad for Bonavista North. I know I am out of time and I am going to have to finish this when I get my next twenty minutes on the main motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Bonavista North paints a fairly pretty picture of the Estimates meetings, the committee meetings, but I do not recall, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Bonavista North, or any of the other government members who were sitting on that committee asking any questions of the ministers who were sitting on the front bench over there. I do not recall any questions coming from them.

I will just give you one example of my experience when it came to the questions, or discussion regarding Income Support. The substituting minister for that committee, the Minister of Justice, was unable or unwilling – I am not sure – to answer any questions about the percentage or volume of calls that get answered regarding the provision of Income Support.

The minister was unwilling or unable to answer questions regarding the number of vacant front line positions in Income Support. It was noted that a number of front line staff at the Student Financial Aid Division had been let go as a result of the recent cuts. The substituting Minister of Advanced Education and Skills on the Resource Committee was also unable or unwilling to answer questions regarding the volume of calls that get answered or go unanswered on that committee.

So, I did not get all the answers I wanted on that committee. Maybe the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, or the Minister of Justice, or somebody will stand up at some point and give us the answers to those questions because they are important questions. I do not recall any of those sorts of questions being asked by any of the government members on that committee.

I wanted to take some time to talk about the cuts to College of the North Atlantic because I think they are momentous in the depth at which they cut. Take only the campus in Happy Valley-

Goose Bay, I read last week that approximately half of the staff there, somewhere closing in on half of them, have been let go or going to be let go at that campus. It is a campus where government has seen fit, the college has seen fit to build a residence so that people can go and attend there. People I have talked to feel like it is a serious diminution of the status and stature of that campus.

The college system in Newfoundland and Labrador did not really start to build steam to grow until the post-Confederation years, unlike a lot of provinces in Canada. That was of course aided by federal spending. Funding that came from the federal government under a variety of different federal acts after Confederation. In 1958, the construction of many of the former district vocational schools was announced by the provincial government here. Between 1963 and 1965, no less than twelve new campuses were opened.

I believe it is really interesting. We used to joke about this when I was involved with the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Students, that in all of those former district vocational school campuses you can go in and somewhere in the building, somewhere on the premises, there is a plaque basically proclaiming the opening of that location by former Premier Smallwood. That is certainly his legacy by and large.

Vocational and applied programs have taken many forms over the years in our system, and the former district vocational school campuses have been reorganized a number of times. They were combined into regional and community colleges at one point. Then of course in the 1990s they were all combined to form the provincial college, which is now called College of the North Atlantic.

I think that over time, especially in the 1990s, the system took a beating. The government at the time saw fit to remove a lot of the trades programming or not to invest in the trades programming at the college. I think that is a really good example of a period where

government did not value the college, and I fear we are going back into that period again now.

Fortunately, what our predecessors built in terms of a college system, a vocational and an applied programming system, is durable. It is durable just by virtue of the fact that it exists and offers such high quality programming today.

In fact, our college programs here are the envy of other provinces and they are indeed the envy of other countries, to the extent that the State of Qatar has contracted with College of the North Atlantic to deliver programs that originate here by a good number of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and other Canadians and internationals, in the State of Qatar. That is something we should be rightly proud of. We should be investing then in the college system as opposed to divesting government from the colleges.

I say that because I was a little struck when the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island got up last week and said that this was all short-term pain for long-term gain. I would argue that it appears to be short-term gain and the long-term consequences could be quite significant.

The previous speaker, the Member for Bonavista North, I note that he got up some time back, I believe it was in the Budget debate, and he talked about how our constituents, the general public, had been spoiled by the nature of government spending prior to this year. Somehow they were spoiled by the programs and services that government was providing.

In Grand Falls-Windsor, the Adult Basic Education program is going to be removed and the Comprehensive Arts and Science Transition program is going to be stopped there. Where they spoiled at the College of the North Atlantic in Grand Falls-Windsor? The staff, the students, and the general public, were they spoiled there?

In Gander, they have lost their Adult Basic Education program, too. Where they spoiled? Were the people of Gander spoiled? Were the students and the instructors there spoiled, the staff at that campus? In Corner Brook, they

have lost four programs: Adult Basic Education, Environmental Technology, Adventure Tourism, and Electronics Engineering Technology. Where they spoiled? Were the people of Corner Brook spoiled by having these programs? Were the staff and the students at the campus there spoiled by having these programs so we had to remove them?

I mentioned Happy Valley-Goose Bay; they are losing Adult Basic Education. They are losing Automotive Service Technician. They are missing the first year of Engineering Technology and they are losing Office Administration. Were they spoiled and they had to have those programs removed? Were the staff and the students at that campus spoiled? Maybe somebody can get up and tell us.

At Ridge Road, just up the road here, Telecommunications Software Electronic Engineering Technology is being taken away from the campus. The Academic Support Centre is being taken away from the campus. Were they spoiled? Were the people who were served by that campus spoiled? Did they have too much that they had to have these programs taken away from them?

In St. Anthony, represented by my colleague the Member for The Straits – White Bay North, they are losing Adult Basic Education and they are also losing a first year of Engineering Technology. In Bonavista, Adult Basic Education is being taken away, as is Office Administration. In Bay St. George, they are losing Adult Basic Education, Visual Arts, Hospitality Tourism, and Community Studies is being changed to an alternate year, an alternate year of intake.

MR. LANE: (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: I do not know if they were spoiled, I say to the Member for Mount Pearl South. He is yelling over there. I do not know if they were being spoiled, I say to him. If you folks think they are being spoiled, get up and say that – get up and say that.

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: In Port aux Basques, Adult Basic Education is being cut and the Comprehensive Arts and Science Transition program is being cut.

In Burin, Burin is probably the hardest hit by these cuts. I was down there a few weeks ago. As I said here in the House of Assembly before, they said we have three members of Cabinet: the Premier, the Member for Grand Bank, and the Member for Burin – Placentia West. We all thought they were going to go to bat for this area and we would not know they are in there.

They are losing Adult Basic Education; they are losing the Comprehensive Arts and Science Transition program. They are also losing the first year of Engineering Technology and they are losing Business Administration. That is a lot to lose. That is a lot of instructors and that is a lot of students. Some would say they were spoiled, but I do not think so.

In Placentia, they are losing Adult Basic Education and they are losing Comprehensive Arts and Science Transition program as well. They are losing a Machinist program. It is interesting that we are losing the Machinist program there because precision machining and tooling should be in demand, the period we are in now, if we have a white-hot economy or a blue-hot economy or red-hot economy, or whatever the particular political rhetoric is this week. We should need more people trained in precision machining and tooling trades like machinists, but we are losing that program.

In Seal Cove, they are losing the Adult Basic Education Program and they are losing the Oil Heat Systems Technician program. In Labrador West, they have not been spared; they are losing the Adult Basic Education program and they are also losing the first year of Engineering Technology.

In Baie Verte, they are losing the Adult Basic Education program and they are also losing the Machinist program again. At a time, like I said when we are talking about needing more skilled tradespeople, we are getting rid of programs that train them. The Carbonear campus is losing the

Adult Basic Education program there and they are also losing the bricklaying program there.

Clarenville has not been spared, and I do not think they were spoiled either. I think we were doing quite well at that campus. They are losing their Adult Basic Education program and they are also losing the first year of Engineering Technology.

Here, just down the road at Prince Philip Drive campus, they are losing Adult Basic Education as well. They are losing one section of their autobody mechanics program. They are also losing Nutrition and Food Service Management. That is a lot of programs to lose.

As we saw, there was a press release from NAPE last week that pointed out quite a large number of positions are going to be lost. We also do not know – and I wonder, these are not the sorts of questions I have been able to get through the Estimates process about, really, all told, how many positions are lost altogether as a result of the Budget, permanent, full-time staff but also temporary and contractual employees. I suspect the actual real number is quite a bit higher than what we have seen released from the government publicly.

We did see before this all began, and there is a certain irony here because government has oftentimes touted they anticipated or it was believed there was going to be some sort of labour shortage down the road as a result of the need for skilled workers and because of people retiring out of the workforce that we are going to need 70,000 new skilled, trained workers by 2020. At a time when we are going to need that, we are reducing the ways in which people can get into a community college or a post-secondary program by getting rid of programs like Adult Basic Education and Comprehensive Arts and Science Transition.

We are eliminating avenues people had. Pathways they had to get a post-secondary credential are being taken away. We are promised that something is going to be put in place at least in the case of ABE, but we will

have to wait and see. The jury is still out on that.

Just prior to the whole Budget process, we learned there were over 200 employees of various community not-for-profit agencies who were delivering Employment Assistance Services in our communities who are also losing their funding. You wonder what is going to happen with all the funding now, whether we are going to be able to provide the same level of service with somewhere in the order of 140 or so staff at Advanced Education and Skills, whether they are going to be able to take on all that responsibility that was shouldered by that number of employees, 220-odd, almost 230 people losing their jobs.

Again, I go back to what the instructors have told us in the past. They have pointed out that the argument around government's decision to cut has really been based on sort of a sound bite communication strategy around why it is that we have to have ABE parcelled off, cut out of the College of the North Atlantic to be delivered by private sector providers. The actual calculations – a lot of the thinking behind this has not been released, at least in its entirety, to the public, although it has been asked for a number of times. So, we have to question the accuracy of this position, and you have to question whether or not it is actually relevant.

There are also a lot of questions around the success rate figures for enrolment and completion at College of the North Atlantic when it comes to ABE, whether we are comparing apples and apples, or whether we are actually comparing apples and some other variety of something or another, because some of this does not add up. We hear stories anecdotally about students not showing up for the first day of Adult Basic Education in the college system.

We do not know if the calculations of success, whether they include those people or whether they do not. We do not know if people in the private sector completing these programs mirror the demographics of the people who are completing them at College of the North

Atlantic. Chances are that they are not the same, they cannot be treated the same.

Students have suggested to me, instructors have suggested to me, that some students who start an ABE program at the college, some of them have, in some cases, already had a high school diploma. They were just completing courses or trying to upgrade that way. Some have suggested that students do not complete the entire ABE program at the college. Instead, leave and go and complete their high school diploma elsewhere because they would rather have a high school diploma than an ABE certificate. That is their preference.

There have been other suggestions around whether or not people leave prematurely to go complete a GED or to find other avenues to complete their education. Whether they leave and go into a pre-apprenticeship program elsewhere or outside the Province. There are certainly a lot of questions about that.

There are also questions about cost and about the availability of a program in a particular community. In Labrador, we know for example there were ABE programs delivered in communities like Sheshatshiu, Rigolet, and North West River. A lot of those students have been in touch with my office. I know they have been in touch with other members in the Official Opposition office, worried about whether or not they are going to be able to complete that program in the same fashion as they have been in the past in the communities proximate to them. That is a serious concern.

People are worried about the cost of tuition. We know there is a big difference between the not-for-profit private training institutions in the Province and the ones that are for profit. The ones that are for profit, by virtue of their nature have to make a profit. They have to charge something to give them a marginal benefit, a profit. Students are concerned they will have to take on some of the part of that cost. It would be significantly higher.

It has been suggested that more or less what one person would be paying at College of the North

Atlantic will be in the order of \$720-odd. At a private training institution it could be several thousand dollars, up to as much as \$3,000.

It has also been pointed out that College of the North Atlantic, by virtue of its nature as being, up until this point, a relatively decently, funded public community college system. It had a number of fairly decent quality services available on its campuses, whether those are services and supports to help students with academic remediation, with peer tutoring, that sort of thing.

Students who have different sorts of disabilities, at least up until very recently when a lot of these services started to be cut, as I pointed out in Question Period today – the college was going the way that the White Paper on Post-Secondary Education really suggested back in 2005, that they were adding services that were definitely needed in a college system.

To speak nothing of all of the sorts of technologies, resources, the capital equipment that was invested in the college in recent years, the staff support, whether that is guidance services or other services, top-notch laboratories within the college and shop facilities, student development officers, libraries, and a variety of other resources. Unfortunately, a lot of that is going to be lost as a result of this Budget.

I realize I am out of time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege to get up here today and talk about the Resource Committee and the Estimates process. For those just tuning in at home, I guess, what you see is we all go over to the other side of the House, we take our seats

and then the minister comes in. They have the full complement, if you will, Mr. Speaker, full complement of all of the deputy ministers, all of the managers they need in order to best answer the questions from the Opposition parties.

We get in here and the Chair runs the meeting. Then they get equal opportunity to go back and forth with the minister and go line by line on every single number associated with our Budget in order to clarify issues they may have as a party, clarify issues they may have on behalf of members of their constituency, organizations, residents, or whatever.

They are given ample time not only to discuss the line items and talk about an actual number, Mr. Speaker, but they were also, in my opinion, given a lot of leeway to conceptualize, if you will, to – I will say it, maybe grandstand a little bit and talk about initiatives the way they would like to see it in terms of what they think their vision for this Province should be. The patience displayed by our ministers and our staff on the government side was simply phenomenal in my opinion. That is not an overstatement. That is not an exaggeration.

When you get into a situation where you are looking at the Budget and the budgeting process, Mr. Speaker, and you have to look at a series of numbers that relate to expenditures within departments and then the variances associated with that, when you hit that target or you do not. Of course, there are going to be questions brought up about that. That is fine too, but when you go over and above the function of the Estimates Committees, you go over and above that and you start conceptualizing and asking questions about the decision-making process that has nothing to do with the line items and it takes on a broader scale, then unfortunately you have to term it as grandstanding, Mr. Speaker.

You get into a situation where, just like we have seen with the member from across the way representing the NDP. You start tugging on the heart strings of all the people out there in TV land who are watching this. You start using words like: Oh, are they spoiled? Were they too spoiled because these programs had to be cut, or

these jobs had to be lost? It has nothing to do with that.

The comments on this side of the House in reference to someone being spoiled came to a situation, and I believe it was a reality, Mr. Speaker, whereby when you have successive surpluses and the ability to spend a little more when you are certainly bringing in more revenue than your expenditures are at that particular time, and you are in a position to give upwards of, what, \$500 million in raises to the public service; you can certainly look at that, I guess, as really good times, if you will, Mr. Speaker, where you have a little extra money to throw at a little bit of programs and services, and all the while you are still in a situation to go beyond the public service, beyond those boards where we have people employed, but right into the homes of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, right into their pockets in terms of \$500 million worth of tax reductions. That brings it home.

The whole process should have been about the realities of what we are doing, but unfortunately we got into a situation where they start grandstanding a little, they start talking very grandiose in terms of what they think we should be doing as a Province, and what direction we should be taking to ensure a viable future for the residents of this Province, an economically sound future in terms of how our government interacts with programs and services that are there for the people and in terms of what direction we want to go in, in terms of our economy and our businesses.

We get into a situation where they, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, are looking for lists. For example, we were with the Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development and they were asking some specific questions about initiatives that we have put forward, where we funded certain agencies or certain projects. Those are all well and good. There were professional answers by the minister and his staff. It was excellent, but then they wanted lists of everybody who has availed of these programs, services, and loans. They want lists of this and lists of that, bordering, if I may, Mr. Speaker, on confidentiality.

If I happened to be an entrepreneur who had availed of one of the services from our government, I certainly do not want a political party getting the lists of everything we have done, copies of business plans, reports and such, Mr. Speaker. To me, that is completely inappropriate. They went a little bit overboard with that.

Sometimes you just have to shake your head. We have, in some cases, Mr. Speaker, minister and staff, upwards of one dozen senior public servants sitting here for hours and hours on end – and here is the point I am trying to make – other work is being sacrificed to accommodate this process. The process is worthwhile and that is fine, but for hours and hours on end to answer specific questions for line items in relation to the budget and the expenditures from the general fund, absolutely a wonderful thing to be at; but if you are going to take the time and stand over there and do that, put a little bit of fear mongering out there, a little bit of grandstanding, put in a smattering of what you would like to see, whether it is shrimp shells, wood pellets, or whatever it happens to be, et cetera, you are wasting everybody's time, and that is my point, Mr. Speaker.

Now, if you are talking about line items, you are looking at expenditures versus revenues, and you are talking about things that are real to the people of this Province and the things that have to happen for good governance, great. So be it. If you are going to sit here and go on and on, and your preamble to your question about a line item takes ten times longer than the actual question about an amount of money expended by the government, then you can see what I am getting at here, Mr. Speaker.

You end up in a situation where you have all the good people who would be over here on this side of the House, just to paint a picture for you. So we are all over there, the Committee members, minister, and staff over here, and they are being asked sometimes ridiculous questions which have nothing to do with the line items. Some ministers will cut them right off, some ministers will indulge them a little, but you can only let it go so far.

What I am saying is if you are passing a question that really has not anything to do with the line item, which they are prepared for, then you are talking about theory, really, about how programs should be run, maybe what should be done in one area versus another, or how they think they should do it in Opposition versus how we do it on the government side. Mr. Speaker, the reason I bring it all up is because then they have the audacity to stand there, to get up time and time again, and say we were not given enough time. We have to reconvene. We need another three-hour session.

We have given you the time that should have been adequate for you guys to grill the minister, grill the staff, get your questions about the expenditures and our budgeting process here out there, and get the answers, but instead you take the time to do little speeches, ask for lists, and ask for minute pieces of information that do not have any effect on the overall running of this Province and the people in some cases, I will venture to say, Mr. Speaker. To me, it got a little silly at times. You just have to shake your head and bear with it.

I can understand them wanting to have the answers. There is nothing wrong with that. When you are playing games as opposed to getting down to business, unfortunately I have to take exception to that.

I also comment on some of the comments, Mr. Speaker, of the Member for St. John's North. He is using words like, oh, we are considering now the people spoiled to want programs delivered in CNA regardless of the circumstances surrounding that. There is still a reality, I say to the member across the way, in this Province. Yes, you have to tighten your belt. When your expenditures are surpassing your revenues, you have to make some hard decisions.

Nobody on this side of the House ever wanted to see a program shut down or a job lost or the bumping process have to get in the way of somebody's career path. Nobody wants to see that. As somebody who has been through a situation where there have been cuts in my life,

in my previous life outside of the House of Assembly here, nobody wants to see that. Nobody wishes that upon anybody. It is not something that we enjoy doing on this side of the House. I mean, I can only imagine the decision-making process that had to go in our Cabinet; it is certainly a tough one. As well when it comes to CNA with the board, they certainly had to make some tough decisions as well.

To me, I have to ask this question: If they are going to get up and say that we should not consider people being spoiled because they have certain programs – Mr. Speaker, there is a reality behind this where you have to have programs that are eventually going to lead to employment. You cannot have less than 50 per cent enrolment in courses over many years and, in some cases, have more than one instructor for those handful of students to get an education in something that in all reality when they get out into the workforce, Mr. Speaker, there is not going to be suitable employment for them. So, what happens then? They go back into the system and take another seat.

I am not going to get too far into that, but the reality is this: When we are not getting all the seats filled to make it sensible in an economic sense, in order to put the course off, the college has to adjust. They have to look at the markets, the labour markets, see what is out there, see where the gaps are and see what they can do in order to offer programs that will actually result in meaningful employment for the students. It is just something that has to happen.

For us now to be using the word like spoiled – we are responsible to the people; we are responsible for taking their tax dollars and using them to the best of our ability in order to run this Province successfully. That includes making hard decisions like this. You cannot have programs and services that people do not avail of and just put them out there at whatever cost in order to have them for the sake of having them. That is irresponsible, Mr. Speaker; we will not do that.

Likewise, when you go back to the college scenario here, you simply cannot have courses that are mostly empty, that are costing the taxpayers of this Province a lot of money, when in all reality the few who might get out of there with a successful diploma in that course will not even end up in a job that is going to work for them in this Province at this particular time. I think that is just pretty realistic in terms of putting it that way, Mr. Speaker.

Before I move on – I am killing a lot of time on this – I want to talk about the ABE programming just a little. Mr. Speaker, it comes down to the same thing. When we looked at reviewing our core mandate on this side of the House we tasked everybody with looking for efficiencies. It comes down to this; you simply cannot run things for the sake of running them. Especially when we have a scenario where we can move those out to private industry, have a higher success rate at a better cost to the taxpayer in the Province, and hopefully have a bigger effect on communities.

If we have a higher success rate, you have people who are moving up. They are increasing the level of their education. They are going to get to a point – if we have a higher success rate because we are doing it efficiently and with less cost, that is great. When they get to a point then they think about the next step. After you get the basic education done, what are they going to do then? Hopefully then they would leverage that initiative on behalf of themselves where they have the ABE done to go into a program that will actually lead to employment.

In this economy right now you cannot train people for a job that is not going to be there. It does not make sense. You have to stop. You have to sharpen the saw sometimes, as the old expression goes, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about accountability?

MR. RUSSELL: Absolutely. It simply comes down to nothing more than accountability to the people of the Province, accountability to the people who have put us here, accountability to

run things, to run a tight ship, and to run things as best we can.

Mr. Speaker, I will just go back and talk a little bit more about the Estimates process in terms of what we saw. We talked about – we have been through. One I want to touch on is Tourism, Culture and Recreation. A fabulous session, a lot of questions asked.

I will tell you one thing; we are doing a fantastic job here in the Province in terms of our ads. In terms of just trying to draw people to the Province, to see the beauty of our Province, to see the culture, and to see the colourful people, I will say, of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. That is happening.

Which leads me back to another part in our whole Budget here I would love to talk about again. When you talk about tourism – especially for me being representative of Lake Melville, the great district I will say of Lake Melville. If you heard me speak in the House before, we talked about how there was no road when I moved back, pretty much, to Labrador after I went out and did my schooling, got my education. There was no South Coast road. You could not go to the Northern Peninsula, cross on the ferry from St. Barbe and drive into Central, where I am from, where I was born and raised, and get out to Lab West. You could not do that.

When we talk about what we are doing here with tourism and we talk about the \$450 million up to this point that we have invested in the Trans-Labrador Highway, Mr. Speaker, and working with other levels of government, and the \$85 million that came in partnership with the feds. People are driving, people are – they are still going by boat. They are still going to fly into remote areas.

Now they are driving like never before, Mr. Speaker. They are coming in. They are stopping into little towns along the way. They are dropping a few dollars here; they are dropping a few dollars there. The spinoffs from tourism alone with the road opening up and joining all the great communities in Labrador together, is phenomenal.

I cannot wait, Mr. Speaker, until we get to that point in time when we have a road that goes all the way to the Northern tip of Labrador, right to the great community in Nain. Goods and services will become cheaper. More tourists will go up there and drop more money, especially when we are talking about Aboriginal communities, too.

We have great – great is not a good enough word – unbelievable talent in Labrador. Especially in Central Labrador in terms of Aboriginal crafts, Aboriginal products that people can buy. The tours and getting out in boats, going hunting, going fishing, seeing the interior of Labrador in all its majesty.

We are facilitating that through our initiatives within government, Mr. Speaker. I cannot commend the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation enough because he certainly knows what it takes in order to get the job done. He certainly knows what it takes and what the right amount of investment has to be in order to show the world the beauty of our Province and to get them coming in to drop their dollars.

That is what it is all about eventually, is maintaining the livelihoods of people who are in that industry. It is about generating new sources of revenue and increasing those on a year-to-year basis. It is about showing the beauty of our culture to anybody who is looking for something new, something different, and something exciting, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of our Environment and Conservation, pretty smooth sessions as well. There was no major uproar from the other side. Their questioning process was the same. They still gave it to the ministers. The staff was phenomenal. There was a little less grandstanding in that one, I think.

Mr. Speaker, I will just say one thing. When it comes to the Liberal Party, Mr. Speaker, at least you have some sensibility in terms of utilizing their time within Estimates and utilizing the ministers and their staff with a little respect to the process and focusing on the line item. I cannot say that about the NDP whatsoever. It is

about, like I said, tugging on the heartstrings. It is as if they want to get on camera or get their name and their statements on paper, on the record, as opposed to getting a decent piece of information which might mean something to the people they represent, and to the small amount of area that has chosen to take them on as their people in representation.

We have exciting things going on in our Province within Fisheries and Aquaculture, Mr. Speaker. It is always great to hear my comrade from Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune always talk about the aquaculture going on there. We have heard our minister talk about our initiatives in the fishery. We have a lot to be proud of on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about being efficient and responsible in our governance, this Budget is a poster child for that. We knew with everything happening with the Atlantic Accord, we knew with the tax rebates we have given, with the raises to the public service we have given, also with two of our three main producing offshore oil rigs down for long-term maintenance, we knew times were going to be tough.

We did the responsible thing, which was to look back at ourselves, to look inward to the various departments within government and do our very best and make those tough calls, Mr. Speaker. I will say tough calls because when you are talking about jobs and you are talking about discontinuing programs, those are tough calls but they are necessary because they do right by the people of the Province. It is the greatest good for the greatest number in terms of efficient utilization of tax revenues, Mr. Speaker. So we have nothing to be ashamed of over here.

I will clue up, Mr. Speaker, by saying it was an honour and a privilege once again to take part in the Estimates. Not only do we get an opportunity for the ones from across the way to ask the questions they want answered, not only do they get to grandstand a little and put off a little bit of a show, but also on the other side of the House too, we also enjoy being able to drill down into the details, Mr. Speaker. You always

learn something new from one session to the next. Again, it was an honour and a privilege to be there.

I just want to say before I close, Mr. Speaker, the ministers and their staff, what a wonderful job they did throughout this whole process. Not only did they do their very best and give concise, direct answers to the questions that were asked but they also made themselves available for follow-ups with individual members as requested and they also provided information in written form as requested at a later date as well.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. It was my pleasure to speak today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am happy to get up and speak to this Concurrence involving the Resource sector. I have been listening to all of the speakers prior to me and hearing what they had to say, the comments on the Estimates process and everything that goes with it.

I was about to get up and say all kinds of stuff about the Member for Lake Melville but he acknowledged how great we were in the Estimates process. I have to concur with his sentiments about how great we are. In all seriousness, the member described the process. I will say I did disagree with him on one thing. That was that even though we do get three hours, and no doubt the ministers are available and their staff are available and it can be long sessions especially at night, I do not agree that the three hours is enough sometimes.

Again, that is just my point of view. I am sure people on the other side will say no, you get plenty of time. The fact is, it is tough. Some of these budgets, especially when you look at a department like Advanced Education or Health, they are very, very large significant budgets.

Sometimes it is hard to cover it off, but I will acknowledge the fact that many of the ministers and many of their staff go the extra mile, they stay longer and they make sure all the questions are answered. They make sure the line items are answered and they acknowledge our requests to have certain information provided.

It is an important process. It is incumbent on us as the Opposition, as the critics of government, to review these things and to review the line items. If not, we all know what happens when you do not have that review and that due diligence, it can lead to troublesome issues. That is our job as an Opposition. I think members of the government recognize that and we have our back and forth sometimes over it, but in theory we all know what our job is in that purpose.

Now, when I look at the Resource sector there are a number of departments here; in fact, I only sat in on one of the Resource sector departments and that was Advanced Education. No doubt, we had someone representing the Official Opposition and all the other ones whether it is Environment, Fisheries, IBRD, Natural Resources, and Tourism. Again, there were a lot of questions asked.

Now, one of the things that was brought up – and again, even though I did not sit in on the Estimates for the Department of Tourism, what I would have to say is that personally I have been known to speak very highly of what this Province has done in terms of tourism. It is hard to dispute that when we see the numbers and we see the beautiful ads. We have a great product to work with and we have matched that great product with very good advertising and we love it; it is award winning.

I was disappointed with this Budget when it came to certain cuts and the fact that regardless of whether it had to do with the actual Department of Tourism, the fact is that many of our tourism sites are lacking in that on-the-ground assistance in providing the services. In many cases, they are not-for-profit groups and it is hard for them to run these, especially in the smaller communities of which I have a number

of them, whether dealing with lighthouses or interpretation centres. That was something that was administered through Advanced Education and something that has been seemingly eliminated.

The other thing, too, is that there were a number of fee increases. That is something we are going to discuss at some point: a number of fee increases, some of which affected tourism. Again we still have a ways to go when it comes to the accessibility. Our volunteers are great; we all know how wonderful they are and what they do in every sector of this Province. We cannot rely on volunteers to run everything when it comes to tourism because that is what they are, they are volunteers. They are doing this out of the goodness of their heart. There is still a ways to go in terms of the co-ordination when it comes to tourism.

Now, what I did want to do, Mr. Speaker, is I wanted to concentrate on the department that obviously I am the critic for and I sat in on the Estimates for. That would be Advanced Education and Skills. It was a very lively session and we had three hours at it. We did not get extra time in that, but I do not think I fault the minister for that. I think there may have been some constraints with the schedule. We got our three hours and it is what it is.

Again, this is a huge department. It is a department that was created just after the election. Last year when we went through the budgetary process, it was our first time for many of the people here, government side included, to deal with this department and the integration of various components which had previously been separated. Last year was sort of a feeling-out process.

One thing I learned about last year was actually, we asked a lot of questions, we sat down for three hours, but three hours was not enough, especially for a new department. It was not enough. Last year I submitted a list of forty-seven questions to the department after for Advanced Education and Skills. To date, we are sitting here in the middle of May, and that was

not answered. That is unfortunate when we went into this process.

Now, there was some information we did request to be provided. I know the Member for St. John's North asked for one list, and I think it was a full ten minutes spent explaining every single component of it, which undoubtedly is a clock-killing mechanism there. I am willing to put some money on that. We have a number of requests in. When Hansard comes out, we will go through these requests, request them in writing, and hopefully get that information provided to us, which it should be.

I just wanted to hit on a few things I heard over this Concurrence and during the Estimates that should be brought up when it comes to this department. One of them is some of the comments I heard from various members. These are just some of the quotes about how there are hundreds of programs when it comes to that department. I am not sure if Mr. Noseworthy agrees. He actually referenced seventy, and he is saying they need to be streamlined to forty-three. So I still have not gotten an answer yet on whether that is going to happen, and if so, what the timeline is on that.

One of the other things that were brought up by a previous member is that Advanced Education is very positive. It is unfortunate because Mr. Noseworthy said the exact opposite. He said there are a lot of issues when it comes to this department. He used the words – I actually read them in the previous session; I went down through the list of terms that he used, like duplication and dysfunctional. I had a whole list and I do not want to spend today going over that.

We also said short-term pain for long-term gain. Even if you agree with that assessment that this is short-term pain for long-term gain, which I do not know if I am prepared to go there, my question is when you have a government that is in power ten years, why do you want until now to do this? Did it take ten years to figure this out and make these changes?

I have to question this here. We talk about sustainability plans and budget as a whole, but

when we spend ten years figuring things out and now we are going to do it, I have to question: Why wasn't this started earlier if this was an issue? Obviously, it was; it was discussed around the Cabinet table, how we have issues with the amount we are spending.

Another one of the comments brought up was that we cannot keep doing things the same way. That in of itself, is probably a fair comment. You cannot keep doing something for the sake of doing it. You cannot keep doing something because this is how we did it. We have to reassess.

I have to question some of the decisions that were made and some of the factors that were used in making those decisions. It is hard; I have so many notes on this because this is a very broad department, with a lot of different moving parts to it.

One thing that Mr. Noseworthy mentioned – again, just to remind those at home, this is the report we paid \$150,000 for. In the Estimates, it was confirmed that we do not know if we are actually going to implement the recommendations. We do not know. We are not sure if this is going to happen or not. That is troubling when we can cherry-pick between our reports that we pay for.

The member who spoke previously mentioned that we asked for this information and sometimes it should not be put out there. Again, it is information that was accumulated or purchased with public money and that is why it should be available to the public, especially something like this which has a sense of notoriety, given the way that we arrived at getting this untendered, six-figure contract.

I had one member say to me – I think he may have Tweeted it – about the irony in asking about this report that we criticized. To me, there is nothing wrong with that. We paid for a report. We questioned how we entered into that contract. You better believe we did, because it was completely against many of the recommendations that are set in place, it was untendered, and you take in all the other stuff. If

you had the report – which we did get and it was a very comprehensive report – you may as well take advantage of the six figures, the \$150,000 that we spent on it. It is clear that we need to, given what he has said about this department.

One of the bigger problems as a whole when we talk about this department, and I asked this question in Estimates, the minister said – it was brought up previously by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island. He said we are in transition, and the minister used the term restructuring. I find it odd that we are restructuring a department that is not even two years old. It is not even two years old yet, and here we are restructuring it.

It comes back to the basic premise which is why didn't we actually do the work first and figure out how we should run the department, how the department should be constructed, and everything else that goes with it? I find that very troubling. It seems like we should call it the department of advanced restructuring because it is constantly in flux. The people who are suffering are the people working in the department and availing of the services and programs that the department provides. These are the people who are having trouble, and they are not getting much information.

I asked a lot of questions. Sometimes it was not so much a question as I put forward a premise or a complaint that I had heard. Many times these are from the people working in the department, the people who are not allowed to speak out or are not given instruction. That is a fact because we talked to them and they are not allowed to speak out. It is what it is. They are not allowed to talk. That is my job, to raise that question.

I know there are members on the other side when it comes to certain programs like EAS, for example. I know there are members on the other side who were contacted by their constituents. When they talked to their constituents they said: I am not sure about this, or I do not agree with this, or I do not know if it is working.

I understand they might not be allowed to bring that up, and I am not here to embarrass anyone.

It is a fact, because these same people, after they speak to their member, come to me as the critic for that department. I am putting these things out on the record.

A lot of times the best place to do it is in Estimates because you have, not only the minister but you have all the people in that decision who are calling the shots; deputy ministers, ADMs, communications people, and the executive assistant. The executive assistant is an important person because obviously that is the individual who, in every department, is hearing from us as MHAs. They are all there and it is a great opportunity to bring these things up.

My time is running away from me. I have to keep going here. A lot of the things we brought up, the fact that the department is still restructuring after we paid for a report is troubling.

We talk about ABE, and that is something that has been brought up a lot. We just saw the ABE program at the Waterford staying there which is great. I am troubled by the information that a lot of members put out when we talk about, well, the success rate is not so high. Well, the fact is that it is not so high for a number of reasons, none of which are brought up by government members.

For instance, people on Income Support have to go to the College of the North Atlantic. They have to go there. They cannot go to a private institution – or they can, but in very rare, exceptional cases.

Now, the government's own White Paper on education said people on Income Support have barriers that prevent them from succeeding sometimes. That might be a reason why the graduation rate is not so high. That is a reason, but government does not say anything about it. They get on the radio and they say, oh, the success rate is lower, but they do not say that.

That is one of the reasons some of the instructors are so upset, because they feel they have had their work degraded. I have never said it was

intentional, but that is how they feel. Government members, especially backbenchers, that is their job. Again, this is not a shot at them; that is not a shot. They know their role and they do their role.

AN HON. MEMBER: Very well.

MR. A. PARSONS: Some of them do it very well.

You have to understand that the effects sometimes of what you are saying are going to – especially in this case where the notes and information you have been given is wrong. It is going to have an effect on the people who are having their jobs basically taken away from them.

When I talk about ABE, we do not talk about the fact that it was never brought up that many of them actually achieve success because they did not need the full degree. They went on and went to post-secondary. They got the credits they needed. So, the graduation rate does not go up but they are moving on. They are attaching to the labour market.

Now, I want to talk about the labour market because this is something else that Mr. Noseworthy said. Mr. Noseworthy said that when we deal with Income Support, which in this Province can at any time be somewhere in the range of 24,000 up to, I think it is 29,000. The number varies, but right now I would say that we have more people on Income Support than we did in 2009. So that is a troubling fact.

He says that we need – because one of the goals of the department is to transition people from Income Support into the labour market – to transition them. There is no issue with that, but he says in order to do that you have to do more case management. The people on the phone, the front line people have to – it is not just a case of taking the call. We have to case manage these people and work with these people to achieve that set upon goal.

We are not getting that done because right now the call return rate for Income Support has

actually gone down to where it is somewhere in the 20 per cent to 35 per cent range. Now, if we are only returning or answering 20 per cent to 35 per cent of those calls, well that is certainly not case management. These people, if you talk to them, their morale is low right now. They are burned out.

If you take somebody who is calling for Income Support and the first message they get when they call is: Your call is important to us; however, due to a higher volume of calls we cannot get to you. The fact is there is no higher volume of calls. It is just less people to answer the calls. When this person is put off and put off, and in some cases they can be put off for a couple of days, when that front line worker takes that call, you know what you are dealing with. You are dealing with an irate individual. You are dealing with someone who is upset, and I do not blame them. They have a right to be.

How can the morale be high when these people are having a hard enough time just taking those calls and dealing with the other Income Support issues, whether it is dental issues, glasses, or emergency cheques? Now they are supposed to case manage. They do not have enough time. With most of the phone calls they are getting berated by upset clients, upset people. Right now the system is failing.

I hope this is part of the transition, that we are going to fix it but right now we have to look at the people answering those calls. When we have a call success rate that is in the low thirties this month, gone down drastically, that is not success. That is very far from it. Again, that is something identified by Mr. Noseworthy.

We could talk about something else too, and that is one of the things – the Immigration and the Population Growth Strategy. We all know that immigration is one of the greatest drivers of population growth. We just hired someone. We are paying about \$170,000 for a Population Growth Strategy. It is a population study that is not going to be released. It is to inform the department.

MR. JOYCE: How much?

MR. A. PARSONS: It is \$170,000.

MR. JOYCE: No.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, straight from the Estimates. Now, we are not getting anything out of it, nothing that the public will see. One of the people brought it up actually, one of the prior members said we have the population growth. It was said in the Estimates, too. It said: With this population growth and the increase of people, we have to change. So, I said what is the population increase? It is 0.3 per cent. I know that is a humongous strain right now, 0.3 per cent.

The fact is we could go back to 1991 when the population was at about 579,000. Now it is somewhere between 512,000 and 514,000. We know they are fluid numbers, they change, but when we cut out money under the heading of Immigration, and we cut out civil service jobs, and we cut out families, many of which now have to leave because their skills do not translate into other jobs that exist, what are we doing with the Population Growth Strategy? What exactly is getting done there? Of course, we will not see it.

Now, I will give the government credit; they did release the Noseworthy report. They did. Again, it was submitted in December and then I do not know when it was looked at, but it was released in March.

We are paying for this population study that we have no idea how it is done. One could surmise what went on there, and I certainly have my opinion of how this all came about. Certainly I hope the population increases, but right now there is no idea of how this is going to happen.

I want to end off. I have only a few seconds left, Mr. Speaker, and I want to talk about JCPs. JCPs are something brought up in this House many a time. Just to give people an idea, when I was sitting in Estimates I got an e-mail from my constituency assistant. The letter was dated April 24 from the department, received on May 8. It said: JCPs are up for the year, but the deadline was May 7. I got my letter May 8.

Again, I have to question what is going on in the department.

Now, I do not have enough time to talk about the train wreck that was JCPs last year. I do not have that time, but I have been assured by the acting minister that JCPs are going to be administered better this year. I look forward to that. I hope that works.

Mr. Speaker, my time is up and I appreciate the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is good to get up today to speak to the Estimates in regard to the Resource Committee and certainly the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development. We had a good discussion. We had an initial three hours. Then we reconvened for another couple of hours and had a very good discussion on a whole range of items, broadly from an economic development perspective and what is happening in the Province, on the Island and in Labrador. We talked about small and medium enterprises, our small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador, and programs to promote them.

As well, looking at supplier development and some of the significant projects we have in the Province, as we all know now, those are certainly driving economic activity, high-paying jobs, and supporting regions of our Province, a lot of rural Newfoundland and Labrador. How to supply our development? We are seeing the growth of companies to provide that service and spinoffs from those entities.

I had an opportunity, along with my colleague the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, to visit the Vale site a number of weeks back. I saw first-hand the activity out there. There are about 5,000 people employed at that site as it moves to production stage, first phase in the next few months. I certainly saw, too, the spin-off

that is happening in Arnold's Cove and other communities in the region in regard to companies that have taken advantage of the opportunities that exist in certain projects that they have that ability to provide those services.

We have seen the expansion of SMEs and see the creation of new SMEs that feed that. That drives our economy, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the new growth, new jobs, and new money. Because that is so important; we have to always develop new growth as we look at sustaining us as a Province. Our traditional industries, we grow those, but still we need new growth, new money, to drive our programs and to be able to provide the services that we need to provide to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to two just overall I guess in terms of the Budget and where we are to. We have done significant investment over the past number of years in terms of many kinds of infrastructure. We have spoken about it here in this House. Whether it is school infrastructure or hospitals, roads, recreation facilities, it has been extensive. Now we look at where we are this year, in terms of our financial situation, looking at a 10 Year Sustainability Plan to make sure we can meet the needs of Newfoundland and Labradorians as we move forward.

We do that certainly by driving our resource sector. As a government, early on in our mandate we had the mantra of no more giveaways. We would make sure that our resources are well managed. That we maximize them for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and that is what we have done and that is what we will continue to do.

Having said that, we also need to be fiscally prudent, and that is what we are doing in terms of the Finance Minister laying out his plan this year and in future years in terms of we can generate revenues, but again be financially prudent in terms of making those investments that we need to make to grow our Province. We need to do that.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister Responsible for IBRD, it is amazing the past couple of years in terms of the amount of attraction that we are hearing from local companies in terms of growth, but companies from outside the Province and around the world in terms of looking at the activity that is going on in Newfoundland and Labrador and wanting to be a part of that.

Obviously we know about the oil and gas sector, mining sector, innovation technology and again companies coming, recognizing where we are, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean in terms of harsh environments. We are developing the expertise and knowledge here in the many new industries; one that comes to mind is the ocean technology industry. Some of the expertise we have developed here and the intellectual capacity of the people we have here, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, many have come through Memorial University engineering, science, and they have developed that ability. Those who worked in the oil and gas sector here have developed that knowledge and expertise and that has allowed new growth, new innovation, new expertise, that drives us to become sustainable as a Province and innovative.

I say that in regard to our oil and gas sector. We are looking at Arctic opportunities in terms of what the future holds, in terms of new exploration, surveillance, and other activities in the Arctic. With the expertise we have in the Province now that we are developing, some of that can be exported. While we are used to being in harsh environments and functioning here, we are developing that expertise. That is something that we have the intellectual capacity now, we can use it here. As we move forward it gets exported, and that knowledge and expertise get exported. As I say, we are seeing it in ocean tech, the oil and gas industry, and there is a bright future for that.

As a government to support that we have created the Research & Development Corporation in 2008 specifically to look at how we link up research and development with the business community and get into applied R & D. That is something we have been quite successful with in

terms of partnering with business to identify where the opportunities are.

We see it in the fishing industry. We have supported through the RDC the various projects in the fishing industry. We see it through oil and gas. As well, we are looking at the mining industry now and pushing that out. Other industries; the agriculture industry in Stephenville, a dairy farm out there, we worked with that farm out there, as well as the Baie Verte mines. We are doing it all around the Province in terms of opportunities, in terms of research and development, how we can reach out and as I say diversify our economy, new growth, new opportunity, new funds so we are able to deliver resources and the services to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

A while back I was with ExxonMobil, we opened the site at Bull Arm in terms of activity out there. I had the opportunity to meet a young man who had done an engineering degree here at Memorial. I think he completed his M.B.A. a number of years ago and had found work out West, and then had left and gone to Russia. He had worked on a gravity-based structure and had built that knowledge and expertise.

He was back here now working in Bull Arm. A lead hand in terms of the operations out there, living in Clarenville with his wife and two children and delighted to be back in the Province. He said thank you to the government, to us, for the vision to drive these projects to make sure that people have an opportunity to come back and to practice their skills.

With what we are seeing in the Province today, all over the Province, we are seeing people with opportunities. That is what it is all about, Mr. Speaker, in terms of opportunities, especially for our youth. To make sure that the opportunities that are presented to them are available, and that they are able to maximize the benefits of what we are seeing in our economy today. That goes back, from to a Budget perspective, to the investments we made right through our educational system, right through K to 12 in terms of the investments that were made over the past number of years. As well, as we look at

Memorial University, post-secondary, Marine Institute and CNA, everybody knows the investment we make. We continue to make again this year; I think it is \$8 million or \$9 million to ensure that we freeze tuition rates to make sure that they are the lowest in the country so our youth have an opportunity to avail of the expertise in those post-secondary institutions, the training they need to transition out, as I said, to those opportunities that exist in our Province today in a variety of areas.

There are traditional areas; I mentioned ocean tech, research and development, science, as well we are seeing growth in the gaming sector here in the Province, ICT. ICT sector is a \$1.6 billion industry here in the Province and we are seeing tremendous growth in that.

We have partnered with Desire2Learn, an e-learning platform company that is setting up in the Province, a significant investment to allow us to build on that cluster of ICT and that is all about the expansion of our economy. We are having discussions with other ICT companies in terms of them coming, but we have a great base here and we continue to build that out and that is how we can expand our economy and make it sustainable for years to come, for this generation and certainly generations to come, as well.

I mentioned post-secondary in terms of our investment in terms of expanding the specialties we have there, expanding our engineering department at Memorial. We have expanded our pharmacy at Memorial, as well as our medical school. Memorial is recognized as a great institution, providing good services and opportunities again that I have mentioned for our youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention, from a Budget perspective, the Recourse Committee and some of the efforts of IBRD in terms of what we are doing in terms of assisting economic development. We believe the private sector drives economic development. At times, we create that environment which we have done being very competitive in corporation and business taxation scheme, personal income tax in terms of those that we see in terms of what we

put back in people's pockets when they work, that makes it inviting for people to work and live here. We drive that; we try and create that environment.

Our results are quite evident to anybody who is familiar with checking on what the indicators are with regard to the business environment. SMEs from any time over the past couple of years have been close to, if not at the top, for being the most optimistic in the country in terms of what the future holds in Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is a great indication of the work we have done, how we have built that atmosphere here in the Province as a government, working with the private sector to do it. It is showing up in indications of how people perceive the business environment here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I said, there is tremendous interest both nationally and internationally for various companies to come to invest in our Province, to see the opportunities. Certainly in our commodity markets we have seen tremendous growth and companies want to come and be part of that. We are certainly open as a government to facilitate and to create that environment. Very simply, sometimes government needs to get out of the way. They do not need to be involved.

As business comes, industry comes, they will drive their own circumstance and be successful. At times there is intervention required and it is more about creating that overall environment where a business can flourish and certainly we are seeing that today in Newfoundland and Labrador.

From a programs point of view, I announced during the Budget and just after that we have gone through a process over the past year in terms of our suite of programs at IBRD and we did a review of those programs. We are having success in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, in regions, in driving opportunity, because that is about opportunity management in terms of economic development. Regionally there are opportunities there and we drive them as a

government through various ways. It could be through low-interest loans, it could be through equity investments, it certainly could be work skill enhancement in terms of training staff with a particular SME, looking at exports, maybe new technologies, allowing them to upscale to make them more competitive.

We also look at export. How do we help a company export and get into new markets? It could be down on the Eastern Seaboard, it may be Europe, but all of that we work with those companies to make sure they can expand. Again, it is about new growth.

It could be about a start-up company. At Memorial we work with the Genesis Centre as an incubator for new ideas. Certainly to get that idea from, as I said, the idea stage to commercialization, we have great success and see the number of companies that have done that and are doing quite well. We support that.

It is right along the business continuum. Then again, it could be company that has good cash flow, is doing well, but needs an influx of funds to get to the next step. That is along the business continuum and we certainly work with all of those companies to do that.

The other one we do is global travel. We cost share companies that want to go into other markets, sell their wares, and make other countries aware of what they have to offer. Our Global Travel Program has been extremely successful. We are seeing a number of companies in Newfoundland and Labrador have taken advantage of that program, gone into other jurisdictions. We have allowed them and helped them market their goods and services and it has been quite successful.

What we did in terms of our programs and the review we did, we identified that there were particular areas we need to improve on. With streamlining the programs, we have a large number of programs, and oftentimes there appeared to be some confusion in regard to what those programs were and how employers could easily access it.

We consolidated a lot of that, went with a commercial and non-commercial fund, and streamlined access to those programs. We delegated more authority to our regional offices in terms of decisions on the amount of funds they could disburse at the local level, which that is what we heard from our stakeholders.

As well, we had a number of review committees, quite a number actually, that were required for approvals. We streamlined those because we needed to make quick turnaround times for those entrepreneur businesses out there that every day gets up – and we salute those entrepreneurs and the businesses owners – every day driving opportunity, employing people in our communities, urban centres, our regions, rural regions, and being innovative in how they are growing their companies. We need to respond to that and that is what we did.

Again we looked at the financing piece we do. In the past we used to finance three plus prime and we were hearing that that really was not competitive, so we rolled that back to 3 per cent. With that, we have seen a significant uptake and we are continuing to roll out a suite of programs and driving economic activity in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Another program we made changes to last year was the Fisheries Loan Guarantee Program. Last year we made adjustments to it which reflected the ability of a fish harvester to get access to additional capital, using their licence as equity, which was new. It expanded the amount of capital they could have access to in terms of purchasing another enterprise, and as well allow them to get access if they had borrowed from a particular processor in the past that they could access funds to become independent and purchase it through the commercial banks.

What we do through the Fisheries Loan Program is we guarantee that, we guarantee any difference at the end of the day, if there is a default. As I said since last year we were in Fermeuse with the then Minister of Fisheries and announced that Fermeuse Marine Base and the indicator, since that was done in terms of uptake,

have been extremely significant. Maybe in the years before that, we were getting five or six applicants. Since that time in the current year, we may over twenty; I think twenty-three, twenty-four. We have others we are doing reviews on, so that is an indication of us listening to the industry, hearing what they need, and responding to it.

As a result of that we are certainly seeing tremendous uptake in the Fisheries Loan Guarantee Program. Obviously that is, for the most part, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, going to the issue of sustainability, we are making sure that we respond to what people require as we move forward to do that.

The other one I want to speak to is the non-commercial part of our programs. That deals with the Regional Sectoral Diversification Fund. That is a fund that every year is in the range of \$6 million. That deals with the non-profit organizations on the ground and the work they do in terms of driving economic activity, it could be infrastructure. A lot of times it is infrastructure.

I know up my way, as an example, the Colony of Avalon, we have invested significantly in that. That is an entity that draws 22,000 people roughly a year into the region. Though it is a non-profit, it is significant. It drives economic development through the traffic and the attraction of people coming, through the tourism point of view.

That is very important, and what we have seen in that has been, every year, maximized. I think about \$44 million we have invested. It has leveraged over another \$100 million which is a massive investment. Seventy-five to 80 per cent of that is in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. HUTCHINGS: Seventy-five to 80 per cent. I say 80 per cent is in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I spent \$180 million, \$190 million, and 80 per cent of that is going in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

As well, with our SMEs and what we are doing on the commercial side, we do it again in terms of our SMEs and working with them. Last year I was on the Port au Port Peninsula with my colleague at Magine Snowboards. It was about the innovation and youth. Three young people who had started a small company in one of the gentleman's father's garage handcrafted snowboards. We partnered with them. Now they are sending that around the country, getting into other markets.

That is an indication that the SMEs, entrepreneurship, and business is all over Newfoundland and Labrador. We help with that idea to drive it and to help them wherever we can. That is happening all over the Province in a larger scale. In terms of down on the South Coast in terms of the aquaculture industry, what we have invested down there is \$24 million, over \$400 million leveraged. That is investment. I would say for the gentleman for Bay of Islands to stay tuned to that one. We are getting to that. We will see how that goes.

We are not ashamed to invest in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We have done it; we will continue to do it. I think some comments on the other side there a while back in regard to Arnold's Cove and the harvest vessel out there. We invested in that, it was a good investment. Icewater needed it and they needed cash flow.

The hon. member over there wanted to shut it down. We did not feel a need to shut it down, it is an SME. We continue to fund that. It was a good project. I make no apologies for that. Folks on the other sides might, but we do not. We did a business analysis on it. It was good to do, a good project. We will not walk away from rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Some on the other side might walk away, but we will not walk away from rural Newfoundland and Labrador. The money we spent in the past number of years, Mr. Speaker, we are clear on that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: So, Mr. Speaker, just to conclude.

As I said, whether it is innovation, whether it is investment in education or post-secondary, research and development, SMEs, diversifying our economy and building new growth and opportunities through megaprojects, and through supporting our supply and development, we are there. We are going to continue to work on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John's East.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thought they were getting close to the end of the clock here on this particular committee, but that is okay. I have plenty to say. I want to thank as well the various ministers who –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: – were involved in the Resource Committee. At the same time, one of the committees, Mr. Bill Parrott, who is a long time deputy minister, this was his last Estimates as well. I want to wish him all the best. I know he has given a lot of service to the government over the years. In whatever capacity he takes up in his next role, I think everybody here in the House wishes him all the best. So if we could get that out of the way, I wish him all the best.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it was kind of interesting as well in this budgetary process, considering there were so many issues talked about in Resource Committee, in particular in one of the Estimates I dealt with that had to do with Environment and Conservation. I wanted to talk about that for a little while because I thought of all of the Resource Committees this one was fairly important to the point that it has the most

impact right now on the future well-being of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think when you get a taste of what has been happening there, and what could have been happening when it came to this particular Estimates Committee for Environment and Conservation, I think we have a degree of confusion sometimes that is being told in the budgets. At the same time, a bit of a loss of direction in the loss of the Budget as well.

One of the more important things I thought about in looking at this particular Estimates committee was the educational component that we are losing when it came to some of the job cuts in Environment and Conservation. I want to touch on that for a little bit first before I go on the rest of the way. One of the things I thought about in looking at the cuts to the educational aspect of it was the impact this is going to have on some of the interpretative programs when it comes to some of the important ecological reserves around the Province.

We are losing a manager, for example, down in St. Mary's at the ecological reserve there. This is a most historic time when not only are you going to have an educational component lost, but who is going to be doing the interpreting, for example, when it comes to global climate change and the effects to bird populations?

We all know the gannet population down there took a bit of a pounding last year. It was affected in this particular case by an oil spill that happened down in the Gulf of Mexico in their wintering area. Of course, I think it was Bill Montevecchi who pretty much gave everybody the bad news when it came to what was happening with gannets down there, that they were having a bit of a troubled time this time around. That did not exactly inspire me, knowing we had a serious educational component that was going to be cut out of there, in the loss of a manager for the ecological reserve in St. Mary's.

The same thing can be said when it came to the manager for the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. Here we are dealing with the puffin, in

this particular case, a very important bird to the Province. Not only is there a tourism component, but everybody likes to make money off the puffin, including the tourism industry. Everybody likes to be able to say we have these cute birds in a reserve there, but now we do not have a manager for that reserve. It has been lost. We have to wonder where our priorities are when it came to the loss of the manager of the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. They really took a hit in that department.

I want to get in, as well, as regards to the permanent, full-time and seasonal positions, eight out of ten (inaudible) in some of the parks around –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time allocated for debating the Estimates of the Resource Committee has now expired.

The motion is that the report of the Resource Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

On motion, Report of Resource Committee carried.

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

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Order 3, third reading of Bill 4.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, second by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 4, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No.2, Bill 4, be now read a third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 4 be now read a third time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion that Bill 4 be now read the third time?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

MR. JOYCE: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in the members.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips ready for the question?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips now ready for the question?

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt third reading of Bill 4?

All those in favour, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. King, Mr. Hutchings, Ms Shea, Mr. Davis, Ms Sullivan, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Jackman, Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Hedderson, Mr. Marshall, Mr. Littlejohn, Mr. Granter, Mr. Cornect, Mr. McGrath, Mr. Dalley, Mr. Felix Collins, Mr. Kent, Mr. Lane, Mr. Dinn, Mr. Brazil, Ms Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Little,

Mr. Cross, Mr. Pollard, Mr. Peach, Mr. Crummell, Mr. Forsey, Mr. Russell.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Ball, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Bennett, Ms Michael, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Mitchelmore, Ms Rogers, Mr. Osborne.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: twenty-nine; the nays: ten.

MR. SPEAKER: I declare the motion lost.

AN HON. MEMBER: Carried.

MR. SPEAKER: My mistake, I declare the motion carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Third reading of the bill.

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

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 2", read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 4)

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

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I call Order 4, second reading of a bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3, Bill 7.

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

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 7, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3, be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 7 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3”. (Bill 7)

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

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are now into Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3 whereby the government seeks approval to amend the Revenue Administration Act to impose a fee of \$50 for each search for a clearance certificate. A tax clearance certificate is issued by the Department of Finance prior to the distribution of assets, including real property. These clearance certificates ensure that there are no liens associated with taxes administered by the Province as of the date the certificate is issued. These clearance certificates are valid for ten days from the date of issuance.

The Tax Administration Division currently receives approximately 30,000 to 31,000 requests each year from law firms seeking tax clearances for their clients. These requests or clearances are required prior to the distribution of real property to ensure that no liens, associated with taxes administered by the Province, exist.

The current process of the Tax Administration Division is entirely manual and requires the involvement of two full-time employees to turnaround each request within a forty-eight hour period. These two full-time employees cost, in salaries, Mr. Speaker, approximately \$90,000. The department does not recoup any of the cost, or the division does not recoup any of the costs. So, in doing our review this year in

the Finance department to determine whether or not there was any cost savings, or efficiencies could be realized within this process, it was determined that it is only fair to charge a fee in relation to the provision of this tax clearance certificate.

The clearance certificate is a service that the Province provides to the public and I would suggest is entirely reasonable to charge a fee per request to assist the Province in getting back our costs. Similar fees are charged in other jurisdictions including New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia, for example, and these fees range from \$20 to \$114 per request and are for selected tax types; whereas this fee will recover all taxes administered by the Province.

Similar fees and services are administered throughout the provincial government as outlined – I will give you a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker. We have a personal property registry which allows both individuals and institutions to record their financial interest in personal property, for example, cars and boats. That is a \$10 per search for a fee. There is a judgement enforcement registry which allows users to search the registry or register their own judgements, and that is a \$35 remote search and \$60 per staff search, Mr. Speaker.

We have the Labour Relations Agency which issues clearances to law firms to confirm whether a person or company is in good standing with the Labour Relations Act. That is a \$50 increase. It is proposed and felt that it is fair by the department that a fee of \$50 per request, consistent with the fee proposed to the Labour Relations Agency, be imposed. The number of clearance requests is highly related to the real estate activity within the Province and it is expected the total fees will fluctuate from year to year and may differ significantly from the overall projection.

Mr. Speaker, when I practiced law, for the last seventeen years of my practice, I was involved in criminal law. I had done some real estate earlier. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs will speak to this as I know he engaged

in practicing real estate for a number of years. I am not sure if the Member for Burgeo – La Poile or the Member for St. Barbe did, but I am sure they may have some comments. Essentially what we are proposing here is that we collect back some of the fees that our services were providing for nothing.

To make the payment of the fee more convenient for law firms, government introduced an online payment option for the payment of the tax clearance certificate fee on April 1. Law firms can now use central Web receipting to make their payment using Visa, MasterCard, or Interac debit card online.

Now I am sure things have changed a lot over the last number of years, but I do remember, Mr. Speaker, I worked one time with a law firm where there were a lot of real estate transactions being conducted. Friday afternoon especially was a very busy time whereby people would come in and all the various certificates that were needed in order to close the real estate transaction were provided for.

What happened, though, if you did not have that certificate you needed, the transaction could be postponed. There is someone either buying a house for the first time, or someone who was buying a house and selling a house. Everything had to run smoothly in order for people to be pleased.

What we are trying to do here is ensure, if the practice is the same today, transactions can proceed and tax clearance certificates be provided. In this particular case, online the law firm can enter the quantity of applications, the law firm's name, and lawyer's name, and the system will generate a transaction number, which must be written on each tax clearance certificate application associated with the payment. A manual search of databases is conducted to determine if an applicant owes outstanding taxes or if (inaudible) is in process. This information is communicated back to the lawyer in the form of an unqualified or qualified clearance.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know about my other colleagues. I know a lot of people are lawyers here who practiced or did real estate law back years ago would use what we call search firms to search for a title. In the Registry of Deeds, which used to be in the bottom of this building, it was like something out of Dickens to a certain extent. You would go in there and you had these huge books, these red books. I forget when they started, but it was at least in 1880 to 1900. The way you would conduct a search is you would have to go through each of those books trying to trace the title of the property.

It is quite amazing how many properties were actually registered back then. What would happen if you were conducting a transaction outside of the St. John's area, well then a lot of people did not register their deeds. They would own the land but there was a different process for trying to establish a title in the land. There were such concepts as possessory title. At the end of it all, there had to be clear title to the land in order for the transaction to proceed. That led then to quietening of titles and applications before the Supreme Court with affidavits of possession.

Then you have to have all of your other certificates, and I am sure the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs will be able to outline in more detail, but the certificates were all listed there. There were legal secretaries, Mr. Speaker, who did a lot of this real estate. They had their checklist that had to be provided. The searching of the documents for title, title was always a key element and then you would have to make sure there was no mechanic liens, make sure all the city taxes were paid, make sure there was no fees owed in various types of taxes in government. This is the way that these developed.

What happened is government was providing a service for nothing. The question becomes should it be an obligation on the part of government to provide a service for nothing, where realistically there is no reason not to charge a fee. What we have here, what I would suggest is a modest fee of \$50 that will bring some revenue in. Not only to pay for the people

who are working on this but to help improve the system.

The department strives to communicate. Because of the nature of this real estate practice, because people want to get into their houses, they strive to communicate the results back to the law firm in forty-eight hours at receipt of the request. If the transaction relating to the request occurs then there could be a withholding of funds. There are various things that could happen. It would have to be clarified. Things would have to be fixed up. The goal, and I know they brought in mortgage insurance since then. So I am not quite sure if the system is the same, but you would have to make sure that everything is cleared up in relation to the property.

What we are doing here is we are simply saying that we are going to introduce a fee similar to other provinces, like Nova Scotia, like Manitoba, like New Brunswick, to pay for this and it will be the same. It is proposed that it be the same as the clearance certificate fee imposed by the Labour Relations Agencies. I also refer to the Department of Justice imposing fees for various types of searches, such as searches within the Judgement Enforcement Registry and the Personal Property Registry.

Mr. Speaker, we just had a piece of legislation go through this House, the Labrador Border Zone tax rebate. I remember saying last week if you are going to oppose us on this I guess you are going to oppose us on everything. We just saw Division in the House where in fact the members opposite voted against us removing what was essentially a rebate providing an unfair advantage to business people in one part of the Province, not even in all of Labrador.

I can expect if that is the way we are going to go, they will also oppose the imposition of this proposed fee, Mr. Speaker. Even though it makes sense, even though it is consistent, even though there is no reason that we cannot collect monies for the services provided.

Mr. Speaker, it has been quite interesting. Over the last period of time, since 2007 being in this

House and watching how the House works, the government will propose a piece of legislation or the government will bring in a policy and almost inevitably, the Opposition will oppose. We have had one or two notable examples whereby the Opposition have agreed, and I am not going to get into them today. They keep arising in this House. The Opposition seems to be, it is their role to oppose whatever the government may do.

Now, I have not had the opportunity to sit in Opposition. Hopefully I will never have that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I do not expect it will happen in the next period of time. I would have thought a more constructive way to be an Opposition critic would be to take the government to task for unfairness, to take the government to task for policies which simply do not make sense, to take the government to task when they make bad decisions. Even though all of us try to do our best, there are legitimate times that the members opposite can criticize.

The imposition of a \$50 fee for a clearance certificate, I am not sure that is one that can engender significant debate, but over the next period of time we will see. We will watch how they will then take this clearance fee and they will turn that into another example of this tyrannical government trying to impose fees on everyone, trying to make people pay and then say, but, Mr. Speaker, we are not raising taxes.

That is the reality, Mr. Speaker, we are not raising taxes. We are not raising taxes as the NDP would have us do on families, we are not doing that. What we are doing here is we have to find certain sources of revenue. We looked at this one and said, yes, this makes sense. Over the next day or two we will see some others where we are going to bring in, like where we raised the price of tobacco. We raised the price of tobacco, Mr. Speaker, in a way that was not that exorbitant, was not that extravagant, not compared to some of the other governments in the country and we will go through that.

I am just trying to give the people of the Province an example of how something here that we should be able to do in ten minutes will probably take us two or three hours. Well that is

fair enough, I just want the people to know that here we are talking about a clearance certificate. You watch the Opposition as they will go all over the place, in and out, and criticizing us for trying to have hidden fees. There is nothing hidden about this, Mr. Speaker. All we are saying is that if you want to do something, \$50 is what you are going to pay for a certificate.

We have two people who are doing this. So, as we hear people now – it will be interesting to hear what the members of the Opposition are going to say. It would be nice, though, if, for once, they agreed with us. It would be just so nice if the members opposite simply said we are not going to talk to this one. Do you know something, Mr. Speaker? This is a good piece of legislation. We are collecting some fees where fees should be collected.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful sign of co-operation, but do I expect it, Mr. Speaker? Not a chance. Because for however long we are here, the members opposite are going to use their time to get up and the way the rules are set up, Mr. Speaker, there does not have to be a whole lot of relevance, with all due respect to the Speaker and the members who have made rulings in the past. Essentially, a \$50 fee will allow you to talk about deficits, about Budgets, I am assuming that is what they will try to do, and we will stand up and argue relevance.

What I have learned, Mr. Speaker, is relevance, in a legal context where X is logically probative of proving Y, is not necessarily the way relevance is determined here. Relevance, in a legal context, there has to be a connection; there has to be a logical connection. Why am I using X to prove Y? In other words, Mr. Speaker, one plus one in the outside world equals two, but one plus one in the House of Assembly oftentimes equals three, at least in the eyes of the Opposition. If they agreed that one plus one equals two, they are agreeing with the government. We certainly would not want to see a system of democracy work whereby even on the simplest matter, the members opposite would agree.

I am going to throw a challenge out to them, Mr. Speaker, and I am hoping today will be the day that we will see co-operation moved to a new level in this House. I am hoping that the members opposite will say: Do you know something? I agree with the Minister of Finance – I do not generally agree with the Minister of Finance; in fact, I can say I do not agree with the Minister of Finance on anything, but I am going to agree with him today that the imposition of the a \$50 fee for a clearance certificate where we do not charge any money – do you know something, Mr. Speaker? If I am a member of the Opposition, I am going to say, yes, that is not bad; I think I will agree with him. Now let's see what happens, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I hate to disappoint the Minister of Finance but he called it, he must have had a crystal ball there. This is obviously a piece of legislation, Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3, that we will ask some questions about, and that is our job here I believe.

Simply, for the Minister of Finance to stand here today and say that this Opposition opposes everything from this government, that is not the case. There have been a number of instances in the last year I would say, actually in my position, that we have supported this government on a number of different things, I say, Mr. Speaker.

For us to stand here and look at a piece of legislation now or amending a piece of legislation that really flies in the face of what this government has done for the last ten years, and something that they have sent out a significant number of press releases claiming the fact that we are indeed lowering fees – as a matter of fact, if you go back to Budget 2006,

there was a considerable PR campaign that went around reducing fees by this government.

As a matter of fact, it was as simple as some of the fees to collect even a coyote licence or a polar bear licence. There was a very substantial list that was included on the fact, and this government said that we are going out of our way to reduce fees. Mr. Speaker, why is it that we were doing this? Well, at that day they were saying: We want to make it easier for people. We do not want our government to be seen as trying to put our hands in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We want to make the process simpler, so therefore what we are doing is we are reducing fees.

Now, in this case here, \$50 for 30,000 to 31,000 requests for certificates. I would say if this was, as the minister was stating, a cost recovery, something to recover the costs of doing this business, of the two employees, somewhere around \$90,000 I think the minister said, well it might be something that you would look at it and say that kind of makes sense, because we are in a situation where people do expect to pay for services. If you say 30,000 requests for certificates and you say it is \$50 each, that is certainly not a cost recovery. That is not cost recovery at all. That is about a \$1.5 million return here you are going to get. So, if it is costing you \$90,000, or if it is 30,000 requests for \$50, well that indeed is not a cost recovery at all, I say, Mr. Speaker.

So, we will have some questions on it, and there is no doubt – I think you can talk to anybody. As a matter of fact, this government went out of its way a few years ago to go around the Province and talk about red tape reduction. Some of the things about the red tape reduction would make it simpler for people to get to where they need to be, from point A to point B. Some of that dealt with the removal of fees. I made comment there about the 2006 Budget, and I do not have a copy of it here right now, but I know there were a significant number of fees that were reduced, Mr. Speaker.

In this year's Budget, however, we saw just the opposite of that where we saw a number of fees

that were reintroduced – anywhere from historic sites to the removal of the tobacco tax in Labrador. Mr. Speaker, we have had a significant debate on that, and the position that we have taken is that this and previous Administrations, including previous PC governments, have gone out of their way – including this particular PC government – to say that the businesses in the Labrador Border Zone, in this case, as the minister just spoke about, that was put there to kind of level the playing field with their competitors in Quebec. Now, indeed that has changed; it has changed effective April 1, I say.

As we know, fees, any time you go into anywhere, you have to pay a fee, and people find that aggravating. As I said, this is not about a cost recovery at all; this is indeed a way to actually bring revenue back into the Budget this year. Simply to say that you are offering a service and you are paying for that service, this is not the case. This is indeed a money-making venture by this government.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this government have talked a lot about not increasing taxes to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in this Budget. I ask you the question: What would be the difference if you added a fee or if you increased fees than actually increasing taxes? It is still a service you pay for; a fee is no different than a tax. In this particular case here, the \$50 to getting the clearance certificates in place will bring substantial revenue into this government. This is not about cost recovery; this is indeed a money-making venture.

What we understand from the minister is the certificates will be valid for ten days and there will be forty-eight hours to turn this around. Now, in that particular case, the turnaround time of forty-eight hours, Mr. Speaker, that is a good thing. There is nothing worse than when you are going through a transaction that you get delays in that transaction because of a timing issue. Forty-eight hours, I think that is a reasonable approach to this. We do support that.

The request being valid for ten days – I am not a lawyer, but that to me would be reasonable as

well. The fact is that you go from where you are today which is no cost, no cost for this service, we have two people who are actually employed with the department right now at a cost of around \$90,000, and indeed what we have now is a \$50 fee for this service.

The other question that I would have about this: Why is this requiring an amendment to the act? Why isn't this done in regulations, for instance? Typically when you look at changes in fees within any piece of legislation, this is actually separated and put into regulations and would not require an amendment to the act. I am sure that these are questions that we will get answered as the debate goes on, but I will say that the purchaser, the person actually making the purchase to acquire the asset, the people who the lawyers, in this case, or the legal community is actually requesting this certificate for, these people will take comfort in knowing the taxes will be paid and therefore they would have this information in advance. Why this is not done in regulations, I look forward to that answer from the government so we can actually figure out why this is done.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to conclude my comments right now. I am sure we will have others. As I have said, this fee is indeed another word for tax. It is a tax. It is taking money from the people of the Province. As Opposition, our job is to ask questions, I say. I look forward to as I listen to other ministers and other members opposite as they make their comments based on this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to say a few words on this particular debate. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to look at the legislation and see the reason this amendment is required. I would refer hon. members to section 18 of the Revenue

Administration Act, which says, "Until the amount of the tax required to be paid under this Act is paid, it is a first lien in favour of the Crown on the entire assets of the estate of the taxpayer and the lien has priority over all other claims of a person against the taxpayer."

What that means is if a tax is owing under the Revenue Administration Act, from the moment it is owing, there is going to be this lien. The lien is going to come into existence automatically. Nobody has to do anything to get the lien, but the taxes are owed. The lien is in existence and the lien is on the entire estate of the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, subsection (3) of section 18 indicates that the lien for tax in respect of real property is considered to be a first mortgage ranking in priority over every other conveyance, every other judgment, or every other mortgage. Even if you have a first mortgage on the property, once you owe these taxes, then automatically under the act as it presently exists, even before this amendment, the lien comes into effect immediately when the taxes are owed and then rank ahead of all the other security.

Mr. Speaker, if anybody is going to buy a house, buy a piece of real estate, buy an asset from somebody, or they are going to take a mortgage on it, obviously they would want to know: Do you owe any of these taxes that are set out in the Revenue Administration Act? If you do, there is a lien on the property. Obviously as a buyer or a lender, a mortgagee, you would certainly want to know if any taxes are owing. So you would request the person who you are buying the property from or you would request from the person who is giving you the mortgage, you would say to them: I want to make sure that there are no liens against the property for any taxes that you have outstanding.

Obviously the person who is selling you the property or giving you the mortgage on the property really would not know for sure. The only way to find out for sure whether or not there is a lien against that property is obviously to contact the Crown. You would have to contact the Department of Finance, and you

would ask them to check to see if the person you are buying the property from, or the person who is giving you a mortgage of the property owe the government any taxes. They are the only ones who can give you an answer that you can rely on.

You do not want to be in a situation where you buy the property, or give a loan on the property, and then find out that somebody else has a prior charge, they are unpaid, and they can sell your property in a mortgage sale. You would have to pay again; you would have to pay more than you paid originally.

Mr. Speaker, this makes a lot of sense. Obviously the Minister of Finance indicated that there are over 31,000 requests coming in every year. That would tie up officials in the department who would have to every time a request comes in – and again he said there are about 31,000 of them a year. Officials would have to go and they would have to check with the various sections of the department to ascertain if the person in whose name the request came owes retail sales tax, did they owe any school tax. While the \$50 is not cheap, the fact is on a \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000 purchase when you are paying heavy real estate fees and whatnot, this is a relatively modest fee compared to everything else.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing the Leader of the Opposition talked about: Why isn't this in regulations as opposed to putting it in the legislation itself? One of the good things about putting it in the legislation itself, it makes it more difficult to increase it. You have to amend the act if you want to do that. You have to amend the legislation. If you simply give the government authority or you give the Cabinet authority to set the tax, or the minister authority to set the tax by regulation, then that could be done very, very, very quickly. Maybe it might be a wiser thing to include it as an amendment to the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this is obviously important. People want to know, if they are buying real estate, whether or not there is a lien against the property. They have to apply to the government

for this clearance certificate. The transaction will not conclude until they get it. I think it is reasonable to cover the costs to the Crown of gathering this information. A fee of this magnitude seems to be reasonable, given what has gone on in the real estate market.

In my former life, I did a lot of this. When I left and came in here, the real estate market, all of a sudden the prices took off and the number of transactions increased. So my timing could not have been worse, but I am glad I came anyway.

I would certainly urge the passage of this amendment. It is an important amendment and it also provides revenue the Crown to help us deal with the deficit. Mr. Speaker, obviously we know when the revenues that were coming in, given the change in the global economy, given the fact that we had a change and less revenues were coming in and therefore we were facing a deficit, it is only two ways to deal with that. Number one, you raise your revenues; or number two, you cut your spending.

The Opposition knows that you have to take those steps. You have two choices: raise your revenues or cut spending. This is a raising of revenue. It appears to be a modest measure. It appears to be a reasonable measure and the circumstance is certainly understandable, and in a small way it will help reduce the deficit. I urge the passage of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, there is no difficulty to go for twenty minutes and stay relevant and talk about all of the oversights with this little bitty tax. This is not really an easy tax; this is something that says, as my leader said, \$50 times 30,000 transactions is \$1.5 million in revenue, for \$90,000 of overhead. Clearly, it is a cash grab. It is a cash grab by the government.

They were not even very careful about it. The Minister of Finance was going on and on and on about how they just disadvantaged Labrador with the doing away of the Tobacco Tax Rebate. If anybody in the drafting of this document or in the minister's office had bothered to read the whole bill and had bothered to read the whole act, that person would see that they have left in place a preferential tax treatment for gasoline on the South Coast of Labrador.

They talk about wanting to equalize it and they want to equalize it when they are doing away with the benefit; but if you look at section 51 of the act, it is 16.5 cents tax per litre, and on the South Coast of Labrador up to Red Bay, it is 15 cents a litre. This act is internally inconsistent. It is not consistent throughout, and the Minister of Finance wonders why the Opposition cannot go along with this tax grab of \$1.5 million out of nowhere. It is a tax grab and not really a fee, and ideally, somebody will mount a challenge against this tax grab.

The basis of the challenge would be the same basis as the case that went to the Supreme Court of Canada with the Eurig Estate. The Eurig Estate said that you cannot charge a fee unless you are providing a service to the value of the fee. The Minister of Finance himself has already laid the groundwork by saying two staffers working full-time are required in order to administer these clearance certificates, and that is roughly \$90,000 a year, \$100,000 a year; yet, the government wants \$1.5 million for their efforts. Clearly, it is a tax grab.

So, on that basis alone this is not a fee, because a fee should replicate the cost of the service. If the fee were to replicate the cost of the service, then this should be around \$5. In fact, I am pretty sure the Opposition would probably go along with even a friendly amendment that would reduce this \$50 to \$5 and we will all go home. That would recover the cost, \$5 times 30,000 transactions is \$150,000 a year; \$90,000 for two staffers. The government would still make a 50 per cent profit on the service being provided. Why would we not have something like that?

Now, some of what the Minister of Finance is saying is accurate when he talks about how real estate transactions go in the Province. There is no doubt that our real estate registry system in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is absolutely archaic, which makes it very expensive. What the government could easily do – it would take some time, it would take some effort. If they wanted to show a real benefit for the \$1.5 million they could start moving us toward the land title system.

The land title system is the Torrens system, which was developed in Australia and is in use in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, any person can go to the land titles office in Calgary or the land titles office in Edmonton and – I am not sure what the fee would be today, but twenty-five years ago you could go and pay \$2 and that would get you a search on any piece of property in the Province of Alberta. For \$2 and you would get it right now.

As a matter of fact, if you were looking to pursue tax sales, buying and selling real estate, you could pay \$20 and search ten of them. You could search ten. Just line up and the staffer would take your \$2. It is not as easy when a province is already established and we already have land that is registered. Registry is not proof of ownership. Being registered in a registry is simply proof of a claim on that property, as the Minister of Natural Resources would say.

Anybody can register on a title; however, if you were using land titles, then what the land title says is absolute proof of ownership. If you get certified from land titles, whoever is on there owns that property. That is not what it means just because you get an opinion on a title by a lawyer. Then what do you do? Well, what you do is you pay for title insurance just in case the lawyer was wrong. You pay for title insurance so if somebody comes and sues you at a later date, at least you do not lose out.

Mr. Speaker, this is adding red tape. It is adding overhead and it is adding layers of administration to the cost of doing business in

this Province. This is simply another one, this is an attempt by government to recover \$50 off each transaction and that \$50 would then go to general revenues instead of being creative, instead of being forward looking, instead of being constructive, and instead of trying to put into place a land title system in this Province that would work.

Is it possible to go from registered land titles? Well, absolutely yes, Mr. Speaker, it is possible. The Province of Ontario has been doing it for the last twenty-five or thirty years. Because when you already have registered it is more difficult to have land titles but every single condominium, every single subdivision is required to be registered in land titles. Over time, all the land is registered.

In this Province we have such a mess. People are going to Crown lands asking who owns that real estate and nobody can tell them because Crown lands can only tell you what the Crown's interest is in that. The registry office can tell you who registered whatever but they cannot tell you who squatted on it for the last thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years.

We have made some progress in doing away with adverse claims or so-called squatter's rights. If the government were to be particularly creative, if they were to say we are going to charge \$50 per clearance certificate and the \$50 is \$1.5 million per year, we are going to take the \$1.5 million and over the next ten years we will have \$15 million, and do something to actually put the registry system in this Province into land titles then all of us would benefit for all time.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, the cost of doing business and doing real estate business in this Province is excessive in relation to the value. For the purpose of these clearance certificates, not only is it the person who buys the property, it is someone who refinances a property. You could refinance a property five times in twenty years and you could pay the fee for the clearance certificate every single time you refinance because a mortgage lender will not advance funds unless you have a clearance certificate. The clearance certificate is a given. The

clearance certificate says that no taxes are owing or says how much is owing in taxes which has to be cleared out.

If you look at when somebody buys a home, particularly maybe young people, whenever they buy a home they invariably forget what their closing costs were. They get to the time when they are closing the real estate deal. Maybe they have saved, scrimped, and scrounged and they have enough for a down payment. They have maybe 5 per cent or 10 per cent down on a home.

They buy the home. They get to the closing, and then they realize: oh my, but I have to pay to register the mortgage. I have to pay for the lawyers. I have to pay for the tax adjustment. I have to pay thousands and thousands of dollars that I had not anticipated when I bought the home, and I did not know because I was a new buyer.

Mr. Speaker, this is another new \$50 tacked on top of this. What happens if they get in the middle of the transaction, the transaction is ready to close, the lawyer requisitions a tax certificate and pays the \$50, and then the deal does not close for thirty days? Well, if the deal does not close for eleven days in this case, the tax certificate has expired. The tax certificate has run out. Ten days have gone. Now you need to get another tax certificate for the same transaction. It is another \$50 on the same piece of real estate, the same property, and the same transaction.

To be valid for only ten days is certainly short sighted. Maybe it should be valid for thirty days. Maybe it should be free. This is driving up the cost of doing business in this Province. It is a tax grab. It is a \$1.5 million recovery by the Province for approximately a \$90,000 to \$100,000 expense.

If you were to look at how this government started, when it began it needed to find a lot of money. It needed to find money because we did not have much revenue. We had lots of expenses. We had a debt load ratio that was really high.

When we get into moving further forward, the Province had some revenue and the Province wanted to reduce the cost of doing business. We did all sorts of reasonable things, such as if you get your drivers' licence online you can save 10 per cent. What happens this year? Well, the government is going to take that money back.

If you save the overhead of someone having to go into the Motor Vehicle Registration office, you save the staff person doing that, and you save all the clearance issues, now you could go online and save 10 per cent, the Treasury would save 10 per cent, and the transaction would be done. You would get your stickers in the mail. The government said, fine, now we have gotten you used to doing that, so we are going to back charge you that.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, one of the most poorly received, oppressive fees that was introduced by this government early on was the way they increased the cost for ambulances. The cost for ambulances went from, in the order of \$75 to \$125 if a person needed an ambulance trip. Have these costs come down? No, these costs have not come down.

This government is pretending to be so progressive, so pro-business and so pro-consumer, saying look at all the taxes that we saved you. They are actually saving on the one hand and taking it away from you on the other hand. They are saying \$50 here and \$50 there – \$50 is not much; look at the transaction we are doing. Then the minister then says \$50, we have to pay the staffers. The actual cost on 30,000 transactions is only \$90,000 to \$100,000 and the government is going to recover \$1.5 million.

Probably one of the unfair aspects of this particular bill is that it is retroactive. Mr. Speaker, this bill is retroactive. This bill, if it is passed by this House today or tomorrow, whenever, shall be considered to have come into effect on April 1, 2013.

This is a government that prides itself on being low on taxes, low on fees, and in fact it charges a fee and takes it back. There is no fee and then it charges another fee, and they say we have

saved you in taxes. Then, with a very sneaky attack on the taxpayers, the people who would buy and sell real property, real estate, people who would refinance homes, they reach in their back pocket for \$50.

They are not content to do it forward looking. They are not content to say this shall come into effect when it is proclaimed. They are not content to say it will come into effect on June 1 or some future date, they say it will come into effect on April 1, 2013.

If the Minister of Finance is accurate and there are 30,000 or 31,000 transactions per year, that is approximately 2,500 to 2,600 transactions a month. If this bill is passed and it is retroactive by six weeks, that means, Mr. Speaker, that 3,750 people will have to pay this tax and they will have to pay it retroactively.

That means that you could easily have closed your home transaction deal on April 1, and all of a sudden somebody wants another \$50 from you. Somebody wants another \$50 from 3,750 people. It is easy to see the lawyers trying to run around to get their clients to cough up the \$50 from six weeks ago, or three weeks ago, or four weeks ago, or five weeks ago and it is completely unnecessary. If any thought had gone into this particular bill, clearly it would not be retroactive.

AN HON. MEMBER: It is not retroactive.

MR. BENNETT: It is retroactive. It is retroactive to April Fool's Day. It is retroactive to April Fool's 2013. Then the Minister of Finance is upset because the Opposition never supports us. What happens when the Opposition supports us? We expropriate a mill.

Last spring the majority of the Legislature went ahead and supported the government, and it was called An Act to Amend the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act. That was run the House so fast that it ran through with all kinds of errors in it, so we had to bring it back in the fall. What we passed in the spring session we had to bring back in the fall session and now we had to call

An Act to Amend An Act to Amend the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act.

So, legislation that is well thought and well considered, certainly, the government would not be trying to ram this through the House. If they were not in such a panic to generate cash, they would not do this. Clearly, it is not necessary. Clearly, it is costing no more than \$5 per transaction. It could easily be absorbed as a part of the transaction cost. It could be \$5 for the fee as a cost recovery. Or the government could say, look, we recognize that over the last 300 years or so there are real estate transactions and there are real estate grants from as far back as Queen Victoria that are still lying around, and King George V, and this needs to be cleaned up. We are going to charge this fee, this tax, it is going to be for \$50, even though it only costs us \$5 to do this, and the million-and-a-half dollars that we generate from this tax, this extra revenue, is going to be used to clean up the real estate transactions in the Province so that over a period of a decade then all the transactions in this Province, all of the real estate would be registered in land titles, the same as it is in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Guess which provinces have the best economies in Canada, guess which provinces have growing populations, guess which provinces are going forward more than most. Alberta and Saskatchewan, because they are progressive with their legislation. This is not progressive legislation; it is jamming the taxpayer for \$50 for a \$5 transaction, and doing it retroactively to April Fool's Day, 2013. Mr. Speaker, I clearly cannot support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I am pleased this evening to be able to spend a few minutes on this particular piece of legislation. I will not take up my twenty minutes, because I think it is a fairly simple, straightforward piece of legislation and should not take very much in the way of debate.

Mr. Speaker, I never cease to be amazed at some of the comments that come from the other side and my hon. friend for The Straits –

AN HON. MEMBER: St. Barbe.

MR. F. COLLINS: St. Barbe, sorry.

It seems that every fee that this government charges is a tax grab. There seems to be a general consensus over there that government can run without revenue. Leave your fees as they are, reduce them, eliminate them if necessary, but do not increase them because that is a tax grab. I do not know where their philosophy is in terms of how you support a government or how you run an Administration without revenues and without calling everything tax grabs for that matter.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. F. COLLINS: I thought he was on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. He is gone with his tax grab.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. F. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this bill from the perspective of one who practiced real estate law for a number of years. The practice of real estate law is a unique practice in one sense. There are a lot of firms that will not touch real estate law, and understandably so. It is a lot of time, a lot of effort, for a little money.

Real estate files can be very complicated; they can stretch out over a long period of time, especially if you get into title problems. There are situations where it takes a long while to get good title. It is not a situation where the client does not necessarily understand what you are into with respect to real estate work. At the end

of the day, after a lot of work, there is only a certain amount you can charge for a real estate deal whether it is a residential real estate or commercial real estate. At the end of the day, you have to close a lot of real estate files in order to make any money. Mr. Speaker, a lot of people will not touch real estate for that reason.

The other point too, Mr. Speaker, the one area where lawyers are sued the most is in real estate transactions. At the end of the day, your client walks away from the law firm, supposedly with good title. You have guaranteed that client good title, and that is the whole issue of having a lawyer representing you. If someone knocks on your door in two months' time down the road and says that property you are occupying, I have an interest in that, it is still there, it was not released, and now you as a new owner owe me money. That is a situation that no lawyer wants to find himself in and if he missed something in the transaction, then that is the area where a lawyer can get nailed.

Today, the rules are a little bit different than when I practiced. There is such thing as title insurance and everything to get you over those humps. At the same time, it is a difficult area of law where a lot of people run into a lot of problems, especially if you are not careful and not diligent. It is an area where you put a lot of work into it for little return and high risk.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in order to convey a real property through a real estate deal, you have to guarantee good title at the end of the day. In order to do that, you have to do a lot of due diligence in terms of the searches you have to do. Not only title searches in the Registry of Deeds, as the member pointed out there earlier, but there are searches of the Judgment Enforcement Registry to see if there is any judgment registered against the property. There is the Personal Property Registry to see if there are any personal judgments registered against the person. You have to check with municipal councils to make sure there are no taxes outstanding in municipal regulations and bylaws, and of course there are clearance certificates in the Department of Finance, as we talked about here today, and Labour Standards.

I think the Finance Minister mentioned that law firms make approximately 30,000 requests a year for clearance certificates. That is a lot of work. The thing with these clearance certificates, Mr. Speaker, is nine times out of ten, or as a matter of fact ninety-nine times out of 100, time is of the essence. Time is always of the essence in real estate transactions.

You get to Friday evening, you are getting up to 5:00 o'clock, and you have half a dozen or a dozen files ready to close. You are short some certificates or you are short some documentation. You are couriering stuff back and forth from one law firm to the other. You are giving undertakings and waiting on certificates. The whole significance of time in these matters comes to bear.

Usually when lawyers make applications for these certificates, the department tries to get them back within forty-eight hours. Lots of times you cannot do it. Then you have a transaction that has to be postponed, deferred for another week, two weeks, or three days. Then you have an angry client on your hands because he expected to move into his home on the weekend and now all of a sudden he cannot do it.

Mr. Speaker, the value of these clearance certificates to lawyers and law firms is significant. I do not think for a minute, contrary to what the Member for St. Barbe might suggest that anybody is going to mind paying \$50 if the alternative is to wind up with someone knocking on your door saying: Hey, that property you just bought, I have an interest in that. I do not think anybody wants that on their hands.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation and it is only a modest increase. It is something that the time pressures and the amount of work involved in providing these certificates are significant. I think a fee of \$50 is certainly not exorbitant. Given the volume of requests, given the short time frame that they have to be provided in and the pressures both on the end of government in getting the certificates out and on the side of the lawyer who has a closing in an hour and has to have them, I do not

think anybody is going to quibble about \$50 for these certificates.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I think it is better to have the \$50 for a fee than have something declared wrong with your title at the end of the day. This is an important piece of legislation. It should be straightforward. It is not a lot to expect for such an important piece of work to be done by departmental officials.

I will rest my case on that, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

I will say to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, it may be an important piece of legislation but with that it is certainly nothing more than a tax grab. You can sell it whatever way you like but there was no fee previously and now there is a fee for the service. It is quite clear that is exactly what it is. I cannot believe that other members on the government side are trying to sell this as good news because we have seen that before.

I would just like to remind the government that they campaigned on new energy, not new fees. That is something that we are seeing, a new fee here, a new fee there. Everywhere we go we are seeing fees introduced by this government, whether it is in the fishing and aquaculture industry where they are actually going to be profiting on the licensing fees if you look at the line items in Estimates. It seems quite clear that they are going to be profiting on introducing this fee.

I will say this may be the only government that is doing this provincially. Look at what they are doing here federally. Federally, if you look at you need a tax clearance certificate? Is there a fee? No, it is free. The federal government does not charge a fee. They are not following the Harper government that is for sure. There is no fee federally across Canada, but there is going to be a fee in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As the Member for St. Barbe pointed out, they are going to try and make this retroactive to April 1. For the people who have already paid, for the lawyers who have already paid, they are going to have to go digging and looking at trying to recoup \$50. Whereas the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said: Well, this is just a modest fee. The margins are not very high in real estate law. There are not very many lawyers getting into this real estate law or commercial law, so \$50 should not really make a big difference.

Truly, if we look at it, this highly illustrates how low this government will go to take money out of people's pockets, looking at introducing a fee for \$50; whereas we want people to be going through this tax clearing process. We do.

If you are looking at a business to make a business purchase, or if you are looking at making some form of transaction you want to make sure there is no outstanding retail sales tax, or health and post-secondary education tax, gasoline tax, tobacco tax, insurance company, school tax, mining tax, financial corporation tax, any type of tax that is outstanding, because as the Minister of Natural Resources talked about, liens would come into play and then there could be first charges that are there. If you purchase this without having the appropriate clearance you could be the one liable for paying all these significant fees.

If we look at doing a business transaction, it is so important to look at having a tax clearance certificate. What more reason to get a tax clearance certificate than it being free? Why wouldn't you want to get one if it is free? It only benefits the government if this is a free service because it ensures that tax debts are cleared from uncooperative taxpayers in an efficient and cost effective manner. By having that it shows; it will come up. If they are really interested in selling then you negotiate and go through that process to clear up the outstanding debts.

The Province collects all of these outstanding fees, these taxes that are unpaid. If it is like the federal government provincially, I am sure there

are a lot of unpaid taxes of various kinds here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Maybe the Minister of Finance can clarify this, because we see many cases where drivers of vehicles have a number of outstanding tickets and fines and fees they owe, sometimes up to \$30,000. We have seen in cases where used cars have been sold to owners that had liens on them. That poses a great concern to the owner where that piece of property can be taken back, can be sold in order to get – so you really have to negotiate.

There is high risk of not having these tax clearance certificates. You want to have them but now government is imposing a fee of \$50, whereas previously it was free. What is this going to do? Is this going to encourage more people to get these tax clearance certificates or are some people going to take an unprecedented risk and forego this? Then nobody is going to benefit, including the government.

In parts of the world economy people would look at making a transaction through a cash sale. One thing I see about getting this certificate, it is now saying you have to go online to get this clearance and it has to be paid for by a credit card. It has to be paid for by some sort of online payment. It does not say it will accept a cheque, or money order, or bank draft, or look at going in and paying cash. So it seems like this can be a little bit prohibitive for somebody who wants to go in and make that payment. That is a concern.

One thing for government, though, that they failed to do is that they failed to have an absolute land plan when it comes to looking at doing some forms of transactions. I have worked with lawyers before on commercial pieces. When they go through this process, they look for all of these types of things outstanding and look for clearance; but in some cases, if we look at Crown lands and Municipal Affairs, sometimes land can be granted and it granted over other land, as in some municipalities in my district, so it creates a whole bunch of disputes and can go through the process where things can be tied up in courts for quite some time.

Like I am saying, putting this fee in place is certainly being something that is a bit restrictive, whereas if we could get people, 30,000 clearance certificates – well, there are more transactions, I would imagine, in terms of real property sales whether it be land, whether it be commercial property, residential property, whether it would be looking at personal vehicles that would be sold in that process that would be looked at for tax clearance. What is the compliance? How many sales transactions are actually taking place where people are not getting these certificates now when it is absolutely free for them to get it? That is something that we need to know. We need to know that type of information.

There are people who do not get it and that risk is there, but now government is imposing a fee of \$50 to make sure – they hope that there is going to be greater compliance now by charging \$50. Another tax grab on a list of other tax grabs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: This is a case where government says they are pro-business, but they are doing so many things to show that they are really not. In many cases, if people are looking at getting a tax clearance, they may be acting on behalf of somebody else or the lawyer or the broker who is doing this type of package, the fee is \$50 but because now they have to go through that process and the fee did not exist before, they may have to increase their fees, as well, for charging this fee and it may not be in line of \$50. That is something that I would like to know. Are there caps?

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs had talked about the restrictions that are placed on the fees that, basically, lawyers can charge when they are doing a commercial transaction and talked about the low margins that are there for lawyers when they do their commercial transactions and that there are not many people doing commercial law. Well, I would think that there are significant margins to be made in

commercial law. I would think so. The minister might want to explain himself on that, but I was listening attentively to what he had to say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: We would want more people to have tax clearances because it protects the Crown. It protects Crown liens, the rights and obligations that are associated with them. It preserves the public interest to fairness and equity in the tax system. We want to encourage more people to be getting tax clearances.

I do not think implementing a fee of \$50 per transaction is really fostering that fair and equitable environment in the tax system when you are looking at people making purchases, when you are looking at affordability of first-time buyers, when you look at people wanting to get into business, tacking on additional fees do nothing to really help.

Fifty dollars may seem small but when we look at how restrictive sometimes financing can be to people, they are limited at \$150,000, they are limited sometimes at \$100,000. Sometimes people have real difficulty getting fair value for their business and for the commercial property they are looking to buy. If more of that gets eaten up into legal fees and tax grabs from the provincial government, then it is not something that is pro-business and it actually discourages people from getting into business in many cases when you are looking at adding additional fees, as we saw with the provincial government come down with a \$500 fee for businesses to gain access to the provincial highway. Those are things that we see.

The Minister of Finance had talked already about the fees that exist on the Personal Property Securities Register; the PPSR being \$35. Then, talked about if you want to go through the Labour Relations Act, there is another fee, so now we are adding on another fee. People get sick and tired of these fees when they are going to buy stuff. That is why I say in a release that I

made previously that sometimes these fees are certainly worse than a tax grab.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: To only go with the online option, it makes me wonder as to why people cannot go into an office and get this tax clearance certificate and go through that process and deal with someone, a provincial government employee, where this could be sent to a regional office somewhere closer to home, for people who cannot avail of this type of service. When the federal government took this hard-nosed approach of the DFO, of making all the fees and everything go online and closing down its counter service, this seems to be a bit restrictive there.

I wanted to make a comment; I have made the point that the federal government does not charge a fee when it comes to protect those people under their revenue administration act. I am just wondering, what type of consultation had taken place in this?

Nothing was explained in any of the messages from the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Natural Resources, or the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs who are all lawyers, who have had dealings with commercial law, as they have stated, in dealing with these real estate. Were other people consulted in this? I would like a response. If not, I will ask the question when it goes to another part of the reading.

This to me, like I said, we are seeing these bills that are coming forward that is just all about nickel-and-diming people. Nickel-and-diming the everyday person, the small business owner, the people who want to be making their first-time home purchase, or looking at making any type of purchase.

If you are doing this type of transaction, you have such a small overhead and you are looking at profiting off the backs of these people in Newfoundland and Labrador who would all be

taxpayers of this Province. You are looking at making close to \$1.4 million off these people in new fees. How much more is going to be made off all the other fees that are imposed? It seems very questionable – it does – as to why we would do something, that if you look at putting forward this fee, it could cost a lot more to the consumer.

These fees, these clearance certificates, do so much for the Province because it raises a lot of red flags on all these other outstanding fees and fines. It may be the mechanism on which a lot of the unpaid taxes and fees actually do come through, and do come through in provincial revenue in the Treasury once these certificates go forward.

By adding a fee it is just another barrier. It is, and it seems very short-sighted. Unless consultation was done with industry, with people, with consumers – is this going to drive up the cost of the Consumer Affairs Division in the departments? What is this going to do and, where is this additional profit going to be put forward? If the profit was going to be put forward looking at things like trying to deal with our land plan and the issues on how land is actually used, clearing up title, clearing up old deeds and things like that and trying to associate who actually owns what, because in many cases I think some lawyers are flummoxed as to who really owns what piece of property based on what is in the provincial inventory. One department may have records saying, well this is okay but another department says it is not. To me, it does not seem like a good way of doing business.

Government should really be pro-business. They should be about encouraging investment, reducing fees. This government has taken the direction where they want to increase a fee, basically, on just about anyone in Budget 2013.

I will not be supporting this amendment put forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It is a privilege to stand and speak to Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3. Looking at it on its face, it is very small, very simple. Clause 1 says under section 113.1, “Notwithstanding section 114, the fee for a clearance certificate is \$50.” Clause 2 says, “This Act shall be considered to have come into force on April 1, 2013.” It is a retroactive bill.

Now, I want to have a few comments on this, just from my own personal feelings on this and some stuff I dealt with back in my previous life doing real estate deals, but also some commentary put forward by members on both sides. I say to the Minister of Finance, and I enjoy listening to him. He said this Opposition crowd are going to get up and oppose for the sake of opposing. That is not true. That is not fair, because I did agree with the Act to Amend Enduring Powers of Attorney. Actually, I put forward a number of changes, suggested a few. They were not listened to, and that is why we had it back in the fall to amend it again.

I am going to oppose this one, but I think I am going to give my reasoning for opposing this. Again, I have to put it out there. I do not think it is opposition just for the sake of it. I think there are some good points here and hopefully they are brought into consideration. I do not think for a second it is going to change anything but I have to at least clarify why I do not agree with this.

What we are talking about here, we are changing the Revenue Administration Act to basically add a \$50 fee for providing a clearance certificate or providing a service that previously was free. It was free. Now, coming up with this, this is something I did deal with back when I was practicing. Being in a small town you have to, as a general practitioner, cover off everything. You cannot specialize in a small town. We know when you get in a bigger city you can have your criminal firms or have your personal

injury, but in a smaller town you have to cover it off.

I do not mind saying that real estate is a tedious aspect to law. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is quite right that it is the area that is the most litigious in the sense that the most insurance claims against lawyers come from real estate law, especially when you are in a small area when title to land can be very, very sketchy.

I was very lucky when I practiced to have my boss, Beverley Marks, who was very, very good at it, but it was something that takes a while and is long. I know the Minister of Natural Resources, his firm dealt with it. You have to do it. You have to cover off real estate. It is something that is necessary, but it can come with its troubles.

Now, what I want to do here is just say that obviously I am going to deal with it from the point of view of purchasing a piece of real property. We will just say a pre-existing home. In that case, basically, you have your vendors and your purchasers. I am going to speak now, and if I am wrong I am assuming the minister or ministers will clarify if I am wrong or will ask it during the committee. My understanding is that it is not a \$50 fee straight up.

The fact is if my wife and I own a property and I am selling it to the Leader of the Official Opposition and his spouse, there has to be a clearance certificate for each person. Now it is not just me. It is not \$50. It is me and my wife. That is \$100. It is the member and his spouse. That is another \$100. So, it is actually a \$200 cost.

The cost is actually, I guess we will say, borne by the law firm per se, but obviously law firms are going to pass that off to the client. You have to. There is just no way that you can do that. That is the first thing.

Again, when the member says, and I think the minister might have even said that, too, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, that it is \$50, well, it is not. It is not \$50. Do not say

that. You have to cover off, if there are two people who are selling, you have to get both of these individuals cleared. You have to get certificates for each individual because you cannot just do one and the other person may have issues when it comes to taxation or lien issues.

It is fine to do it for me, but if my wife has those issues and we do not get a clearance certificate, the people purchasing are going to be in trouble. So, the cost is not just \$50; it is higher than that. That is the first bit.

Now, the second part, too, is that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said: Well, I do not think people are going to mind \$50 for the peace of mind they get for knowing that we are not going to get nailed on taxes after. This is something that was provided previously for free. This is not a new peace of mind we are getting for \$50. You got it before for free. You did not pay for it. You always had to get clearance certificates.

They have been modified over the years. A couple of years ago it changed under the Revenue Administration Act to bring a number of headings under one affidavit, but the minister says: Oh yes, \$50, peace of mind. Well, it is not. It is the same peace of mind you got for free before but now the government has put a fee on it. That fee, in most cases I would say, is \$100 per couple.

I will continue on in that vein. Again, if I am wrong at any point I am assuming people are going to correct me. That is the whole point of this because I very well could be wrong. I am just putting in my opposition from the way I understand it.

The second part is, I heard one member say: Who is going to mind paying \$50 if we are talking about a \$500,000 house? Who is going to mind paying it? The fact is, do you know what? They probably will not mind. If somebody is in the financial position to purchase a home for \$500,000 they are probably not going to mind the \$50 to \$100 or whatever little fee

that comes with it. That is fair, but not all homes are being sold for \$500,000.

I will just go to my own District of Burgeo – La Poile, there are a lot of homes being sold for a lot less than that. They are not \$500,000 homes. Sometimes they are not \$100,000. In many cases they are \$50,000 homes. We are talking about people – even if it is \$100,000, \$200,000 or whatever, let's look at the circumstances.

You could have a young couple who are purchasing their first home. The fact is they are going to get a mortgage. A mortgage is going to cover the purchase price but there are still fees out of pocket. There are the legal fees. There are the other costs that come with it as part of this transaction. There is a transaction levee.

There are other fees that come with it, and this is just one that adds on to it. Those can be substantial, especially when you are a first-time homebuyer, never purchased a home. You are already going out and getting a very big mortgage that you have to figure out if you can cover. Now we have these fees out of pocket that are not covered under the mortgage.

Again, I am not here trying to say it is going to make or break people, but we must have a clear understanding that, look, this adds up to people. It does add up and not everybody is buying a \$500,000 home on the Avalon. There are a lot of people still out in rural Newfoundland and Labrador who are buying smaller homes. They are downsizing. You have very old homes that are being sold. That is just a reality of it. This is an extra cost that is borne by them

I will answer the Member for The Straits – White Bay North's question on how much consultation took place. There was none. There was no consultation that took place. I do not know if that is the necessary evil here because I do not think you are going to go and ask a law firm should we charge this. I do not think for a second consultation was done, but that is not my issue here.

The fact is that the Province, in this last Budget – we have seen the last ten years. One year - I

think I have 2006 here - you look at all the different departments that had the fees reduced. A lot of them were reduced: late filing fees, and there were certificates of registration of co-operatives, there are licence fees and contractor registrations, towing and storage, small game fees, group camping fees. There are a lot of these that were reduced. They were reduced at a time when things were good.

The fact is, times are not so good right now, and so this is a way to recoup monies. One of these is by the imposition of fees, in many cases where there was no previous fee, which is here, or in other cases where the fees have been hiked up, whether it is hospital rooms, and online vehicle registration - again, that was something that was previously reduced, and now it has been bumped up – ferry fees, historic sites, and certificates for teachers.

Coming back to this, there was no consultation done, but we had to find a way to make up some money. When we get to Committee, I will ask the question in advance. I will ask again at Committee, but I do not want to wait for the figure to come out, because the ministers might not have it. The question is - there must have been some anticipated uptake on this - how many transactions did we have last year? So, going by this new fee, how much are we willing to take? The minister might have said this and I may have missed it.

MR. MARSHALL: Thirty-one thousand.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thirty-one thousand. So that is the amount that we are looking to take in. I guess it all adds up.

MR. MARSHALL: One million and five hundred thousand dollars (inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: So \$1.5 million. The Province is going to take in \$1.5 million, and the fact is that there are 30,000 transactions. The people privy to those transactions, that is a bit of extra money out of their pocket. That is what it comes down to. It is a bit of extra money out of their pocket.

The other thing I took the liberty of doing was talking to some law firms to see how this system was working. This is nothing new to law firms. I say to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, this is nothing new, this was done before; everybody had to get it. It was a pain before; it is still a pain now, because you have to get the clearance. The problem is now we are just hauling in a few dollars. We are just hauling in a few dollars now to do the same thing.

What I am getting back from people is that this is causing some trouble for law firms in terms of the turnaround time. I do not think with the addition of these fees has come an increased level of service. There are no more people doing this than there were before. If there is, I would like to know it. That is a question I ask: are there more people handling this?

The reason I think no is because the law firms are not getting any faster turnaround on this. It is not getting turned around. This is one of those things, anybody who has gone through that home buying process, you are getting anxious, you are trying to get everything done, and you are hoping to have the closing date. When you cannot get these certificates, it is just something that is adding to that stress and that pressure. Not only do you have the same stress and pressure, but it is an extra \$100 out of your pocket, plus the venter is selling it for X number of dollars. It is an extra \$100 out of their pocket too, if it is a normal two-person. The reference I am using is the standard couple to couple. Obviously, it is \$50 an individual. It could be more in some cases if you have situations – which are rare – where you have more than two owners or purchasers.

The process that they are going through is an online payment. I have not heard many complaints about that per se. Most law firms now do have a credit card for the online purchase and we can run all of these through the same transaction. You are putting \$50 times four into one thing and that is good. They are telling me that the process we are going through is tedious, it is cumbersome, and it is slowing down business because there are applications

involved, e-mails, and processing. A lot of times we are still waiting. We cannot wait to get the written clearance; we have to get a verbal, because if we want to get the closing done on time –

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I say to the minister, yes, it was tedious before but now you are tossing in a finance charge with it, so they still have to pay for it and then you have to get the e-mail back – then, if there is an issue with that. It is just adding another layer on to it now where we are involving the fee portion with it, which is normal when it comes with the fee structure.

Basically, it is making things more complicated. I am actually not even getting it from lawyers; I am getting it from legal assistants, real estate assistants, people who are doing the work.

We have had situations. We know in this Province the Law Society a couple of years back imposed a transaction levy after the issues they had there. I am not saying it was an unnecessary thing.

MR. MARSHALL: Sheriffs' certificates.

MR. A. PARSONS: Sheriffs' certificates.

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: A lot of costs. This is another cost. This is the reason why I am opposing it.

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: Here is what I am saying to the minister, you are not risking it because you –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the member to address his comments to the Chair.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying to the Minister of Natural Resources is that you are not risking anything because you

have the same clearance as before. You have the same clearances, but this one you are paying for now. You got it before for free. There is no risk per se; there is no peace of mind. It is just you are paying extra as something you got before. This is what I am saying. This is why I cannot support it.

I am not opposing for the sake of opposition, because that is pointless. This is an extra fee out of people's pockets, and it is going to affect everyone here in terms of – whether we are one of those people. I am more worried about the people in my district, the low-income families that are managing to put together enough money to buy that home. Maybe they were renting to own and maybe they have come up now and they are going through this process.

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, this is something actually I covered off, Mr. Speaker, previously.

Some of things that are covered off here, gasoline tax, health and post-secondary education, horse racing tax, insurance companies tax, mining and minerals, retail sales, and tobacco. It is funny you go through these transactions with your homebuyer, and I would say are you liable under the horse racing tax? It was always funny, it was a bit of a joke, but you had to go through it; you had to ask these questions.

At the end of the day, as the solicitor responsible – in many cases in small towns you are responsible for both sides. You are responsible for the purchaser and the vendor. The purchaser is also the mortgager, so there is a lot of responsibility. You want to make sure that somebody does not leave your office and down the road – because it never happens right away. The problem never happens right away. The problem happens down the road, later on when you forget about it. Then you come back and so and so was dinged because you did not properly do your work. It is complicated.

I come back to this. If you ask just about any real estate assistant, there are very few people –

if you get a clearance certificate, I bet you over the last ten years – I asked one firm, almost nobody ever came back and owed anything under this clearance certificate. It is usually under your bankruptcy, it is usually under your student loan, and it is usually under your Sheriff's Office.

You have those cases where if you happen to be lucky enough to have the same name as somebody who owes a lot of money, you have to go through this process of making sure it is not them. Under this certificate, the one that you used to get for free, it almost never comes back because most people do not owe money under horse racing, or tobacco tax, or retail sales. They do not owe money. It is almost never positive or comes back with somebody that owes.

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear the minister and this is what I say, come out and tell people this is why we are doing it. We are doing it because we are in trouble.

MR. MARSHALL: We are doing it to cover costs.

MR. A. PARSONS: You are doing to cover the costs. You did it for the cost, Mr. Speaker. For years before, it was never an issue. I would like to know what the cost is.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, and again this is probably something better to come up in Committee, this is cost that we are already burdened. There is no new cost coming up with this. We are in a \$500 million deficit; we need to raise money; boom, we are going to put it out there. Say it like it is. It is what it is, and if I am wrong, I am wrong. I speak to the minister on this and I say to you, Mr. Speaker, this is a chance to recoup money and it is coming out of the pockets of people; it is coming out of the pockets of citizens. That is what we do in this situation where we have this significant deficit that we have tried to combat through job cuts.

They will come back and say we did not raise taxes. That is good and that is fine. What I am saying is let's say this for what it is; it is the imposition of fees on people that were never there before. They are not getting anything new for this fee. There is no improved service. This does not make anything faster; it does not make anything better. It just adds another layer on, and it is money out of the pockets of people. That is why I am not going to support it.

I would say to the members opposite, if you want to support it that is fine, make sure you stand up and say that is why you are supporting it. I am opposing it. I am opposing it because I think there are other ways to do this rather than affect those people who are availing of this service, which in many cases, in my district particularly, are low-income people trying to buy their first homes. It is still a dollar out of their pocket that they should have had in their pocket before.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would just stand to have a few minutes on this to echo a few concerns that I have with this bill. I always find it a bit amusing when you get a member opposite, in this case the Minister of Finance, saying, oh, I am willing to bet that the government goes against it because that is what their role is. An hour before that I was praising up government about the work they are doing on Kruger.

You always then get the impression that because we are in the Opposition that we are going to oppose everything for the sake of opposing, which is totally not true. In actual fact, I was giving the Minister of Finance credit for the work that he did with Kruger also.

When you make a statement in the House giving the impression that the Opposition is just going to oppose for the sake of opposing, I have to stand and clarify that. In my case, on many

occasions I have given support to government members and government ministers on some initiatives that they have taken, and I still do that. Just because we raise concerns like on this Bill 7, some of the concerns that we have, that does not mean that we are not doing our job and we are just going to do it for the sake of doing it.

What I always say is that instead of attacking what we are going to do, let's attack the issue, let's go through Bill 7 as it is, Mr. Speaker. If you go on the government's Web site itself, if you go on the Bill 7 Web site, "The legislation is necessary to: Ensure tax debts are cleared from often uncooperative taxpayers in an efficient and cost effective manner".

Mr. Speaker, just on that alone, just that line, is cost-effective manner. Anybody out in Newfoundland and Labrador, when you say something is cost-effective, that would mean that you do it to recover your cost. You ensure, okay, whatever cost to government because if certain people are going to use it, is that you would go out and say we will cover your cost because that is the appropriate thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think anybody would say, okay, if there is a fee being offered here under this act, if you go out and we will cover the cost, I think everybody would say, yes, that is not bad. Whoever uses or avails of these services, it will cost them a certain fee and then we all would agree. If you want to do that and you actually put the cost in and what it is going to cost the government, with this bill they are expected to raise \$1.5 million. The cost to run it, just say two staff, let us say is \$50,000 each. We are looking at \$100,000 to operate.

MR. A. PARSONS: They do not even need new staff.

MR. JOYCE: I am just saying. I know my member is saying they do not need new staff, but if you want to cover it off with the staff or you just want to in this case have it in a cost-effective manner. We are looking at \$1.4 million revenue to the Province.

The funny thing about this, Mr. Speaker, is it is pretty hard. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, I think it is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, stood up and said: Well, this is not a tax grab. How can anybody stand up in this House and say they are going to bring a tax in, a fee in, raise up to \$1.4 million, and say it is not a tax grab? How can anybody do it?

When you come back and look at this service, Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague from Burgeo – La Poile mentioned it, if someone went out now and bought a house or another thing is a bankruptcy and wanted a clearance for taxes, wanted to ensure that whoever they are buying it from is tax free, the question is: What if there are two people in the household? Do you have to charge now \$100, \$50 per person, or is it just one for a household? That is the question that we do not have answered. Is it \$100 per household if it is a married couple, or is it just \$50?

What happens there, Mr. Speaker? What do you do in that case? Those are the things that are not spelled out in this. So, when you want to look at the government itself, the government puts out in their Budget Speech saying that we had no tax increases whatsoever. Now, Mr. Speaker, we all heard that. We all went through it and we all said, oh, well, people out there, there are no tax increases. I go through some of the fees, the so-called fees that increased, Mr. Speaker. Hospital rooms up 20 per cent, historic sites, certificates for teachers, ferries, they are all fees.

When government stands up here and says in Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, that it is only a fee, not a tax, it is to the point where people out in the general public, once they go in and have to pay this \$50, are saying, well, jeepers, I did not have to pay that last year. Because a lot of the times if you put in your good standing, as the Member for Burgeo – La Poile said, you do not have to give anything back, because everything is fine. Now what you do, you put it in, you have to pay \$50 just put it in, and you are going to make \$1.4 million, minimum, by doing that.

The other question I have to ask, Mr. Speaker, and I am going to ask this in Committee stage also, when we get into Committee stage: Is this act retroactive to April 1, 2013? Am I correct on that? So, my question is: Has this fee been charged up to this date, when this act is not proclaimed, and were we charging this \$50 – which I am not sure we were; I do not think we had the legal authority to do it. I could be wrong, but I do not think we had the legal authority to do it.

If not, come April 1, when this here gets passed in this House and gazetted, are we going to go back and track down those people who went and got this search done, and go back to April 1 and say, okay, we have to come back now, by the way, you owe us \$50; if there are two of you in the household, you may owe us \$100. We are not sure yet. Who is going to go back and track down these people? Is it the government's job now? The legal firm that represents them, is it their position? Or is it going to be – and I am asking this question, Mr. Speaker – track them down and put it on the fee like we do if someone owes a fine in a licence? How are we going to go back retroactively and claim these funds from these individuals by making a retroactive bill?

It is a big concern. The bigger concern about it, Mr. Speaker, is how this bill was just brought in; make it retroactive with no foresight, no thought on how we are going to collect it. Who is going to be charged by it? How many people in the household are going to be charged?

Mr. Speaker, I will just go back again about what is on the government Web site, protect Crown land liens and obligations. That has not been explained, how it is going to protect Crown land liens and obligations. I am going to be asking this question: How does it protect Crown lands liens and obligations? It is a question that I think a lot of people would love to know how. There is a piece of Crown land out in Corner Brook; how is this going to protect Crown lands? It is a question of how we are going to administer that and the reason why.

I go through the third part: preserves the public interest to fairness and equity. Get this, Mr.

Speaker. I just want the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs over there listening. I got it, Bill 7; it is on the government Web site. I know he was busy the last little while with so many duties in his department that he never had time to look at what is on the government Web site, “Preserves the public interest to fairness and equity tax system”. When you go on your own government Web site that is talking about this is only a fee, they are talking about an equity tax system.

We have the minister standing up over across the way today saying no, no, no, this is just something we are putting in. This is a fee. This is not really a tax; this is just a fee. On the government Web site, Mr. Speaker, and I challenge anybody to go look at it, they are saying the new tax they brought in to make the equity tax system – fairness.

Mr. Speaker, can anybody explain to me – and I am sure the minister is going to get up later, on some of the points that were brought up and explain them. I am no lawyer; I am just a simple person who is out there and who sometime probably will need to avail of this. I will be asked questions about this out in my district office. I am no lawyer; I will be the first to admit it. I can tell you one thing, when someone has to pay \$50 who did not have to pay it prior to April 1, and someone says, well, there are no new taxes and they have to pay \$50, to them it is a tax.

It does not matter to me what anybody says in this House, when you put in a new cost, it is a tax. It is definitely a tax. Mr. Speaker, when you put this through, you can see in its own. I would love to know how it is going to provide interest to fairness and equity tax system.

If I am availing of a government service, for example, registration of a car, Mr. Speaker, and if government in itself again are charging everybody for this, it is a tax. What the government is saying is this is what it costs us to operate and ensure that all vehicles are being licensed across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and we have to tax for it. That is fine. When you bring in a bill which is a new

fee according to the government officials, but on the Web site it says it is a tax, and they are going to make \$1.4 million, in any form this is classified as a tax.

Mr. Speaker, I will just keep reading. Now that we have it confirmed by the government’s Web site that it is a tax system, I will just go and read some more on the government Web site: “A Tax Clearance Certificate indicates that no tax liability is known to the Tax Administration Division at the time of issuance and is valid for 10 days following issuance. However, additional tax liabilities may be discovered at a future date through audit or other means.”

Mr. Speaker, I will just explain to the people who are listening. When someone was going out, buying a house, and there was a clearance put in, if there was nothing wrong that was the end of it. You get your clearance and that was it, gone and over with. Now, when you put in your clearance, it is \$50. The Minister of Municipal Affairs knows all about that. It is \$50 each, gone.

People say, well, it is a lawyer’s fee. Well, who is going to pay for the lawyer? The lawyer is not going to say, well, boys, as the Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, by the way, we are good corporate citizens; we are going to put in this new \$1.5 million that is the new fee of the government. Who is going to pay for it? It is the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who are going to be looking to buy their new first home.

MR. A. PARSONS: They are charging it now.

MR. JOYCE: They are charging it now. Oh, I was just told, Mr. Speaker, that they are charging it now. That is very interesting.

MR. A. PARSONS: Law firms are.

MR. JOYCE: Law firms are charging it now. Can you imagine? Here we are debating a bill in this House to raise the fees – which is a tax – by \$50, that is retroactive, that has not been put

through this House, and the law firms are charging it now.

Mr. Speaker, you always ask - this Legislature is supposed to create laws, supposed to pass the laws. It is supposed to be able to put out in the general public the laws that we want done. We heard on many occasions here - and I go back to a number of acts that were presented and passed in this House - oh, we cannot do anything yet because it is not gazetted. We cannot do anything yet. We are told on many occasions, it is still not gazetted; we have to wait. We have to follow the proper procedure, the procedure law.

Look at the Minister of Fisheries looking. I bet you did not know, Mr. Speaker. He did not know that the law firms are charging it right now.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to look at someone who is prudent, if you want to look at someone who is forward-thinking, you would say well, it is going to take us a month to pass this. If we bring it in now - and what is it now, the middle of May? May 14? - we should make this here until July 1; have this law proclaimed for July 1, which would say okay, anybody, July 1, so people would know what the law is. We would follow the law itself to ensure that once it is proclaimed, then people would have it.

Now we are going to pass a law that has already been charged. My question is, Mr. Speaker, and it is a question that I have to ask: Who gave the law firms the authority to do that?

MR. A. PARSONS: They had to. If not, they would get dinged.

MR. JOYCE: Yes, but someone had to give the authority to the law firms saying that if you do not charge this \$50, come May or June - from April 1 on you are going to have to pay for it out of your own funds. Is that what happened? I do not know. Is that what happened?

That is the question. That is going to be a very legitimate question. What is happening here now is that if the law firms are charging this and

there is actually no legislation in place, Mr. Speaker, who informed and who gave the permission to these law firms to go ahead and collect the fees now? If not, if no one gave them that authority, or no one gave them a heads-up saying if you do not do it come June or July when this act is proclaimed we are going to get the funds out of your law firm, who gave them the authority? It had to be somebody.

I say to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, it is not authority because the act is not proclaimed yet. Who went and warned them? What is going to happen is that people already know when this Budget is not even approved, Bill 7 here is not done - Bill 7, Mr. Speaker, is not through - there are people in this Province already who went out and wanted a certificate of clearance, already paid either \$100 or \$200, they do not even know that under the law it is not even proclaimed.

I am just amazed. If you want to talk about a government that has planning, if you want to talk about government - do you know what this is? This is something - okay, we are in a financial crunch. We are in such a crunch here now. We mismanaged so bad that we have to find some way to come up with \$1.5 million. Guess what?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I know it is hard for them to listen to this. Especially when they know now that the financial mismanagement - and up to a month of extra charging people, probably even a month-and-a-half, April 1, we have all of April, and we have May not done yet, who knows?

It is not done yet, Mr. Speaker. Here we are with a government that finds themselves in a financial crunch going through the Budget. How can we make off with some more money, Mr. Speaker? How can we try to find some way that we can go through our mismanagement?

The Department of Finance, oh, here is \$1.5 million. What we will do is we will make sure we will make it retroactive. We will make sure it is retroactive. So once it is retroactive we have you. We have our money. Look at our nice Budget. Go right down line by line right to our Budget. That is what happened here, Mr. Speaker.

There are people out there who paid the \$50, who paid the \$100, who do not even know that it was a new tax put through. They do not even know there was a new fee, a new tax put on through here now, Mr. Speaker. That is the sad part about it.

Mr. Speaker, if government stood up and said, look, we are in a financial bind. We are stuck. We need money. We mismanaged so bad that we have to go off and find some other ways to come through it. We have to find some other ways to mismanage –

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: I hear the Minister of Natural Resources saying you did not mismanage. If you want me to start naming things, I can. I can start and I will not even start with the Abitibi mill out in Grand Falls. I will not talk about the pellet plant. I will not talk about the \$30 million up in Parsons Pond. I will not, Mr. Speaker, I will not. I am just going to stick to the bill because I know they try to edge me on.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is up. I am sure I will have time in committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure for me to stand just to say a few words to this particular bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3. According to the bill, the idea here is to start charging a new fee, a fee of \$50 to clearance certificates.

Somebody said only \$50, Mr. Speaker. For a lot of people it is not only \$50. I think it is important to stand up sometimes, whenever it is that government is adding a new fee, whenever government is adding a new tax, whenever government is adding a new levee, whenever government is adding a new tariff, whenever government is adding a new financial barrier of some sort, or another tax grab or another fee grab of some sort, I think it is important to stand up and have thorough debate about that particular proposal.

The Minister of Finance stood up and said the Opposition are going to be against this. The Opposition has already made up their minds that they are going to oppose this. He suggested that the Opposition should support this additional fee of \$50.

I am surprised to hear the Member for Bay of Islands point out that this is already being charged to people. People are already being charged this fee when – to my understanding, and maybe I am to be corrected – this is not fully into force until it passes this Legislature and is properly enacted. That is surprising to hear. I guess it is just an assumption that this is going to pass and that it is somehow futile to oppose it. I would say it is not futile. I think it is actually important to have some substantive debate about it.

It is like the debate we had about the rebate on tobacco tax. It is another charge, another fee like the \$500 charge to new roadside businesses, another fee that is being charged people that government did not campaign on. It was new energy. It was not new fees and charges. That was the slogan.

A number of important points have been raised by the previous speaker, because we are talking about charging this not only to individuals – and I am not a lawyer. I heard somebody say over there earlier that they are not a lawyer, and there are a number of people over there who are not. I did look up this whole issue of clearance certificates. Basically, this is something that has to be – for people who do not know – obtained before a property is distributed, a property that

somebody controls in their capacity as legal representative. I guess the discharge of property one might say.

A legal representative is somebody who administers or somebody who winds up, somebody who controls or otherwise deals with a property, or I guess dispenses with a property or a business or an estate of another person. It may be an individual, or it may be a trust, or it may be a corporation. The legal representative assigns a signee or a liquidator or a curator or a receiver of some kind, an heir, or if it is an heir to say something that is left to people, an administrator, an executor in the case of somebody's final will and testament, the executor of that; some committee that has been charged with overseeing the discharge of property or a business or an estate, or any other person, other than the trustee in bankruptcy. I think that has some legal consequence.

It is important I think to realize that this is material or this will be charged to spouses potentially as well as the individual. That is important, not just in the case of the purchase say of a home, because in that case obviously it could be you being charged the \$50, or you and your spouse getting charged two times that, obviously \$100. I think it becomes more complex and it is more compelling, and it is more important to think about it if you are dealing with a business, because it is quite possible we are talking about the discharge or reassignment or the change of control basically of a business of that property and getting a clearance for that. Let's say somebody is going to buy a corner store, like in the case we were talking about up in Labrador, I say, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the Member for Labrador West

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SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: - if you were going to buy a convenience store. Let's say there were five of you. The five of you will be charged the \$50. Of course that is \$250 then, potentially, the partners in the business arrangement. Then, if

all of the spouses were charged that too, well of course that is \$500 now. That is a lot of money.

We know government is talking about \$1.4 million or so. As we have learned through going through the Estimates process, and here when we stayed late the other night we talked a lot about whether this was a projection and projections can certainly change. Let's assume that these will not be the bulk of the people, but these will be some of the people.

There are other sorts of transfers of property as well. Just imagine if somebody is buying a motel. Maybe there are ten partners purchasing the motel, so that is ten times the \$50. Then, if you include all of the spouses, all of a sudden then that is \$1,000. That is an awful large levee, tax, or fee, whatever you want to call it, to put on that clearance certificate.

Imagine if somebody is buying a fish plant. It could be a larger group of people and a larger group of spouses then. If you multiply all of that out by the number you are getting larger and larger numbers. I think you could see where I am going with this.

Of course, that not only impacts individuals when they are trying to acquire property to live in, and we know what the market is right now. The real estate market, the housing market in the City of St. John's on the Northeast Avalon and the communities surrounding St. John's is on fire. Even though we talk about how there might be a bit of a softening or cratering of 25 per cent, is the figure that has been thrown around recently, it is still very expensive. Adding any additional cost on to that can be problematic for people.

You have to ask the question about whether or not it is appropriate to be adding these additional costs. Some people would see this as basically a cash grab, would see it just basically as a way when you are in a crunch to get a few additional dollars, and at what consequence?

AN HON. MEMBER: It is terrible.

MR. KIRBY: Absolutely. The member across the way says it is a terrible thing. I have seen numerous, almost exclusively, there have been very few members opposite who stood up at some point in the Budget debate, or some time during Concurrence and talked about how inappropriate it is to charge Newfoundlanders and Labradorians another dollar that will go into public revenues. With the exception of the people who live in Labrador West and Southern Labrador. It is apparently fine to charge them more, or businesses there. It is fine to charge people an extra \$500 for the roadside business tax.

I also forgot the cellphone tax too. That is another fee that is – that is right, they are talking about the additional tax for the cellphone expansion. That is another \$7.7 million to \$8 million worth of additional fees there.

It all adds up, really. You cannot have it both ways, as one of the PC Party Cabinet ministers no longer over there – I suspect there are going to be a lot of people not over there when we get to the next election. He used to say that you cannot have it both ways. Either you are against new fees, taxes, levies, charges, and so on, or you are for it. Pick one, you cannot get up and decry or claim I have a position that I do not, that is the position that you have appear to have adopted yourself.

The other thing about this here, which I think is very, very important to point out and to have a thorough debate on here this evening, is whether or not we should actually have this in this bill enacted through legislation at all, whether or not this should be in here at all. I think you can make a relatively compelling argument that this should actually have been put in the regulations.

I think the minister, or one of the ministers said at one point in Estimates, I believe – and you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think this is my understanding; that this is being put into force through legislation because it is harder to change. If somebody wanted to get rid of it, it would be harder to change. You would have to bring it back into the Legislature again at 6:50 p.m. on a Monday evening. You would have to

bring it in and have a complete debate on it and change. Unlike through regulation, if somebody else was the government, if one of the Opposition parties were the government, it could easily be gotten rid of.

MR. F. COLLINS: (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: It could be reduced more easily. The member says it cannot be put up either, but I guess the fact that we are putting it in at all shows a willingness to have this.

It does not really seem to be the right way to operate to me, to put this in legislation, to basically lock this in that way, and not allow for the level of flexibility and leeway that you would have if it was in regulation. It would be much more straightforward or much more easily changed in the event that you thought it was a bad idea.

I think one of the members who stood up and talked earlier in the debate this evening, talked about how sometimes legislation can be a bad idea. There are instances, and I will not go back through all of them again, but he talked about the expropriation, he talked about the act to amend the act to amend, and so on. We have seen instances here in the Legislature just in a short few years where things that seemed like a good idea at the time – even though they may or may not be consistent with your particular political philosophy, they seem like a good thing at the time and then it is enacted, and it is apparently not and has to be changed. If this had to be changed you would need an additional piece of legislation like that previous piece we had that I believe has been amended a couple of times now. That is important.

I think the other thing about this that I find interesting is that the Canada Revenue Agency does not see fit to levy this sort of a charge in the event that somebody is administering, winding up, or otherwise dealing with property, and whether that is property that is a business, a corporation, an individual, or some other group, or committee. That begs to question why are we doing it when they are not?

I know the minister talked about how a lot of the things work in the real estate business, and when legal folks are involved, in trying to deal with all of these clearance certificates. It seems to me that if there is a rush to administer this, or the clearance is already something that the people have devoted a significant amount of attention to, then there is more administration that is added to this now because there is more administration in the administration of the fee.

The fee then has to be remitted to government and it is more red tape. I think that is one thing that government has talked about. I am not sure which minister is responsible for Red Tape Reduction now, but there has certainly been a lot of talk about reducing red tape, not having fees like this, and not having additional levels and additional processes for businesses, individuals, operations, or corporations to have to do. It is important, well, purportedly important, not to have this sort of red tape.

Now we are having additional fees. We have an additional charge now and more money coming out of the pockets of people, whether they are purchasing a property for themselves, for their own personal use. It does not necessarily have to be a home. It could be if you are purchasing recreational property. Some people can afford to do that in this economy and there are a good number of people who cannot. Those people would be impacted by it as well.

Small business certainly would be, in a lot of ways, impacted by this as well. I outlined a few scenarios there where individuals, if they are purchasing a business or they are purchasing a property for commercial purposes. You have to wonder and we have to figure out before we are finished with this, before there is actually a vote, and hopefully we will get an answer, about whether or not groups of individuals will all have this fee levied upon them, and then whether or not all of their spouses as well will have to pay that as well. It becomes a much more significant sum of money, as I was saying earlier, I say to the member.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: Well, if there are multiple individuals involved in –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: That is important.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the member to direct his comments to the Chair and not engage with members on the opposite side.

MR. KIRBY: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I thought the members were trying to answer the question, but I was lost for a second. I thought we were in committee there for a minute. Now, I think the correction is important. It is true, absolutely.

We will have to see. If that is the case, that multiple individuals who are implicated in this sort of situation would have \$50 charged to them each, I am not sure of how the legal mechanisms work here, but obviously this is a certificate people cannot do without if they are going to assume property that is new to them. Obviously, that is the whole point. If the property is going to be distributed to them, they are going to have to have this because it is a legal requirement.

Of course, when it is not paid, this charge or another one, but this will be a new charge. If this is not paid, well people are going to be liable for this. I can think of instances, just imagine where this fee is not paid and then people become liable for this. It could lead potentially to other issues for them when the property is being distributed to them.

These certificates, as I understand it, certify all the amounts that the taxpayer is or can be reasonably expected to become liable for. That is at or before the time that the distribution of property is being made. This amount is being paid out in order to ensure that and provide them with the clearance certificate they need.

I was saying about liabilities, but then in the event that this is not paid, what are the consequences then when that does not happen?

Are there other fines or levies or charges, or is there interest?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Is there interest that could be charged on top of this? Then, of course, it becomes more than \$50. It is more than \$50. It is like \$50 plus interest. If your spouse has to pay it too, then it is \$100 plus interest. If you are in business and it is multiple individuals, it is a larger sum of money which is subject to some fee or charge or interest.

I think while it seems like it is very simplistic on the surface and it is just \$50 and it just has to deal with this issue of the clearance certificate, I think it is important not to over simplify the importance of the clearance certificate and the role that plays in the discharge of property, or business, or an estate that is owned by an individual or a business, or a trust or a corporation, or a business or a committee of some sort of individuals who would be assuming –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member that his time has expired.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: South, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a pleasure for me to speak on Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, I said it before and I am going to say it again. There are many times when I sit in this hon. House, and when I am

asked to speak to a particular bill or a particular piece of legislation, speak to the Budget, whatever it may be, I have a number of thoughts around that. About what I want to say about it, what the benefits of that particular bill might be, what that particular piece of legislation might be, but I always get sidetracked, Mr. Speaker. I get sidetracked every time.

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, as an elected member of this House of Assembly I feel that I have a responsibility. I have a responsibility not just to the people of my district, to the people of Mount Pearl South who put their trust and faith in me to represent them, but I also have a larger responsibility, Mr. Speaker. I have a larger responsibility to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have a responsibility to set the record straight whenever I think that opportunity should present itself. It seems like each and every time I am asked to speak that opportunity keeps presenting itself, because I keep hearing so many things from the other side that I would classify as nothing but irresponsible, political spin, Mr. Speaker. That is what I would classify it as, and today is no exception.

I do want to address some of the points that were made by the Member for St. John's North. I want to address some of the points that were made by the Member for The Straits – White Bay North. I really hope that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, as many as possible, I really, truly hope they were listening.

I hope they are listening now and I hope they were listening a little earlier, particularly when the Member for The Straits – White Bay North was up. I hope they were listening intently to what the member had to say. If they did listen intently to what the member had say I think it would be a real eye opener for them in terms of where they would go, where the NDP would go if they – God help us – were ever to form a government. They would understand that they seem to have no concept of how things work in the real world, Mr. Speaker. They really do not. It is scary. I actually feel fear for my children; I feel fear for my grandchildren.

The member says to use an example, and there are many examples. We could write a book of examples, Mr. Speaker, whether it be the private-public partnership we talked about with Long John Silver and the shrimp shells for Holyrood, or whether it is this particular issue. Whether it is a subway that was going to run from Flower's Cove to Conche, I believe was the recommendation there. Mr. Speaker, another example yet again today.

We are talking about a fee. We are talking about implementing a \$50 fee for a certificate that is required for the sale of land and property, Mr. Speaker, for a transaction. For a legal transaction that is required in terms of real estate, in terms of the transfer of sale of land. In order for that service to be provided, there is a cost to it. There is a cost in terms of the human resources required from the provincial government, which is the people, and our money to provide that.

Mr. Speaker, as a government we realize we have a responsibility. We have a responsibility for the provision of services. We have the responsibility for the provision of what I would classify as core government services; things such as education, things such as health care, things such as municipal works, and things such as roads, highways and infrastructure. We also have responsibility for things such as health and recreation. There are another host of programs, if you will, that the government has to provide to the people. We have to provide it in the most effective and the most efficient way possible for all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We do not have an endless supply of money to pay for it, we really do not. So we have to match up our revenues with our expenditures, and in a responsible manner we have to come up with a formula to provide those services at the best cost and the most efficient way we can.

In order to raise these revenues, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of choices that government has on a year-by-year basis. The primary way is through taxation. That is the primary way that we do it, all governments of all levels do. We also do it through things like royalties; royalties

from our oil and gas, royalties from our minerals.

We also do it with fees. We realize that while we have to tax people, while we have to tax businesses, while we have to tax corporations for these core services that we are providing, we also realize that there are certain, I will say, specific services that we provide, specific services which the population as a whole, I will say, would not necessarily avail of. For these services, these programs and so on, we charge fees.

We charge park fees for people who come in and use our provincial parks. There is a select group of people who would use those parks and so on. There is a cost to maintaining these parks. There is a cost for staff of these parks, human resources. There is a cost around the advertising and the promotion of these parks. For the people who would use those parks, we charge a fee.

There are a number of other services which I will say are not necessarily what we traditionally think of as core government services that we have to provide to people for various reasons, many times for legal reasons. This is one of them. This service is one of them, it is the provision of that certificate that is required for these real estate transactions to ensure we have clear title on the land, and to protect people so that they do not have liabilities and so on associated with a piece of property.

Mr. Speaker, as I said in order to provide that, there is a cost associated to it. As a government we have recognized that and we are implementing a \$50 fee. Now, I can buy the argument to a certain degree. Someone could say, well, based on the human resources involved, 300,000 certificates a year, the number of people involved and so on, perhaps \$50 goes above and beyond capturing that sort of as a wash. Maybe this fee actually raises some additional revenue.

Mr. Speaker, let's say worst-case scenario it did raise a little extra revenue, if that is what it did. Rather than increasing taxes to the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador, the average taxpayer, on their day-to-day life, particularly people of lower incomes, modest incomes, if that should derive some extra money to go into government coffers to offset some of our expenses, to offset the fact that we do not have as many revenues coming in at this particular point in time, and by bringing it in that allows us to be in a position where we do not have to raise taxes, I do not see that as a bad thing. I honestly do not.

Let us put this in context. We are talking a one-time \$50 fee. The Member for St. John's North was trying to spin it out or trying to throw it out there, if you will – throw enough at the wall and see what sticks. He was trying to throw it out there, trying to fear monger, like the NDP do all the time, that maybe it will not be \$50. Maybe if there is a corporation involved and there are ten people on that board or whatever, they are all going to get charged \$50 and that would be a \$500 fee. Maybe if it is not paid in time, there are going to be levies on that and it is going to be higher again, and so on. It is nothing but pure fear mongering, Mr. Speaker. It is a one-time \$50 fee.

The Member for The Straits – White Bay North stands up, Mr. Speaker, talking about this \$50, basically saying that could be the tipping point for somebody in terms of whether or not they are going to buy a property. As the Member for St. John's North said, he was talking about properties. Well, it could a home, it could be a commercial property, or it could be a recreational property.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, if you look at the housing market here in Newfoundland and Labrador and where the housing prices are, granted there are some homes that are probably older homes and so on that might be in the \$200,000 or \$250,000 range and so on. Most of the houses I would suggest, certainly in this area for sure, are into a cost of anywhere from \$400,000 or \$500,000 up to \$1 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can picture the couple now saying: Honey, you know, we have been saving up for that house and we moved in our

apartment, paid our rent, and we were saving. We were working overtime; we were doing whatever we had to do. We have our down payment on our house and we are going to buy that new house, \$400,000 approved by the bank. Way to go.

Honey, I don't know how to break it to you; we are not going to be able to get this house. What do you mean? The government just implemented a \$50 fee. The government implemented a \$50 fee on this certificate and our dreams now are gone. We cannot afford the house. Honey, that property we were going to buy up at the – where is the place I am thinking about, off Salmonier Line? Deer Park - that property we were going to buy in Deer Park for recreational purposes, we cannot buy it now. Why is that? Well, if we listen to the Member for The Straits – White Bay North, that \$50 fee, we cannot afford it; sorry, we are not going to be able to buy that property up in Deer Park.

Look at it from a business perspective. A business person is going to purchase a property to open up a business, and the Member for The Straits – White Bay North would suggest that all of a sudden that transaction is not going to happen because of a \$50 fee for this certificate. I mean, it is absolutely ludicrous, Mr. Speaker – it is absolutely ludicrous.

I think people need to hear what is being said. If they really listened sometimes, whether it be the shrimp shells or whether it be issues like this, they would know where I am coming from and why I am concerned for the future of my children when I even think about the NDP having any influence or power to run this Province, I have to tell you.

The member also talked about the fact – the Member for The Straits – White Bay North – maybe they would avoid it. He said yes, that they were going to avoid it. They just would not get their certificate. There will be people who will not get their certificate. How are we going to deal with that? Now, Mr. Speaker, again, reality, we are on planet earth now. We are on planet earth; we are in reality.

MR. JACKMAN: Those fellows are not.

MR. LANE: The member here, my colleague, says those fellows are not.

Anyway, here we are, Mr. Speaker, and we are talking about this particular fee now and people are going to say I am not going to get that certificate. Well, Mr. Speaker, if somebody were foolish enough to say – and we know it is foolish – but they were foolish enough to say I am not going to get that certificate, tell me where we can find a lawyer who is ever going to sign off on an agreement for the purchase of that property. Tell me where we are ever going to find a realtor. From the case of a business, tell me any businessman who would be crazy enough to do that, and tell me any bank, Mr. Speaker, who would ever give you a loan –

AN HON. MEMBER: Cash exchange.

MR. LANE: Yes, he is talking about a cash exchange. So I am talking about buying a \$500,000 property, and the Member for The Straits – White Bay North is talking is talking about buying a puppy – cash exchange, that is what he talking about.

Mr. Speaker, the reality of it is that a \$50 fee for this particular certificate that is required for a transaction to purchase property is not excessive. It is just totally reasonable, logical. It is recovering the costs that the government has to endure in order to provide this. As I said, if it provides a few extra dollars to go into the general funds to help offset, to help pay for some services that we are providing here for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, so be it; things like the universal home care that they talk about.

Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have looked at these issues. Somewhere along the way revenue to has to come into the Province to pay for the service that we provide. The service that we provide now, which are great services, by the way, the best in the country in many cases, Mr. Speaker, but it takes revenues coming in.

Mr. Speaker, we get revenues from our taxation, we get revenues from fees, and we get revenues from royalties. When I listen to members for the Third Party, the NDP, and they are complaining about a fee, the next time they get up on their feet I would ask them: Where are they getting the revenue to? Where is the revenue coming from for universal pharmacare, universal day care, universal home care, a house for everybody, and full-day kindergarten? Where is the money going to come from?

If you listen to what the Leader for the Third Party has said, what the NDP have said, it is not going to come from the royalties. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is because they are going to tear up all of the oil and gas contracts. It is not going to come from oil. It is certainly not going to come from development on the West Coast. I can guarantee you it is not coming from there because they are against that –

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the member this is Bill 7.

MR. LANE: Absolutely.

Mr. Speaker, the point I am trying to make –

MR. SPEAKER: Relevant to the bill.

MR. LANE: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Where I am trying to tie this in, is that if the members on the opposite side, the NDP in particular, are complaining about the \$50 and the revenues from fees, if we cannot get money from fees, it has to come from somewhere else to pay for all the stuff they want. We know that this government is committed to not taxing the people any further.

We put a half billion dollars into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That is what we have done and we are proud that we have done it; but, at the end of the day, revenues and expenses have to add up. In this particular case, putting a nominal \$50 fee on a real estate transaction, a certificate that is required for that, is certainly not excessive at all. Really, the argument that is being made is too foolish to talk

about, quite frankly. It really is. It is important we point that out.

MR. KENT: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: My colleague said hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion if the NDP, as I said, are not prepared to raise fees, where are they getting their revenues from? I know exactly where they are getting it from. They are getting it from taxing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is where they are getting it.

As a matter of fact, I have a transcript here from the Leader of the Third Party on a particular Open Line show. The leader said, but the thing is what the have Province status means – because of our revenues, we have the ability to use our taxation system to start dealing with that. I do not see this government doing that. They are not doing long-term planning and seeing how to use our taxation system because we do have the ability to tax. We do have the ability to tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, the NDP, as we said before and I will continue to say, is about tax and spend. That is where they are at: tax and spend. We are about raising revenues in a responsible manner where we can, where it is appropriate, where it makes sense. That is what this bill does.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: A point of order.

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I did not want to interrupt the member while he was speaking because the less he knows the more he says.

Just because you can charge \$50 to people does not mean you should.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, initially, I was not going to stand and speak to this bill; however, when I heard the hon. Minister of Finance say that the role of the Opposition is to take government to task for bad decisions and to take the government to task for bad policy decisions, then hearing my colleague speak, it became clearer, clearer, and clearer to me that this, in fact, is bad policy and it is a bad decision.

He also said that it is very important to not just get up and talk about this and talk about that, but to talk about the relevance, to speak with relevance to the bill. I am very happy to be able to stand and speak with relevance to Bill 7. It is a bill that would amend the Revenue Administration Act to impose a fee of \$50 per search for clearance certificates.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Now, Mr. Speaker, we all know how important clearance certificates are, particularly in some instances, and how important they are for protection of businesses. Also, it is for protection of individuals, for instance, an executor who is dealing with a will or an estate.

There has been so much revenue. While this government has been in control for the past ten years they have been at the helm when we have had our highest revenue ever; ever in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, ever in the history before Newfoundland even joined Canada. This has been the time of the highest revenue ever.

They had money to spend, they had time. They had time, Mr. Speaker, to plan how that money was going to be spent. They had freedom. Nobody could stop them. They were in power, they were the majority. No one could stop them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker has recognized the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

They had time to get it right. Getting it right is about deciding how the money is going to be spent, what kinds of fees are in place, and how they are going to tax the citizens. The more I look at this bill and the ramifications for the people of the Province, the more disturbing it becomes. Mr. Speaker, this is becoming – what the government is doing in this bankruptcy Budget, in this Budget of desperation. That is what it is; it is an absolute Budget of desperation where they are cutting left, right, and center without solid plans.

We see the roll out, we see the effect. We see that they have already had to reverse some of their decisions. They had to reverse some of their decisions in Justice; they are going to have to reverse some of their other decisions in terms of the effects of their ill-planned or their unplanned cuts.

Mr. Speaker, basically what we are looking at is we are looking at death by a thousand fees, by a thousand fee increases. This government is talking about they are not increasing taxes, but this government with this Budget have become like pickpockets. They are pickpockets. They are pulling money out of this pocket, out of that pocket, and out of that pocket. They are pulling money by increasing their fees. They are pulling money –

MR. KING: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I know the member is eager in her speech, but she just used the term referencing government members as pickpockets. I think that very clearly indicate thievery of some sort and would be unparliamentary. I ask that she withdraw the term.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker will review the transcript to make sure the language and the tone in which it was used was either appropriate or inappropriate for the House, and make a comment later.

I would ask members if they would be a little bit tolerant of those who have been recognized to speak in the House. I know this is getting into our second night in the session sitting, but members are debating an issue before the House. I would ask members when I have recognized the member to speak that we would listen in silence.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I would be happy to withdraw that comment –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: – if it hurts the sensitivities of this particular government. I would not want to do that in any way, shape, or form, Mr. Speaker, so I happily withdraw that comment; however, I still would like to go on with the fact that this is death by a thousand fee increases, and I would like to look at that. When we look at the fee increase for bars and events, for permits for that, there is a fee increase right there.

Again, this is a government that says they are not increasing taxes, that they are not going after

the middle class, and that they are putting money back into the pockets of people. That is not what we are seeing here, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to shine a little bit of light on that. Once we start adding it up, one fee increase after another fee increase after another fee increase, Mr. Speaker, it is nothing short –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

The Speaker is going to remind members one more time and then I am going to start naming members. There is a member recognized to speak on the floor of the House, and I ask members to keep their private conversations to themselves. If they want to engage in a conversation, please leave with those individuals you are chatting with and stay outside of the Chamber.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

We are going to look at some of the other fee increases we are seeing, because they do add up.

MR. SPEAKER: No, we are only going to talk about those that are referenced in the bill itself. This is Bill 7. We are talking about a very specific bill and very specific fees.

MS ROGERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: All our comments should be relevant to the bill.

MS ROGERS: All right, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to do that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the increase in this fee and the fees for this, it is not isolated. It is a new fee that is added on top of all the other fees. It has that cumulative effect. It has an overload effect. I would be happy to just even mention the fact, though, that it is similar to what we see in other areas that have

had others. It will be interesting to see how many more might come our way.

We have seen that in fact it is not dissimilar to the teacher certification fees that went from \$60 to \$115. This, in fact, is a fee that never even existed before.

This is a new one, but the others ones are doubling. For instance, a Statement of Professional Standing for educators went from \$10 to \$20, and ferry rates have gone up 10 per cent. This seems to be, Mr. Speaker, a government that likes to increase fees, that likes to take money away from people as opposed to putting money into the pockets of people, which they so very much like to talk about.

In fact, we are seeing the opposite. It is similar to the increase in fees for semi-private and private rooms in hospitals, and the increase in fees for elective non-insured surgery. Some of these fees are effective June 1. These fees will be effective July 1. This is retroactive, actually. It is actually a retroactive act, Mr. Speaker. It is not progressive, and it is rather regressive.

For a Province as flush with cash and a Province that has had so much prosperity, to be reaching into the pockets of citizens and saying, we need to take more from you, we need to take more from you here, we need to take more from you there. There are more fishery, agriculture, aquaculture and forestry fees.

The hon. Member for Mount Pearl South said he gave us a story of oh look at that, a couple is going to buy a house. He was mocking us by saying oh, honey we cannot buy this house because there is a new \$50 fee. We know that is not going to happen. He did not need to mock. We know that is not going to happen.

The situation that we are dealing with here, Mr. Speaker, is just because a government can add a fee does not necessarily mean that they should. They can add a fee to anything. They can double anything because we have seen that. We have seen that they are doubling fees right, left, and centre, almost across the board.

What happens, Mr. Speaker, it adds up, it adds up, and it adds up a load. That again is why we see death by a thousand fees. It is almost like shaking people down for their money. It is a kind of a funny way because they are saying we are not taxing you, but, in fact they are. They are shaking down people for money.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, “The Department provides Clearance Certificates, to ensure compliance with the Revenue Administration Act... This Act creates a statutory lien in favour of the Provincial Government, without the necessity of registration on any real property owned when a tax debt is due to the Crown.” This is what is on the Web site of the government.

“This legislation is necessary to: Ensure tax debts are cleared from often uncooperative taxpayers in an efficient and cost effective manner”. We like that. We all like that. We all like that this will be applied in an efficient way and a cost-effective manner. We would hope that almost everything in government would be handled in an efficient and in a cost-effective manner. It “Protects Crowns lien rights and obligations”; and it “Preserves the public interest to fairness and equity tax system

“A Tax Clearance Certificate indicates that no tax liability is known to the Tax Administration Division at the time of issuance and is valid for 10 days following issuance.” We are really happy about that. These clearance certificates are really important. As a matter of fact, it can help the Province collect taxes that are owed on property. That is really a good thing.

This says that it is effective April 1. I think that right now our date is May 13, 2013 and that this in fact is effective April 1. I am not sure how that is going to be applied, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if the government has a plan to retroactively apply the fee to people who have already had the certificates. Who knows? We

do not know because we have not seen really plans about much of anything.

We have not seen plans for spending, and we have not seen plans for cutting. There really is not much in the way of plans. That is too bad because what happens if we have good plans, it can avert disasters. It can avert problems that are, as the Minister of Finance said before when he introduced this bill – really we have to take government to task for bad decisions. We have to take government to task for bad policy decisions. If we had seen plans about some of the bills that come before us, if we had seen plans about –

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. KENNEDY: If the member is going to quote me then she should quote me correctly. What I said is what we are going to see here is a waste of time. What we are going to see is an Opposition who opposes for the sake of opposing, who will never agree with anything.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENNEDY: We will be here all night arguing over foolishness.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENNEDY: That is what I said.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for St. John’s Centre.

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, I took notes, and I hope I am correct because I certainly would not want to misquote the Minister of Finance because he

gave us such a good briefing, a good introduction to the introduction and the presentation of the bill. Again, when he said the Opposition's role is to take the government to task for bad decisions –

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. KENNEDY: The hon. member, Mr. Speaker, if she is going to quote me she has to quote me in the context in which I just put that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

MR. KENNEDY: (Inaudible) the people down.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker has already indicated once this evening that when I recognize a member to speak in the House I expect members to listen in silence. If I have to stand again to restore order I will start naming members and then I will ask them to leave the House. Please, I am asking for your co-operation for the last time.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I understand how difficult this is for the government. I understand how difficult it is because we – again, the government has been at the helm for ten years in a time of absolute prosperity and now to have to because of – we do not know why, Mr. Speaker. We do not know why we are in this position with this

desperation budget that is affecting the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians across the Province in so many ways, whether they are the people who are the most disadvantaged or even the middle class people, Mr. Speaker, that this Budget is so affecting their lives.

I can understand how this government must feel. They must feel so desperate to have to levy these additional fees on to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what they have to do because they have ground to a halt. Now they have to add on extra fees, and not only that, existing fees in many cases are double and sometimes even more than double.

This is a sad state of affairs, Mr. Speaker, when you think of what we have lived through in the last ten years when there was so much prosperity, when there was so much hope. Now they have to nickel and dime the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is like death by a thousand increases. It is a sad state of affair for us to have to come to this point. It truly is when there was so much hope, when there was the promise that we were open for business and now we are down to nickel-and-diming. It is sad. It is a sad state of affairs.

We know that the tax clearance certificates are important for the protection of the Province, for the protection of government and for the protection of individuals and businesses who are in the business of dealing with property like this. It is a necessary thing. Is it necessary to apply a never before fee? I am not so sure. Just because government can, should it? It is not so clear, Mr. Speaker.

Now we know the federal government has a similar service that they provide. It does a similar thing. I would just like to speak a little bit to that. There is a similar provision in the federal income tax legislation, which requires a legal representative to obtain a clearance certificate. Otherwise they would be liable for any unpaid amounts of income tax. We all know that. We know that is happening here on the provincial level and we know it happens on the federal level.

For instance, like an executor of an estate, if it is not cleared up and the taxes are owing, Mr. Speaker, the executor, him or herself, actually can be liable for any outstanding taxes. That is really important. For instance, when we are dealing with the estate of someone, we know how difficult this is for families. Families want these kinds of things wrapped up and tended to as quickly as possible because they can drag on and on. It is very difficult for families. Who pays for this \$50? Is it the executor? Is it the family? Who pays for it?

Also, the new forms are saying and the new information online on the provincial government Web site says it will all be done online. Not everybody has that kind of access, Mr. Speaker. Not everybody has a Visa, a MasterCard, an Interac debit card, or online payment. They just do not. That is the reality. There are some communities in our Province that do not even have high-speed Internet, so it is not so easy.

Again, when the Minister of Finance said he wanted to make sure we take the government to task for bad decisions or take the government to task for bad policy decisions that is kind of what we are doing here. We are looking at the effect of that.

Anyway, federally, “A legal representative is someone who administers, winds up, controls, or otherwise deals with a property, business, or estate of another person...”; in other words, “an assignee, liquidator, curator, receiver of any kind, trustee, heir, administrator, executor, a committee, or any other like person other than a trustee in bankruptcy.” Do you know the interesting thing about this service that is necessary federally, because they are doing the exact same thing? They are doing the exact same thing federally.

MR. MARSHALL: No, they are not. It is not the same (inaudible).

MS ROGERS: Well, they are doing similar things –

MR. MARSHALL: No, according to yourself, not somebody else.

MS ROGERS: Okay. Well, the interesting thing is that there is no fee federally. They do not charge a fee. We do know that there is a long waiting period; it can be a long time. I am hoping that the body that gives the clearances here in the Province – in fact, for the federal one it is up to six months, the waiting. It can be really, really long, and it can be excruciating for people. It can be sometimes a deal-breaker for some situations. We are hoping that is not happening in our Province, that, in fact, our wonderful public servants are able, the public service, to deliver much more efficiently and much more quickly the tax clearance certificates that are needed in order for people and businesses to be able to get on with what they have to do.

Federally, there is no fee. It is unfortunate, again, when we have had such prosperity, that the government has decided to plant a brand new fee, reach deep down yet again into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. When we see, again, the increase in fees and the doubling in fees, it is the culmination of all the increases, the little increases, bit by bit by bit, that all add up and it is death by a thousand fee increases. That is what we are dealing with, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to have had the opportunity to speak to Bill 7. I thank you very much and, again, I thank you for the instruction from the Minister of Finance –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member that her time has expired.

MS ROGERS: – and the invitation to speak.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I have been in this House for ten years, but I have never witnessed anything like this here tonight. Here

we are with Bill 7 – and I will read it, Mr. Speaker; it is a very simple bill, two pages, actually. As a matter of fact, there is print only on three pages.

It is a bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3. Explanatory Note: This bill would amend the Revenue Administration Act to impose a fee of \$50 per search for clearance certificates.

Then on the other side it says, “1. The Revenue Administration Act is amended by adding immediately after section 113 the following:

“113.1 Notwithstanding section 114, the fee for a clearance certificate is \$50.

“2. This Act shall be considered to have come into force as of April 1, 2013.”

Mr. Speaker, I have heard it all here tonight in regard to this fee. Really, a fee that we think is warranted in the Province. Yes, it might very well enable us to collect about \$1.2 million or \$1.3 million, and that is only a projection in regard to what we might collect this year in transactions that have happened in the past, and that is all we can do.

Then I have heard the hon. members across the House, the Opposition, talking as if they never did implement a fee. One of the members actually sitting was there, I firmly believe, when Premier Tobin was the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and implemented many fees trying to pull themselves out of complete bankruptcy, the way they had the Province. They had her totally bankrupt, had no other way out but to tax the people of the Province and try to get themselves out. I remember that quite clearly.

Then, as well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the Third Party and members of the Third Party talking about this fee as if they would never enact a fee. They would never, ever tax. Only a couple of days or so ago, or even today, I believe, the Leader of the NDP was on Open Line or one of the talk shows talking about how now that we have a have Province it was a time to maximize

our taxation system to pay for things that they have in their policy manual, wanting to implement, and the only way they can implement it is tax the people of the Province and tax them severely in order to implement. The simple reason is that they are going to drive all of the business industry out of this Province, especially in regard to our oil and gas.

As well, they talk here tonight as if we found ourselves in this place and we put ourselves in this place purposely. They talk as if they do not know – and probably they do not know anything about a global economy, Mr. Speaker. They do not know anything about oil. They do not know anything about what is contained in our revenue stream in regard to what we have in the Department of Finance to pay for the social programs and the other services that we provide to the people of the Province. They have no clues about them, Mr. Speaker.

They talk that we find ourselves here because we put ourselves here. The price of oil has been down over the last year because of the global market, because of things happening in China, because of things happening in India and because of world strife over in Syria and all of these kinds of places, Mr. Speaker. That actually impacts one-third of our revenue streams for the Province that we pay for such things as education, as health, as our social programs in Child, Youth and Family Services, the Advanced Education department and all that kind of stuff, a severe impact, Mr. Speaker.

Then, we might implement a fee, and we went through a careful process in regard to reviewing our programs to make sure that we can streamline them, make sure that we can deliver them cheaper, make sure that we are not impacting in any way the service that is delivered to who matters the most, the people of the Province. We went through that process, Mr. Speaker.

We reduced a projected deficit from \$1.6 billion down to \$1 billion or so. Then we had to find other ways to reduce it even further, because that is the right thing to do. As I said on Friday out in Gander to the MNL Symposium, it takes a

strong Premier to make those kinds of decisions because it is so easy to make decisions that would make you popular.

We have made decisions because we are doing the right thing for the Province. I firmly believe that our Premier is leading us in the right direction, and it is going to be a very prosperous Province in the future, I say to the hon. members across the way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: I hear them as well in regard to some of their comments, Mr. Speaker, in regard to this fee. I just read it out. It is a very simple thing; it is one fee: \$50. I had one member over on the opposite side in the Third Party talk about multiple fees, expanding up to \$500 because you might have a corporation that might have ten shareholders so everyone pays a fee, \$50. Just like somebody comes in through the door and says give me \$50, give me \$50, give me \$50.

I do not know if you can do this, Mr. Speaker, because I am not a Google box person, and I am not a Twitter box person. Maybe we should start really putting our telecast on YouTube where the people of the Province can compare what the Opposition, what the NDP are saying here in this House as compared to what they are saying outside to them in person, and then as well what they are saying on Open Line. I tell you it is astounding. It is absolutely astounding what we hear.

They are talking out of two sides of their mouth. The Leader of the Third Party is talking I think it is fifty ways out every side of her mouth. I do not know how many sides it is on any given day.

Mr. Speaker, I will get back to the bill as you are indicating that I should. I stray from it, and I have to say to you because I have seen them stray so far away from this bill. I apologize to you as the Speaker and the people of the House that I stray as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member has read the bill and he has brought our attention to the content. I would ask now if he could confine his comments to the bill, please.

MR. O'BRIEN: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

I was just trying to explain to you, Mr. Speaker, why I stray as well. I have to try to control myself.

MR. SPEAKER: I understand why you stray, but please get back on track.

MR. O'BRIEN: The \$50 fee will be applied in regard to obtaining a clearance certificate. I was in business for thirty years. I bought many things, not only in business but personally wise in regard to investments that I have made in housing here in the City of St. John's, out in Gander, wherever it may be. I will tell you something. I would like to have this fee here to make sure I do get a clearance certificate, and to make sure I do not have any tax implications that may very well have happened in the past when I sell that actual property. It is property I have invested in for a reason and I would like to have protected.

In regard to the people of the Province, the every day person out there in regard to this fee that will be attached to having a clearance certificate, it is only on the sale of a property or some other entity you may have. You will not have multiple fees attached it. It is one fee and one fee only, over and done with, and you have security. In regard to that sale, you have security in your back pocket because you have that clearance certificate that you paid money for, Mr. Speaker.

Then they try to fear monger and try to put it out there that there are going to be multiple fees because you might have a corporation or you might have a marriage, which naturally has to be two people, that there are going to be two \$50 dollar fees. Maybe there might be three; I do not know, Mr. Speaker, some days in this world. In the meantime, there is not. There is only one fee and that is a \$50 fee.

Mr. Speaker, as I look at you, and I know you have been here a little longer than I have, but you have seen this government, and I have to say it, reduce fees to services by \$536 million over the last six or seven years. Now, because of the global market and because of the deficit we are facing due to that global market – and if you would give me leave, I could really point out all the factors that predate the deficit. It is quite easy. It has nothing to do with spending; it has nothing to do with anything like that. What is all to do with is the global economy and how it impacted our Province.

So to implement a fee of \$50 on transactions, and then in turn, having the security that is attached to that certificate, I cannot see why we are standing in this House 7:50 o'clock this evening talking about a very simple bill that is contained on three pages and very little texture to it or type to it. There is not a thing to it, and here they are.

What they do is they take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I know you are giving me some leeway here and I appreciate that. I will be honest with you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before the member takes too much license in thinking what I think, let me remind him that we are debating Bill 7. I have provided a bit of latitude as we talk about the Revenue Administration Act, as we talk about this bill. I want to remind members that this is a very succinctly written bill; it is a short amendment to what is a larger piece of legislation. I would remind members one more time to confine your comments to, at least broadly, the Revenue Administration Act, and then very precisely to the bill before us, which deals with a couple of short amendments.

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I apologize for trying to read your mind. It certainly got me in trouble, and I recognize that.

It is so important, in regard to the Financial Administration Act to have the proper revenues

in place to provide the services that you are providing to the people of the Province. That is what this is all about. If you are going to bring in a fee, you are going to bring it in so that it has the least impact on as many people as you possibly can in the Province.

I want to state here clearly that this fee will probably only affect maybe 20 per cent, really, of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and only will affect them when they actually sell something, they are the actual vendor. That is it exactly.

I say to the hon. Member for St. John's Centre, I do not see you out there selling houses on a daily basis. I do not think you are heavy duty into that real estate market the last time I looked, I can tell you that. When you get up there and start thinking that this fee is going to attach itself to every Newfoundlander and Labradorian who walks in this Province, well then you are talking out of two sides of your mouth and you are fear mongering again. I cannot understand why you are not taken to task more often on the Open Lines by the commentators and anybody else who is out there, I say to you, the hon. Member for St. John's Centre. Talking out of the two sides of her mouth, and certainly I am not going to stand here and not react to it, I can tell you that right now.

Mr. Speaker, the Financial Administration Act and the revenue streams going into that is very important to us as a Province. We have to provide that service to the people, and that is what they are doing. As well, we are going to add layers of services, but then we have to add, and we have to increase our revenue streams. You just cannot do that by just going out there and picking up money off the street. That is what this is all about.

Every government in Canada, every government in the United States – statewide, the country itself, or in the free world, even, as a matter of fact, in China – has a taxation system that they use to tax people to bolster their revenue stream, to bolster the amount of revenue they have in the province or in a country in any given year in order to provide a service. That is the way it is,

no more to it than that. That is absolutely the way it works, Mr. Speaker.

I know the people across the House have talked about the desperation Budget and all that kind of good stuff. I have to go back to them, Mr. Speaker. We gave our public servants over \$500 million in wages and all those kind of good things. That is the reason why, at this point in time, we have to look at some well-warranted fees that are well-thought-of in regard to how they would impact Newfoundlanders and Labradorians generally. What kind of an impact that they would have generally, the least amount of impact that they possibly could have in regard to the every day person out in our Province who might be selling something, or whatever walk of life that they are in, in regard to middle class, low or whatever. That is the kind of stuff that we looked when it came down to deciding how we would bolster, or have any kind of any impact in regard to our revenue stream going into the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

That is the reason why that is here. As a matter of fact, if I were in the Opposition, either in the Official Opposition or in the Third Party, Mr. Speaker, when you look at it in regard to this Province, where we are, and the types of services we have, I would actually be supporting this bill. The one that I would not want to be supporting is raising personal income tax, which affects a lot of the lower class and a lot of the middle class people of this Province, which our Premier and which our government has protected in regard to this Budget. It has not had any kind of a negative impact on the services that we provide.

That is what this one is all about, Mr. Speaker. That is the reason why I am up in my place in the House. I am appalled that they went through a process in regard to trying to fear monger it, put out all kinds of things out there. People out there who might be listening to this might think that each and every one of the people of the Province is going to have to pay this \$50 fee tomorrow. It is not true, absolutely not true.

This is the kind of stuff that I heard here tonight. That is why I stood on my feet, to just have a

chat about it and to make sure that the people of the Province have heard the truth. This is a fee, yes, absolutely it is, but it is a good fee. It is a fee that actually provides a level of comfort.

As a matter of fact, to have a clearance certificate in your back pocket, making sure that your transaction is sound, making sure that nothing is going to appear in the future that would jeopardize that particular transaction, have any kind of tax implications in the future, whatever it may be, I would want that as a fee. That is where I would be with it. As a matter of fact, I would be getting on my feet and I would be supporting this bill but not, as the Minister of Finance (inaudible), getting up and opposing everything for the sake of opposing it. That is not what Oppositions are for, Mr. Speaker. Oppositions are to provide good opposition. That is not good opposition.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am not going to be very long talking to this piece of legislation. I am going to offer a few of my own personal thoughts when it comes to this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. In some ways I am disturbed, and in some ways I can see where government has to do a fee thing. There are other times where I do not think that they should be doing a fee thing.

When I look at this, Mr. Speaker, I am looking at – and the Minister of Municipal Affairs touched on it while I was sitting there still thinking about this piece of legislation. He talked about the economy. This \$50 fee may be enough to get a clearance for somebody so they know that they have no money owing, and they will check for liens and everything. That is fine and dandy. That is great.

Mr. Speaker, when somebody goes out to buy a house not only do they buy a house – they buy a

house, yes, to keep the economy going, and I will address my comments to the other side – but they buy other things that go with that house. They go ahead and they will buy a toaster, they will go ahead and they will buy a refrigerator, and they will go ahead and they will buy furniture.

Government gets an awful lot of taxation from other forms when somebody goes ahead and they piece of property like that. If they go out and they buy a piece of land off the government, for example, and they want to get a \$50 clearance fee paid, that is fine and dandy. My whole point about this is that government always sees a return from anything that is bought like that. They are already taxing the people who are out there. When they go ahead and they buy something, they are already paying taxes on it.

The only thing that I have not heard government answer today when we are talking about this piece of legislation is why? A concrete answer of why they have to have that \$50 for every clearance fee. Why do they have to have that \$100 if it is a married couple? Why?

MR. LANE: (Inaudible).

MR. MURPHY: The cost to government, I say to the Member for Mount Pearl South –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: – was nothing beforehand. There was absolutely no cost to people before to get these clearance forms done. Now all of a sudden it is an extra \$50, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are asking themselves of all things that they had to tax, why this one? I want to go out and I want to buy a house, Mr. Speaker. Why do they want to tag me for an extra \$50, when tomorrow I have to go into Sears and buy myself a deep-freeze to get in that house, and they are probably going to get an extra \$100 out of me then? Why is that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MURPHY: The challenge to government is to stand up. The next speaker can go ahead and he can stand up, or she can stand up, and they can tell us why the \$50 fee should be there. It is as plain and simple for me for that, Mr. Speaker, knowing about the return they are going to get from somebody's investment that they are going to be putting into, and the extra \$50 they are going to be paying.

The simple question for me is why? Why is government going to be putting up the \$50? Why are they going to do it? They are going to get an extra \$3 million revenue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will sum up very easily with the one question. We know they are going to ahead and do this. We know that they have a majority. Again, I am just going to say for all the return of the value they get from land purchases or house purchases, with the value that government is already getting in the form of taxation, the revenue that they are getting, why are they chasing down an extra \$50 a household for this tax, Mr. Speaker?

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to take a few minutes, Mr. Speaker. We have sat here for just about three hours now and listened to the Opposition – yes, I will use the word rant, I think the word rant would be a good word for the last little bit – talk about something that is fairly simple.

We get up and we get challenged by the Member for St. John's East about why. It was pretty simple. The fee is pretty simple, Mr. Speaker, it

is not rocket science. The Minister of Natural Resources talked about this earlier this afternoon. It is just a fee for service provided. A simple fee, a \$50 fee for service provided. It is not uncommon.

Yes, they pointed out that the federal does not do it, but the federal government takes the time and does all the rest. In every other province, Mr. Speaker, as was pointed out earlier today, this is a common practice. You have a tax clearance fee, and it is common practice in all the other provinces. It ranges from \$25 to \$114, so, \$50 does not seem to be an unreasonable fee. Does \$50 seem to be an unreasonable fee? When you think about all the other provinces and territories, \$25 to \$114, \$50 does not seem.

If you listen to some of the other speakers on the other side, Mr. Speaker, they have led you to believe that this affects every Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

AN HON. MEMBER: Fear mongering.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: No, but it has been led to believe this afternoon that this affects every Newfoundlander and Labradorian. Not so, Mr. Speaker. It affects people who want to have land purchases, or want to purchase new buildings, or new homes. That is not everybody. Then they go on and talk about oh, well, if they have ten people in a business, it is \$50 for every business and it goes on, and on, and on.

I do not mind, Mr. Speaker, when people stand up and they talk about things that are relevant, they make sense, and they are legitimate points. They get up there and just create fear. I would nearly go along but you are going to sit me down if I say it, mistruths. I will go there. Anyway, that being said, it is frustrating to have people stand up here in this House and go on, and on, and on, and fear monger the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no reason for it.

Mr. Speaker, this is a simple fee. A simple fee that came into effect and it is a cost-recovery method. Yes, it may be a few extra dollars, but as the minister said earlier, it also assists us with

our deficit. That is not a bad thing either as well. It does not affect every Newfoundlander and Labradorian. We have 30,000 to 31,000 people per year who need these fees.

Mr. Speaker, I had to familiarize myself with clearance fees during my time in municipalities. These certificates are important, they need to be researched, and they need to be thought out. What we need is to ensure that when people go about purchasing property, there are no taxes against it.

This is just a fee, Mr. Speaker, that I would suggest unless you were really looking for it, would probably go unnoticed. In fairness, it would probably go unnoticed on the bill of sale or whatever. It is something that would help us in cost recovery, put in new programs, put in the administration and all the rest. That is good.

Mr. Speaker, I think the idea of turning this around in two days – and we have heard colleagues on both sides of the House say that this is not a bad idea, to be able to turn it around on a Friday afternoon. I have an aunt who is in real estate, and I know how important it is to turn around and close a deal and make sure it is done. So turning something around in two days or forty-eight hours seems to be very, very sensible and valid. To have a valid certificate for ten days, Mr. Speaker, I think that is a reasonable time period as well.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance suggested earlier today, this would be consistent with other fees that are already present within government. It is nothing out of the ordinary, nothing strange, nothing untoward, just bringing consistency into the system, and being consistent with other provinces and territories, I would argue, throughout the country.

Again, while this seems to be a big how-de-do for some people on the other side, I think it is about consistency. It is modest. It is reasonable. It is not outrageous. It does not affect every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, as some would suggest. It is not a multiplier. So if you have one, two, three, four or five individuals on

a purchase, it does not go up \$50 per person. It is a \$50 fee, a flat fee of \$50.

Mr. Speaker, I think, in fairness, this is just something to put us in line with other provinces and territories and put us in line with other similar type fees throughout government.

Mr. Speaker, I sat here and I listened for just a little bit to the Minister of Natural Resources when he was reading the act and why it was in the act. He talked about the importance of that being in the act; it brings a direct lien. In other words if there were taxes owing or any taxes owing, then it would be picked up immediately and those taxes would be paid. That is important, Mr. Speaker, to the buyer. It is important to the buyer, Mr. Speaker, because if I go out or the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune goes out and buys a piece of property, they want to know that they have clear title. They want to know that they have clear title of that beautiful piece of land overlooking that beautiful bay in Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

Mr. Speaker, that is not unusual. Again, these things here today, we spent three hours talking about a simple bill that brings in line and brings safeguards to the system.

I do not know how much more I can really say about this right now. It ensures there is no lien on the property, as I already said. It is a modest increase. We believe it to be reasonable. In the end, Mr. Speaker, yes, it also helps in a small way with our deficit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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, I cannot say as I am delighted to get up here and talk about this particular bill tonight because I frankly cannot understand why

it is we have spent four hours in this House arguing over the necessity for a \$50 fee. It has been explained time and time again why it is this \$50 fee makes sense to do, actually.

This is standard across the country. We are not breaking new ground here, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities do this. If we could actually do some googling, perhaps the Member for The Straits – White Bay North could google that for us because he would not be very long before he would find out there are many, many municipalities who have this same kind of clearance certification: Mount Pearl and the City of St. John's. We can list them out for you. Paradise is another one. So we can list those out.

Mr. Speaker, what baffles me more than all of this is the same people who are complaining about the fact that we have a \$50 fee and holding up progress in the House of Assembly over it for four hours now are the same people who stand day over day in this House and say: We want universal child care; we want universal home care; we want all-day kindergarten; and we want pharmacare. So do we, but we have to find a way to be able to afford that. We have to find a way to pay for that.

Now, we have set out in this Budget ways of implementing a sustainable fiscal plan going forward. That means sometimes we do have to look at fees. We know over here on the other side all they want to do is continue to spend and continue to spend. One crowd would have us go out and borrow after they do the spending; the other crowd would simply tax and tax and tax. We want all of the same things the people on the other side of this House want. That is why we continue to invest in health care.

I would say to the members opposite: If you want all of this, how do you propose we are going to pay for it? According to you, we cannot have a fee in place at all, even though this is standard across the country. It makes absolutely no sense, Mr. Speaker. How is it we are to be able to afford the wonderful programs we are doing?

We have decided to invest in families in this Province, Mr. Speaker. We have invested more than –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member we are talking about Bill 7. I would ask her to confine her comments to the bill.

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I understand your frustration with this as well, because it is my frustration, too. We have spent four hours talking to this particular bill about clearance certification to ensure the purchase is free and clear, to provide assurance and comfort to the seller and the vender.

Mr. Speaker, this is something that is standard across the country. We are investing in this province as best we can and in order to do that, we have put forward a sustainable, fiscal plan that is going to allow us to do this.

Mr. Speaker, a small fee like this is really well worth it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

When the minister speaks now, he will close debate on second reading.

MR. KENNEDY: Mr. Speaker, I think you are being very generous in calling this debate.

I started my comments this afternoon or I indicated what I have seen here in the last seven years in this House, very serious issues are dealt with in this House of Assembly; and the Opposition, just as a government, has a role to play.

I predicted, and I think the Leader of the Opposition said I perhaps had my crystal ball, that we would spend a number of hours discussing nothing. I will say to the members of

the Liberals, they have raised several valid points that I will address here in my closing comments.

The Members for Bay of Island has raised a very significant legal issue, one that I will try to address; but when it comes to what I have heard from the NDP, the best adage that I can apply to it: fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

We had a bunch of lawyers who stood up in this House today; they were very circumspect and cautious in the way that they dealt with this matter. Does it matter to the Third Party? Not one bit, Mr. Speaker, to fear monger, to manipulate the truth, to propagate mistruths, and to pontificate, that is all we hear from them day in, day out, with never an answer to the question: What would you do?

I reiterate the comments made by the Minister of Health. If you are going to oppose a \$50 fee that is acceptable throughout the country, something that, as a government, we are going to recover our costs – and yes, we will make some money off of it. If you are going to oppose that, then how are you going to pay for all of those programs? There is only one answer, Mr. Speaker. They are going to tax the families of this Province, as the Leader of the NDP said they would.

Let me first deal with the issues raised by the Member for Bay of Islands, because it is one I had to think about myself and one I actually had to look up there. Section 2 of the act says: “This Act shall be considered to have come into force on April 1, 2013.”

Now, to the average person in the Province, we are now at May 13, 2013, well how can something come into force on April 1, 2013? It raises the issue of retroactivity versus retrospective. Those are always words, Mr. Speaker, that having dealt with them for more than twenty years in a courtroom that I always used to have to go back and think about. How can we, or how can a government make a statute apply at a date that has already gone by?

We know, Mr. Speaker, that on March 26 when the Budget was released we outlined in the backgrounder that this was coming into force on April 1. We also indicated to the Law Society in a letter what would take place. Intuitively, you would think, well, surely government cannot go back now and charge everyone for what has already been done, or how could we charge someone for a fee that was not in place?

When I went back and looked at the words of the retroactive – and there is a famous book on the statutes that my colleagues who are lawyers would certainly recognize, Mr. Speaker, and that is Driedger on Statutes. It describes as follows, “A retroactive statute is one that operates as of a time prior to its enactment. A retrospective statute is one that operates for the future only. It is prospective, but it imposes new results in respect of a past event. A retroactive statute operates backwards.”

That is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. As legislators we gave notice that this was going to take place. It is not something we are springing on people. We are now bringing in the legislation, which we are allowed to do, which says this apply at April 1.

To the answer to the Member for the Bay of Islands, the fee was charged as of April 1. The fee has been charged. The statute allows us to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the law allows the Legislature to essentially do that. That is my understanding. If we go back a little bit there is another case quoted here that, again, deals with, “A retroactive statute operates forward in time, starting from a point further back in time than the date of its enactment; so it changes the legal consequences of past events...”.

Once I started to think that way – because I was concerned. I have to say, when the Member for the Bay of Islands, who is not a lawyer, raised that issue I said: well, have we done something here we should not have done? I started to think it through. One thing, contrary to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I do like to use ‘Google box’ he calls it, and the ‘Twitter box’.

Here we were, and I cannot wait to get back into the courtroom now; with the iPad there you can look up everything instantaneously and here is the answer. That settled away in my mind that we are doing that which we are allowed to do. I am also informed the other statutes or the amendments were looked at in the same way, and that Justice did provide an opinion prior to that. So, Mr. Speaker, that is the first step.

Now, there was a question raised on the issue of: well, if it is \$50 per transaction, what about there are ten shareholders in a company? It is \$50 per transaction. That is exactly what the statute says. The fee for a clearance certificate is \$50.

Then we hear the Member for St. John’s Centre outline: well, look at the number of the people in the Province this affects. Well, the number of people – we have had 30,000 clearance certificates. There is possibility that there could be multiple clearance certificates in each transaction. Again, the math indicates that it is 30,000 people at most. There will be corporations, so there is not a significant proportion of the population.

As the Member for St. John’s South – is Paul South?

AN HON. MEMBER: Mount Pearl.

MR. KENNEDY: – Mount Pearl South outlined, if you are buying a house and you are spending money, whether that house is \$100,000 or \$500,000, you know there are costs involved. You know that you will pay a real estate agent fees. You know you will pay a lawyer fees. Although, as my colleagues will say, there will be lots of complaints about the fees you will pay lawyers, but you will know there are a number of certificates. You have to register your mortgage. The costs are set. You have to obtain certain certificates. The costs are generally set. You have to get various certificates, and this is one of them.

In doing our core mandate review – it was the same thing with the Labrador Border Zone Tax Rebate. We said, well, this does not make sense in this day and age. Why are we providing a

service for free? So the why, as the Member for St. John's East said, is quite simple. It is that there is no reason in this day and age that in a transaction where everyone else is making money that government should provide a service for free. It is as simple as that.

How we could spend four hours on that defies belief, other than what I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite in the Third Party are looking for a podium. Well, Mr. Speaker, we are more than willing, in the days that we have left in this House, to give them that podium. Just tell the people of this Province how you are going to pay for everything. If we have a \$50 fee and that causes such umbrage, that causes such major criticism from the members of the Third Party – now, the Liberals criticized it too. Again, as I indicated, some of the questions raised were valid.

The Member for St. Barbe raised an issue in terms of when the legislation comes into force it has no validity. Overall, issues were raised in relation to the statute. That is what is happening, Mr. Speaker, is that the Member for St. John's Centre makes it look like we are robbing, we are thieving and –

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: That is what she said.

MR. KENNEDY: That is what she said. She used the word pickpocket. She used the words we are shaking people down. To me, Mr. Speaker, again Hansard will speak for itself. I would suggest to you, to be called thieves by another member of this House of Assembly I would suggest is not the way it should operate.

Now, let's look at how we have shaken the people of this Province down in the last number of years. Let's look at the \$500 million in tax reductions. Let's look at the Low Income Seniors Benefit of \$21 million a year. Let's look at the RST on insurance we have given back to the people at \$75 million a year. Let's look at the HST Residential Energy Rebate of \$38 million a year. Let's look at personal income tax reductions of \$403 million a year. Now, as opposed to picking their pockets, we

are stuffing their pockets with money, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: The money that they can spend on their families. The money that they can spend to do whatever it is they want to do with it. We have sheltered low-income residents from paying taxes –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the minister to confine his comments to his bill.

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have sheltered low-income residents. I forget the exact (inaudible) but \$40,000 and less do not pay a significant proportion.

What have we done here? What we have looked at – yes, we could charge another million dollars on the families of this Province or we can raise money through a fee that every other province does. What did we do? We chose to raise a fee.

Now, they would obviously choose – again, it may be syllogistic to suggest it but if you look at it, I would suggest it is logical. If you do not agree with the \$50 fee you agree with the million dollars being taken away from families, because that is where it would have to come from, Mr. Speaker. You have to pay for programs somehow.

Again, listening to Eeyore and Pooh and the bunch across the way, the sky is falling. The sky is falling, Mr. Speaker. Well, do you know something? We have the lowest tuition fees in the country. Does that sound like the sky is falling?

We are the second highest in the country in weekly earnings. We have more people working than ever before. Our unemployment rate has declined by 3.9 percentage points, the lowest in thirty-seven years. Capital investment has increased by 170 per cent. Does that sound like

the sky is falling or does that sound like a Province that is coming into its own?

It is coming into its own, Mr. Speaker, because we have adopted a new attitude, a positive attitude. One that we can look after ourselves, one that we do not need anyone else to either provide us with the revenues or tell us what to do because we will not only pay our own way, we will make our own way in this world. That is what we have been doing as a government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Now, I want to come to the fee increase. The Premier, and I have said this before, could have taken the easy way out. The easy way out is simply to leave it to someone else. It is someone else's problem. Well, Mr. Speaker, what I was told last week in a meeting with a number of different agencies: If you leave it someone else long enough, then you will gather debt. Again, that is what you are going to have to do if you are going to have all of these wonderful programs that the NDP put forward. You either have to borrow or raise taxes. You will borrow so much you cannot pay your debt. When you cannot pay your debt you run into a crisis like we have seen in Europe.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier chose not to go that way. She had the courage and the internal fortitude to say, no, what we will do is we will not tax the families of our Province as the NDP want us to. We will look at other ways we can raise our revenues. What is this one? It is a \$50 increase in a tax certificate, a certificate that people receive for nothing. I really cannot for the life of me understand what we have been doing here for the last four hours because it does not make sense.

To the people of the Province, this is democracy. This is how it works. You vote us in here and this is what we do. We have made our decisions. Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you, the \$50 increase is a pretty easy one from my perspective. It is much easier than laying off more people. It is much easier than taxing families as the NDP would want us to do. That,

along with the Labrador Border Zone Tax Rebate, is easy decisions.

How did we find them? We have been criticized for the core mandate review and we have been criticized for the steps we have taken. When members and ministers got down into their departments, looking and analyzing, and determining if there are ways we can find efficiencies and effectiveness. When we started doing that, then what we started to see were easy targets, Mr. Speaker; easy targets like this one.

As I said, I backed away from this particular issue because it was more than twenty years ago or thirty years ago now that I would have been engaged in a real estate transaction. I do remember, though, and as I think the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs talked about – and the Member for Burgeo – La Poile would have been the most recent among us, maybe the Member for St. Barbe, who would have done these certificates, or done real estate transactions.

There is always that scrambling at the end to get everything together so people can get into their homes, so that people, Mr. Speaker, can know that everything we have worked for – because what do people want? What do they aspire to? A lot of the young families want to own their own home. They have jobs, they have children, and so that is an exciting time for them.

They do not come into this blind, where all of a sudden on a Friday afternoon, oh by the way, if you do not spend this extra \$50 you cannot move into your home. The lawyers sit down, and my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources who was involved in practicing law for many years, Mr. Speaker, will tell you again how as lawyers we strive to serve the public. We get paid for it, but people have to be paid for what they do.

You sit down with people and say now we know that in real estate transactions on the last day something could go wrong. There is always that possibility, so these are the things that we can control. What we can control is having, in those

days, the title search done. I am not quite sure how title insurance affects it today.

These are the certificates that we need. You have to have a certificate from the city. You have to have – at that time it could have been anything from Workers Comp, to retail sales. You had to have your Mechanics' Lien searches done. These are the things you could have done in advance.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when those final calculations are done, or if something happens on Friday afternoon and everyone wants it done, there is going to be an issue that you have to deal with. You do not want it to be, as a lawyer I have not ordered the clearance certificate. Well, why is that? Because it would cost you \$50 and I forgot to discuss that, or I should have discussed that with you further.

These are standard costs, Mr. Speaker, in terms of doing business. For example, towns charge for certificates. CBS charges \$50 for a tax certificate. Mount Pearl charges \$100 for a tax certificate. Paradise charges \$125 for a tax certificate.

MR. MARSHALL: Judgment Enforcement office.

MR. KENNEDY: I already referred earlier to judgment enforcement. Here we today have spent four hours in this House on a \$50 certificate. You have to wonder, what is it really about? Is it about debating this bill? Is this bill so egregious? Is it so out of whack that we really have to take government to task on this one, because this is a battle we have to fight? This is a bad policy decision that we have to fight.

To say we are going to impose a fee for a certificate, we have two people working, and we can provide it to you in forty-eight hours, that affects a number of the people of our Province who are engaged in a commercial transaction of some sort. Is that the kind of bad policy decision that we would expect to spend four or five hours in this House on?

No, so then what is the real motive? I do not know because the Member for St. John's East said, why are you bringing a certificate? I say to them, why have you wasted everyone's time here today dealing with this? That is the real issue.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition, as I have indicated, the members opposite, the Liberals, have raised some valid points and I have attempted to answer them. So what it all about? It is easy to criticise. It is easy to oppose. The finding of solutions is not that easy.

The Member for the Bay of Islands and the Member for Deer Lake know, in terms of working towards a solution on the mill, people work together. What did the NDP do? As the Member for Bay of Islands, pointed out earlier today, what did they do? They tried to scuttle the deal. That is the best way I can describe what happened there.

Why would you want to scuttle a deal that can potentially affect an industry on the other side of the Province, a forest industry that is so important? Why? If you want to start asking why, that would be a good question.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we have the Member for St. John's East who is opposed to fracking without any evidence of what the fracking will do. Here we go. They are opposed to development. They are opposed to a \$50 certificate cost. They want billion dollar programs.

The question that has to be asked, what is it that you would do? If you want to govern this Province, tell us what your plan is, tell us what you would do differently, and tell us how you will raise the money. You know, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day there is only one way, and that is to tax the middle-income families, the earners who are members of their unions.

It is the same way with Muskrat Falls. They oppose Muskrat Falls where members of unions, who they say they stand up for, are being paid high paying jobs.

Are they a party of anomalies? No. Are they a party of paradoxes? No. Are they a party of five? Yes.

MR. SPEAKER: I will remind the member to be relevant, please.

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will clue up now. I just showed great restraint. I am very proud of myself.

Mr. Speaker, in this Budget we knew that we had difficult decisions to make. We knew that we had a deficit and we had to try to decrease this deficit. We also knew that we had to make the delivery of services as efficiently and effectively as possible, and that is what we have tried to do. If \$50 is going to sink the ship, so be it. It is a simple solution and one that we have no problem with.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3. (Bill 7)

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

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

MR. KING: Presently.

MR. SPEAKER: Presently.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 3", read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 7)

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

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, Concurrence Motion to discuss (a) the Social Services Committee Estimates report.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in.

The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to my few remarks tonight, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be the Chair of the Estimates for Social Services. I would be remiss if I never thanked the members of our Committee: the Member for Bay of Islands; the Member for St. John's Centre; the Member for Port au Port; the Member for St. John's West; the Member for Burgeo – La Poile; and the Member for Bonavista South.

Mr. Speaker, we have gone to Concurrence at this time in the evening – and maybe it would be good time just to let the people know exactly what that means. Well, how this works is that government has three different Estimate Committees. There is the Resource Committee, the Government Services Committee, and the Social Services Committee, which I will speak to tonight.

Mr. Speaker, basically what happens is that each of these three Committees have various departments that come before government and the minister and their staff come here to the Chamber and usually three hours is allotted per

department. Basically, there is questioning that goes on; it is line by line most of the time, Mr. Speaker. Once the line-by-line questions are done, generally there is a time allotted for general questions.

Sometimes the general questions are succinct and pertinent to the discussion of the department; sometimes there are questions that we would say we are going fishing. Mr. Speaker, all in all that is how the Committee system works: Estimates come before this House and each department has three hours.

Mr. Speaker, for the Social Services Committee, we brought five departments and one corporation before the Estimates Committee. We began about three weeks ago with Municipal Affairs. That was followed by the Department of Education; then by Health and Community Services, which included French Language Services; the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation; Child, Youth and Family Services; and the Department of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, as the Committee's name suggests, it is the social side of government. It deals with most of the social programming, the educational programming of this government. Mr. Speaker, not only does it deal with the social side of government, but it takes up, in my rough calculations, about 56 per cent of this year's Budget goes between those five departments and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, which would probably put the overall percentage a little higher than 56 per cent. It is our social services or social responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation many times has stood in this House and described our government as being a fairly left-leaning, red Tory government. If you watch on a daily basis, I think you would know that this government as much as any government has done more investing in the social side of this Province than probably any other government in record, many investments to improve the quality of life of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education get grilled. I will not say questioned; I would say grilled here about the programs we offer in health and education on a daily basis. They get up and they do a fine job. They get up here every day and to the best of their ability answers the questions put forward by the Opposition on their departments and on the programs of their departments.

Mr. Speaker, it has been acknowledged by all members of this government that this has not been a particularly fun time. There have been some tough decisions made by this government. Sometimes it has been said that we do not care, and we do care. We also care that we have to have sustainability and longevity. Sometimes you run into bumps in the road where you need to make adjustments. This is one of those years.

Mr. Speaker, we had a very difficult world economy, a very volatile commodity market all of the past year, Sir, and most of these things affected our ability to provide programming and all the rest. We have still done a great job. For all those people who are out there and they think it is nothing but doom and gloom and there is nothing good in this Budget, I think I would encourage those people to go look in the Budget documents and see the investments that have been made, particularly on the social side. We have done some really good investments on the social side in this government.

Mr. Speaker, I will start with the Department of Health and I will start with something that is close to my heart. I have been involved for many years with the Trinity Conception Placentia Health Foundation, something that I got involved with many years ago due to illness in my family. Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago, in partnership with government, we provided the dialysis units to the people at the Carbonear General Hospital. Mr. Speaker, in this year's Budget we are extending our service to the beautiful community of Harbour Breton in the district of the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

So, Mr. Speaker, putting in that dialysis unit was a personal thing for me. I had family and friends

who, up to that time, were travelling to St. John's three times a week, whether it was the Waterford or the Health Sciences Centre, and they had to come to St. John's for dialysis. Right now, Mr. Speaker, because of the dialysis unit in Carbonear General, these family and friends are having the opportunity to have it twenty minutes from home.

Mr. Speaker, that is important, because when you are on dialysis three times a week and you are doing that, over that period of a week it takes a toll on your body. So when you do not have to travel an hour or an hour-and-a-half to get to dialysis and only twenty minutes, that is certainly a significant savings. For these people who are on dialysis, they are there for a long time. They are there, some of them, five, six hours on the dialysis machine. So it is an all-day operation, and in a lot of cases, Mr. Speaker, these are elderly people, older people, and it takes a toll on their bodies.

Well, Mr. Speaker, also in our health budget we were pleased to continue to say that our retention and recruitment of physicians – we have more physicians in this Province than we have ever had in the history of the Province, and we have had good retention rates. We have increased seats at Memorial University's Medical School so we can train more home-grown talent, and these people are staying in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, listening to the minister that day, she was talking about some of the success that we have been having in attracting and retaining physicians in rural Newfoundland. Mr. Speaker, in various areas we have had wait-time reductions. We have spent \$2 million on wait-time reductions. Yes, it is not all great, Mr. Speaker, but we are getting there. We are getting there and we are doing a better job, and we are reducing wait times. That is important to those patients who are waiting, whether it be a hip surgery, a knee replacement, whatever it may be, it is important that these people know that we are working on reducing the time that they have to go between surgeries. Excluding the commitment we made to the Corner Brook Hospital we put \$226 million into various

infrastructure upgrades all throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, in the Department of Health we have done some very, very good things. Again, can you do everything? Are there tough decisions that have to be made? Yes, there are still challenges out there and those challenges were brought forward in Estimates. I give kudos to the minister and her staff. They handled those challenges in questioning with a lot of class, patience, and gave the answers that were necessary.

Mr. Speaker, Child, Youth and Family Services and our Child Care Strategy; here is another area where it is a fairly new department, it has only been the last two or three years, and it is doing a good job. One of the real pride and joys of that is the foster parent recruitment program. I know, even when we were in the Estimates for this one, the Opposition even provided accolades about the ad program, and us attracting new foster families.

Mr. Speaker, I even have a letter here from the Foster Family Association congratulating government on its commitment to the Continuum of Care Strategy in our Budget this year. That is encouraging because that tells us that we are doing something right. There are children out there and we need more people to get involved and be foster parents.

I know earlier in the last session, two of my colleagues on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, were foster families and foster parents. They are providing a great service to children who are in need. It is strategy again; the 10-Year Child Care Strategy is only one small component of it. We care about our children and youth. We need homes for them and we have to have safe, caring, protective homes. Child, Youth and Family Services and the foster parent recruitment program are doing just that.

In education, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has been ridiculed, challenged, and all the rest. I know that as a former administrator, and the Minister of Education being a former administrator, that is hard to deal with. There

were a lot of tough choices that had to be made in education this year. The students have to be first. This was a student-centered approach and the Minister of Education has been strong on that. The Premier has also been strong, that we have to have a student-centered approach, student-first approach. I am very pleased to say that the K-9 caps on classroom size are still in place.

We hear the members opposite talk about teacher reductions, teacher layoffs, letters, and all the rest. Mr. Speaker, I can speak to experience. My wife is a special education teacher with nearly twenty-six years of service in the teaching profession. At this time of the year this is a fairly normal occurrence, teachers who are not tenured and all the rest receive letters and notifications. It does not mean they are going to lose their jobs. It is a normal practice; it is part of collective bargaining. The things that are going on is a normal process. Many of these teachers, if not all of them, will probably end up in placements at the beginning of September.

Mr. Speaker, we still have 265 more teachers in the system despite the continuing decline in enrolments. Since 2004, we have 14,000 less students in our schools. We are also getting a skewing effect on that. As everybody knows, there has been rapid population growth on the Northeast Avalon. On the Northeast Avalon we are facing some real serious challenges, and I know we are dealing with them the best we can. We have built new schools and those schools are already busting at the seams. That is providing real challenges for us.

Mr. Speaker, I was really pleased to see in the announcement of the Budget, the beginning of a new school in my district in Port de Grave at Coley's Point Primary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: A school that has 420 K-3 children in a sixty-year-old wooden structure.

Mr. Speaker, there were some good things and we are trying to maintain. As the changing

demographics go on, we have continued to face those challenges.

Mr. Speaker, it is not easy. I will tell this story, because a couple of the schools that were closing I had the privilege to teach in and my wife had the privilege to teach in, when I was a substitute back many years ago, and my wife – spent five years in one of these schools.

Mr. Speaker, these are challenges we are facing. As declining population happens in certain parts of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, we want to continue to provide the best possible education and the widest course selection possible.

Mr. Speaker, these are hard decisions, it is not easy, and they are not made – they are made by elected volunteer officials, school councils, and school boards. Once in a while here these things all kind of get mushed together, the clarity does not come out, and sometimes it is taken advantage of. So that needs to be pointed out.

Mr. Speaker, improved infrastructure. I believe someone said, or the Minister of Education has stood up here many times and said, since this government came to power thirty-nine new schools all throughout the Province. They are not only on this side of the House; they are on the other side of the House as well. They are being built where the need is greatest, to vast improvements in infrastructure, to older schools that needed new roofs, new electricity systems, new windows, Safe and Caring Schools, all of those things.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to do that. The minister talked about another program. He talked at length about our support for early childhood education from that zero to three age. How often have you heard the minister stand up here and talk about zero to three – that is the time when children learn the most – the commitment we have to that, the work we have been doing in that area, and the programs we have had? We continue to have the best student-teacher ratio of anywhere, one-to-eighteen, I believe is the number. We are very proud of that, and we have reduced our dropout rate.

There are days in this House, Mr. Speaker, when I have sat here and I have often wondered listening to some of the questions from the other side if we have done anything good in education. All you have to do is look in these documents and you will find what good we have done in education.

Mr. Speaker, I know my friend on the Committee has a real concern and a real passion for people who need housing and social housing. When you look at the evidence, and when you look at the information you will see that this government continues to support people in need of social housing.

When the minister confronted us for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, he talked about rent subs. Rental supplements are what it is, Mr. Speaker. We had 1,700 this past year, and they continue to increase. We are working with people all the time to make sure they have shelter and a roof over their head. Through the rent supplement program we are helping low-income persons and low-income families.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial housing repair program, we have invested in the last three years, four years \$12 million. Yes, this year we took a reduction but we are still putting \$10 million into our Provincial Home Repair Program; \$10 million that is going into assisting low-income families put roofs on their homes, put windows in their homes, improve their electricity or plumbing, to do modifications when modifications are necessary for people with disabilities, widening doorways, putting in new bathrooms and the list goes on and on. It does valuable work.

I know in my district, personally, the Provincial Home Repair Program is highly regarded and the list and need is great. I know the minister has made some changes and he looked at the changes. One of the things he said was the fact that people had multiple uses. They were trying to make sure that people who are applying and have need for the first time, that we would focus and have an emphasis on those people who were in need. Some of these subtle changes will have

an impact and will be able to spread the wealth, should I say, to people who have not had an opportunity to use the program.

The other piece on that, Mr. Speaker – I know my time is winding down so I am going to trust my colleagues to get to the rest – is the affordable housing projects we have partnered with the private sector. We provide the money and the affordable housing. There are three new affordable housing projects just about ready to open. Is that correct, Minister? I think we have three new projects just about ready to open in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, we have done some good things. I could talk about Municipal Affairs. The minister was here very eloquently and talked about a lot of the things but, again, the reform to our Municipal Operating Grants is a good thing. Smaller communities need access to more money. The minister in consultation with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador did some wonderful things and helped smaller communities get an increase in MOGs. I know they are thankful, Mr. Speaker, because being a former municipal leader, any assistance through MOGs was greatly appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is cluing up, and I thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I am very happy to stand again and speak to my third standing committee on Concurrence and have an opportunity to make comments regarding the different Estimates sessions that we appeared in.

Looking at the Social sector, there are actually a number here that I was able to partake in, be it CYFS, Health and Community Services, Justice, there was also Education, Municipal Affairs, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, all

obviously important to each of us as they are all relevant.

I just want to bring up some of the issues I think that need to be brought up, because in going through these Budget Estimates and going through Concurrence, some of the members who have spoken often talked about the different things this government has done since 2003 and 2004. Very often it seems like a history lesson.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

Very often it seems like a history lesson, because we talk about what was spent ten years ago as opposed to what was cut this year. One of the things I want to talk about and I need to address would be health.

We keep talking about: Oh, the investment into health. Where we really need to be looking is: what are we getting for that investment? Because we know the investment cannot be sustained. One of those ways – again, I have asked questions on this in the House – is through preventive measures. Sometimes those preventive measures require an upfront cost, and that upfront cost is hopefully going to be outweighed by the savings and quality of life that you attain over the years.

I just want to bring up a few of these things, too. They are relevant because in a lot of cases government said they were going to discuss some, government said they were going to bring it up. One of these is cystic fibrosis screening. That is a topic I brought up last week in the House. It is a topic I have gotten to know a fair bit about in my time as the critic for Health and Community Services.

What we need to remember is the minister said almost a year ago that CF screening was being looked at, was being examined and being considered and that is fine. Since that time there has been absolutely no movement. I guess in terms of spending money on health care, maybe

this is one of the things where they said we are not going to make this investment now because we do not have the means. Again, it is a preventive cause.

The financial side of it is the moral side of it, too. We are, along with Quebec, the only provinces that have not enacted it or not in the process of bringing it in. I mentioned that to the minister. She stood up and said I should check my research. She said only five have done it, but she obviously knew the difference or should because we know that Nova Scotia is bringing it in. We know New Brunswick and PEI are in the process of bringing it in. There are all of the other provinces, and actually some of the territories.

We go beyond that. We go beyond that to all the States. We go to most of the western world. We talk about the UK. I think a lot of the areas in Europe are putting it in. I think New Zealand, and I think Australia is. The fact is it is the normal standard of care. I bring that up. I think it is an important topic for two reasons, because government talks about investments.

This is a case of a small investment upfront, whether it is \$150,000 to \$200,000, plus possibly one job position. The savings you are going to get down the road though are from children who, once they are diagnosed, are not going into hospital. We can alter the drug treatments. This is a government that does not seem to be thinking ahead. They do not want to be proactive, it is very reactive. It is unfortunate.

I know the CF experts have tried to meet with the minister. I do not know if she has actually taken the time to meet with them. I always thought I lived in a Province where we would have the same standard of care as all the other provinces. I guess that is not the case right now.

It is unfortunate that children with CF – right now it is one in 3,600 children who are diagnosed with CF. I think it averages out to about three children per year. We are already screening them. The minister mentioned it, which I already knew. We are already screening

them. We are doing the little prick on the heel at birth and testing it for a number of conditions. This is just to add one to that. It is something that should be done. It is not only the right thing to do, but it is financially responsible. Down the road there will be a savings. That is one of those investments we should make.

The other thing I wanted to bring up – and I heard one member mention this. I took these notes a couple of days ago. I cannot remember which one it is. I think one went a little ahead of themselves and said there is going to be money spent on the Waterford. I know the minister was very cautious about that and did not like the sounds of that, because that is not coming. That is not coming right now.

We are already dealing with the hospital in Corner Brook that has been downsized. We know the Waterford was promised, but whether that happens or not is a different story. I put that out there because I think one member mentioned it. I will make sure I go through Hansard and see who it was, but that is a member who obviously is not informed.

I want to continue on to the infamous dental plan. One that was originally budgeted for about \$6.7 million and we end up spending well over \$25 million, which goes to show the amount of planning that went into that. That is unfortunate that the NLDA was not consulted because they should be, considering they are the ones who do the work.

Many of the people taking advantage of this are people with barriers, people from low income, people with vulnerabilities, many people who have not had work done in ages. So we had to know the upfront cost was going to be far greater because people were taking advantage of work that they could not afford for years. You would have to expect that that amount of work would decrease. After a while we know that the level of dental care a person has correlates into other health savings down the road, whether it be heart disease or what have you.

The fact is there would have been those savings down the road. It is a good reason to make sure

that program stayed in place, but no, we do not have that. We have a situation where the minister's own comments in Estimates were: Well, if you cannot afford your dentures, you should do what you did in the old days and find a way to pay for it. The other thing, too, is that it actually covers \$750 a year, but the cost is twice that.

I put out the premise which seems if it was not true, from what I gather it is almost laughable that we are going to cover off half the cost per year. I have not heard an answer from the minister or the department on whether that is true or not. I find that unfortunate because it is ridiculous really, it is not even a sensible level of care.

If we want to talk about levels of care we could also talk about an issue that actually is probably going to cost us about \$80 to \$100 a day, and that is to provide certain prescription drugs to children going through chemo who have nausea. The pill itself costs about \$20 a day and we are not covering it because of, I guess, issues with CADTH.

We treat what CADTH says as gospel, but CADTH, which is based in Nova Scotia – Nova Scotia does not treat it as gospel; they just take it as recommendations. Nobody else treats it like we do. Here we are, we have kids going through the chemotherapy and treatment. They have nausea, they are very sick. This pill would help them have a sensible standard of care, of living, but no, their moms and dads, to combat this issue, have to give them Gravol. They going to school and they are falling asleep. They cannot travel.

At any given time, Mr. Speaker, there may be five children in this Province in this situation, so certainly not a floodgates argument. We might be talking about five. I think it is reprehensible that we have specialists and doctors in this Province who are asking for it. They are asking for meetings and cannot get it. Another example where the standard of care is not the same, it is not what it should be. That is unfortunate. We talk about all the doctors in this Province and we have more doctors. When you actually

get into those specifics – I understand that St. John's is the hub of tertiary care and specialty, and therefore, you are obviously going to have more doctors in St. John's. That is fine. If you ask any doctor in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, they are not bragging about the number of doctors in this Province because they are trying their best just to keep up with the amount of work on them.

The vast majority of doctors are based in St. John's in the very immediate surrounding area. They are not based in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, they are out there and they are struggling to keep them. You just have to look at someone like – I will give you an example – Dr. Lydia Hatcher who was a well-known family practitioner. She just left this Province after a number of years of dedicated service. She could not take it anymore.

There are good things that are going on and do not get me wrong, Mr. Speaker, but sometimes you only hear one side. I am just trying to provide that balance. We still have a ways to go; we still have a Budget that is extremely high. Are we getting the bang for the buck?

There is a fair bit more. I could talk about very briefly the family care program which was promised in the Budget. It was supposed to be a good news story, just waiting on the information. The appearance of numbers in the document would indicate that there is some kind of plan in place. When you talk about the fact that it apparently looks like \$8.2 million for twelve months and this year where it was prorated at \$6.1 million you would seem to think that there is some kind of plan coming in July.

If that is the case, I look forward to it. I look forward to seeing that promise that was made, to seeing it fulfilled, seeing all of the people in this Province who were encouraged by it and probably even voted for it, to get what was promised to them.

Again, \$8.2 million, I believe if you break it down will only actually cover 5 per cent of the people who need this service, but it is a pilot program and you have to start somewhere. I

understand that it is not an easy process to bring in; it is not an easy plan. I just think that when you promise something you should have the plan in place. Do not just say it, have that plan in place. In this case, I am hoping the minister has one, and I am hoping that we will see it at some point.

We can continue on. I am going to leave the Corner Brook hospital because it is something we do not talk about very often. I have to reiterate, because the minister said on Thursday the Member for the Bay of Islands does not want this hospital. I am not here to protect him or to stand up for him, he can do that well himself. Do you know what? I live on the West Coast; I need to use that facility. My kids, hopefully, down the road, need to use that facility. My grandmother uses that facility. I want the one that was promised and not just promised in 2013, then 2012, then 2011 and 2007. I want what was promised to us.

We have had questions. When we asked questions in Estimates about acute care beds there are a lot of discrepancies. We can have disagreements on that stuff, that is fine, but do not come out and make an absolutely ludicrous statement like we do not want it to happen because it is foolish. Anybody who knows the difference knows it is foolish. That is all I am going to say about that.

We will get into the disagreements on facts, but do not say I do not want the hospital. I use it and my family depends on it. We want what was promised. That is all we are going to say on that. Hopefully, the Member for Bay of Islands does get the two reports he was promised in Estimates though because I think they are important to see.

I am going to continue on because health could take up all of your time. Given that is the biggest expenditure in our Budget it requires a fair amount of attention. I will give the minister and her dedicated staff credit. They sat down for three hours and then we got another forty-five minutes on another night to ask some questions. That is good, we need that time, but there is a lot to cover under this.

Education is not a department that I am responsible for, but it affects us all. I am very anxious to see what happens. I have serious doubts about this combination of the school boards and the consultation that goes into it. We have seen how the lack of consultation has affected us and it has cost us money in the past. I will leave that to the Member for St. Barbe who has done a good job of asking questions and putting these out there.

I want to move on though, there are two big topics left there for me and that would be Child, Youth and Family Services and Justice. The Member for Port de Grave alluded to this in his comments previously, and he is accurate. He said that in Estimates members opposite commended the government for certain investments. That was me.

I think the foster care program and the investment that has been made in that is fantastic. I think it is a great move, I think it is a necessary move. I think the advertising that has gone with it has been effective. I think there are likely more people now doing the PRIDE program than ever before. It is a great move. I know sometimes people think we only criticize, but no, we do not. There are good things that are happening. That is one of them.

I do have a concern though because the Child and Youth Advocate raised serious issues with that department in her report, serious issues that involved tragedies involving children. My only concern – and I have assurances that all the recommendations are being followed and implemented, and I hope that is the case. We need to do what we can to avoid anything like that ever again in the future.

I hope that those steps are being taken. One thing I think speaks that we are going in the right direction, I would hope, is that the caseload for social workers is on its way down to twenty. It is not there yet, but we are getting close. That is a good sign because these case workers, these case managers, they need to have the time to do the proper due diligence. When it is not done, you see what happens. We see what happens and it is often tragic.

I am going to move on. I guess I will clue up in a department that has gotten a lot of attention in the Budget and everything else, and that is the Justice Department. I see the private member's resolution that was brought in, it looks like it is going to be read Wednesday, is talking about the \$1 million investment in the new task force. A great move, because we need that; however, as I said today in the House during my response to the Ministerial Statement, it is one thing to put \$1 million into policing – and, by the way, there were police positions that, if they are not cut, they are not being filled. Just so you know, that is happening; Buchans was cut. I know just in Burgeo this weekend, there are three positions, there are two filled. The last position is not cut; they just do not know when it is going to be filled for the foreseeable future. It is a creative way of not cutting it. That is going on in other places as well.

We are putting resources into RCMP and RNC. That is a good step; however, when we see the serious effect these cuts will have on the other end, and I guess we will only see where we are in a year's time when we go through this process again, but it is not the first time it came up.

I was looking at a speech by our chief justice I think from almost ten years ago and he talked about basically running the court system on a shoestring. This was going on ten years ago and then we saw the Lamer Inquiry and I believe the current Minister of Natural Resources back at the time referred to it as a very expensive, \$11 million issue because we did not have the resources invested into it. I think previous Administrations did not have the money, but this government did invest. This government did invest. We cannot take that away. There was money put into it; however, the decisions that are being made now are contradicting that previous investment and we are going to see results from that. We are going to see. Again, I can only say I do not want to see that. I hope not to see that. Anybody who is involved in the system, especially those family members and those victims, we do not want to see those affects, but it is my belief they are going to happen. It is all facets of it. It is all facets. We

talk about the conservation, sheriffs, correctional officers, and all of it.

I just want to move on very quickly in the closing. I have about three minutes left. A lot of times government talks about, well, we are in this position. We have to make choices. I respect that. You have to. We heard of another choice today that was made that was \$150,000 that could have been spent elsewhere. It was a communications study performed by a group from up in Toronto; a communications study.

I have to question why that was necessary. I do not believe that to be necessary. We have a number of communications professionals within the government; I would say it is well over forty. I know that the report led to, I believe, the creation of the Office of Public Engagement. It is like a question we asked in Estimates the other night. We talk about this public engagement and we talk about all of the communications people, the Executive Council, and the Communications and Consultation Branch, and here we are going to budget \$50,000-odd for a Manager of Social Media for the Premier.

These are things I do not believe to be necessary. Now, maybe it is not filled and who knows if it does get done, but why was it put there when we have all of this other money that is going into communications that could handle it? That is one of the questions I put out there: Is that necessary? Is that the wisest expenditure of our funds? I do not believe so.

I presume if it does get filled we are actually going to restart a Facebook and Twitter account. I know they are coming out of Public Engagement and there are other Twitter accounts. That is fine, but I find it very ironic that we spend \$150,000 on a communications report that is secret, that is private, that we did not make any attempt to communicate, and that we did not make any attempt to put out there. Again, I just raise that, whether there is any rebuttal to that or not. I guess it does not matter.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would just say that similar to the debate that was ongoing earlier today about Bill 7, it is our job to question some

of these moves that are being made. I do not think they are easy moves for a second, but this is a government that has been in place for ten years. I know some of the members have said short-term pain for long-term gain, but I question as to why we had to wait this long when this government knew for years now, going through this budgetary exercise and going through Cabinet talks. We know we have to make a move some time.

I know it is now, but it is having an effect on the people of this Province. I know everybody in this House knows it because we are all getting the phone calls and we are all getting the e-mails. I just hope the changes made do not have a detrimental effect on the people of this Province that rely on it. That is all we can hope for, that the people have the services they need and should be provided for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Honourable colleagues, it gives me great pleasure to be able to rise in this House this evening to once again speak on the many services and benefits the Budget of 2013 offers to people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The twenty minutes I previously provided certainly did not provide me the opportunity to mention all that is offered in Budget 2013, nor will it likely cover everything in the next twenty minutes.

I would like to say the Member for Port de Grave did an outstanding job explaining the Social Services sector aspect of how the Committee functions. I listened to some of the comments the previous member just had to say, from Burgeo – La Poile. I am certainly going to speak about what we are doing as a government, not about the negatives and what is not covered in the Budget. I will speak to Health and Community Services because he highlighted

what he thought were some problems in that specific area. I am certainly going to counteract some of the points he made.

Nearly 40 per cent of the provincial Budget is allocated to Health and Community Services, evidence that this Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to providing access to quality health care for families in all regions of Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government is investing \$92.3 million specifically to strengthen Long-Term Care and Community Support Services to help seniors and persons with disabilities. It is vital to this government that these individuals are able to have independence and a quality of life while remaining in their homes and actually in the communities they always lived in.

I am sure we could all relate to this. I know that as much as I travel there is nothing like returning to home, to have stability and sanctuary in my own home. This is what this government is all about: looking at the social aspect of what is good for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Let us not forget about the \$138 million for the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, a program that reaches so many residents of our great Province. There are five main plans under the program that include the Foundation Plan, the 65Plus Plan, the Access Plan, the Assurance Plan, and the Select Needs Plan. This program assures that our residents are provided with financial assistance to ensure that essential prescription drugs which they need are attainable.

We are leading the country in health care wait times for priority areas such as cardiac bypass and hip fracture repairs. I attended a briefing and I attended one of the outings in relation to a public announcement that the Minister of Health and Community Services made. People who attended that session certainly agreed that what this government is doing in health care is very positive for now and the future to meet the needs of people in different services in Health and Community Services.

Approximately \$30 million is allocated for dialysis services, which are certainly essential for some residents. I would like to point out as well that seven of the fourteen dialysis sites throughout the Province have been added since 2004. This is quite the accomplishment and this government has a vision to help the people in the rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador as well.

Our government is providing quality health care services throughout this beautiful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. When you look at funding that is provided, \$2.9 billion in health care spending, including \$6.1 million for a new paid family care giving option, increasing to \$8.2 million annually next year. This government is spending, spending, spending in health care services and providing quality needs that help out the people of the future in relation to obtaining very important health care services.

Because of Budget 2013 and the keen fiscal management of this government, the youth of our Province will continue to receive quality education, Mr. Speaker. Because of sound planning, there will no reduction in the allocation of regular classroom teachers assigned to deliver required curriculum. There will be no reduction in direct services or supports for students with special needs and there will be no changes to K-9 class size caps for the required curriculum.

Through the \$840 million allotted to continue to build our education system, the Province will see new schools, extensions, repairs, and renovations. We will see investments in distant learning and the elimination of standard school fees. We will see an expansion of the free textbooks to all K-12 students and funding for the Excellence in Math Strategy.

There is funding for music, theatre, visual arts programs, as well as further investments for interactive whiteboards and computers. There is funding for future and skilled trades programs, for lab safety upgrades, and science equipment. The list goes on and on and on. This government continues to invest in education, children, and families.

When you look at a Budget and you have to deal with deficits – and I believe we must continue to pay down on the debt – this approach will allow us to give our children a better future, and it will certainly help generations to follow.

When you look at what we had to face as a government this past year in relation to what happened with the world economy and what happened to the cost of the barrel of oil that plummeted, and when you look at the numerous points when you look at the global economy and the recession and so forth, we had to make some tough decisions. There were times I personally did not envy the Minister of Finance in doing the work that he had to do. I must commend him and the department for bringing forward a balanced Budget that meets the needs of the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I am sure that people will see the benefit of what we had to do today to meet the needs of tomorrow as we follow on in the future as well.

It is not easy to make decisions when you have to make cuts to programs and so forth. When you evaluate the situation – and I will go right back to my district, the College of the North Atlantic – when you look at programs that are in the college and you look at the number of ratio and programs that do not meet the labour market of tomorrow, I have to definitely, as the Member for Bonavista South, talk to people in my district and explain why decisions were made the way they were. I have no problem in doing that. I hold my head high and I would say look, if we have a program there that we have three or four students in a program, seven students next year and projecting two students the year after and there are no jobs out in the job labour market to actually go into, we need to bring programs into the college system that meets the labour market.

This is what departments of this government have been doing, and that is going to be positive for my district and for the College of the North Atlantic that exists in my district for the future. When you have jobs in the major projects that are occurring in Long Harbour, Bull Arm, Hebron project, Muskrat Falls, we need to make sure that our skilled trades' opportunities inside

the College of the North Atlantic and other institutions certainly meet the needs of the labour market of tomorrow. These are some decisions that this government have supported and the plan is outlined and it is a very good plan going into the future, Mr. Speaker.

The Department of Advanced Education and Skills demonstrates our government's commitment to support apprenticeship and trades, as outlined on the last occasion that I spoke on Budget 2013, but that is not the extent of this department's responsibility to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We, as a government, are helping to ensure that residents of the Province who are most vulnerable are best positioned to improve their prospects at a time when economic conditions and employment are promising with educational upgrading and employment supports. We are providing recipients of the Income Support Program with enhanced employment services to better assist and inform them with their job search. This is very positive. We are assisting people in the rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador to actually move into the labour market of the future.

Budget 2013 invests in safe and sustainable communities. It is important to our government to make responsible social investments, keeping key priorities for communities and residents at the forefront. Some of these priorities would include: increased funding for community operations and infrastructure, safeguarding our people, reducing poverty, supporting women, and protecting our environment.

We, as a Province and a government, have certainly outlined to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador how important it is to protect our people and employment out in the rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would also like to speak in relation to the Department of Municipal Affairs. The minister and the department are working in conjunction with the people of our Province to develop self-reliant local governments, capable of providing strong leadership, ensuring that

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians live in a safe, sustainable community which was very open, effective, and accountable.

Another service that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to benefit from is what is offered through the Newfoundland and Labrador housing sector. By investing \$46 million in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, our government is demonstrating its commitment to addressing the housing needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government has invested \$100 million since 2003 in social housing, modernizing and improving our current housing dwellings, and ensuring more sustainable and easier to maintain accommodations for tenants.

Through the Rental Housing Program housing units are available to low-income earners with rental rates based on 25 per cent of monthly income. Also, since 2003, \$78 million has been provided to private homeowners through the Provincial Home Repair Program to support vital home repairs. During this same time, 21,000 households have benefitted from this program.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing will continue to offer all programs available to Budget 2013 such as the supportive living program. This program will provide grants to non-profit community partners in the Province to offer housing and related supports to those with complex needs.

The Home Modification Program enables seniors and persons with disabilities to remain safely in their homes, be it the installation of a ramp, or roll/walk-in shower needed by the homeowner. This will help to promote independence, self-reliance, assistance with a better quality of life, and enable individuals to remain in their own home for a longer period of time. Then, there is the Provincial Homelessness Fund which is designed to provide funding to assist non-profit organizations for the development and services phase for the provision of on-site and outreach services to assist in aiding the homeless and at-risk population.

Mr. Speaker, the children and youth of Newfoundland and Labrador are certainly a priority for this government. Our commitment is clearly demonstrated in the \$185 million investment through Budget 2013 for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

An investment of \$31 million has been allocated for the 10-Year Child Care Strategy with key investments under the strategy to include: funding for the Child Care Services Subsidy Program assisting eligible families with child care rates in a licensed child care center, or a family child care home; funding for the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement, providing a direct benefit to early childhood educators working in regulated child care services who meet eligibility requirements; funding for the Child Care Capacity Initiative, which provides start-up grants for non-profit community-based organizations offering child care services; funding for the Inclusion Program, which provides additional staff or funded spaces to accommodate all children in regular programs; funding for the Family Child Care Initiative, which provides much needed regulated child care spaces; and, funding for the workplace training program.

Other key investments within the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services include the Continuum of Care Strategy, which focuses on child protection, and the Supporting Youth with Transitions pilot program.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on, and on, and on in relation to what was outlined in programs and funding in Budget 2013. When you look at the District of Bonavista South, when you look at the actual jobs that are coming from upcoming projects like Hebron, Bull Arm, Muskrat Falls, and the Long Harbour development, those programs are actually for all of our people in Newfoundland and Labrador. A lot of jobs, good-paying jobs, jobs that this government on this side of the House actually support.

On the other side, I am hearing a lot of negativity. A big part of communication is actually listening. If you listen to what is in the

Budget 2013 you will have to agree that the job market of this Province has been moving forward in a positive manner. The education system is very good in our elementary, high school, secondary, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the College of the North Atlantic. We have great programs and we are definitely going to continue on as a government and talk about the positive things that we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to finish by reiterating a recent statement by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, "We will not jeopardize the progress we have made as a province. With responsible decisions today, we will ensure a prosperous and secure future for generations". This I think summarizes what this government is all about. We do have a great leader.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LITTLE: We will succeed in the future, and we will continue on and work on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am very happy to rise and to speak about our experience at the Social sector Estimates. As we know the social sector absorbs about 57.4 per cent of the entire Budget. That is a considerable amount and significant amount of money, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I would like to thank all the staff from the different departments who were so well-prepared, who entertained all of our questions and provided answers in as much as they were able to. For the answers that were not able to provide, I have asked for several pieces of information to be given to me later in writing.

I look forward to receiving that kind of information.

It was great again to have the opportunity to speak to staff, to ask questions and to raise issues that are quite pressing in this particular Budget, Mr. Speaker. This Budget is a tough Budget. It is a Budget that is very, very difficult for many people in the Province. It is a Budget that has come down really, really hard on many people, some of our most vulnerable people, but also a lot of working families who I think are very disappointed by services that they may have hoped for or anticipated in this Budget.

I think the Budget has come down hard on seniors. I think that the Budget particularly has come down hard on the people who have dedicated their lives to work in the public sector, to be able to provide services with expertise, with commitment, and with dedication through the public service, and we see how many people have been affected by that Budget.

Mr. Speaker, we do not even know yet the complete rollout and how that is going to affect people's lives. People are still reeling from some of the effects and from some of the decisions that are being made. This comes after we heard the Premier say this is not sustainable, we have to rein in our spending.

The former Minister of Finance, on December 14, said government has to cut spending because the current plan is unsustainable. Then the former Auditor General said that current spending is unsustainable. Wade Locke, the economic guru for the government, said it is unsustainable; however, Mr. Speaker, one thing Professor Locke, Dr. Locke, did say to this government is that he suggested a slow, well considered approach. That there would be ten years minimum to try and get government spending back on track and to turn it around. He did not recommend anything harsh or rash, or any kind of severe cuts, but this is what we have seen, Mr. Speaker. We have seen the effects. This is a Budget that is so hard for many people in the Province.

One of the themes that seem to have gone through a number of the departments that we looked at through the social sector is the theme of consultation and the theme of core mandate review. Mr. Speaker, most departments acknowledged or at least government when they are sometimes answering our questions in the House talk about core mandate review and how important that was. However, in speaking to departments it is not so clear.

As a matter of fact, it probably is clear that cuts were not based on core mandate reviews. As a matter of fact, they were not. We know a number of ministers have told us that, in fact, no, the core mandate review had nothing to do with cuts. We do not know what the cuts were based on. We also know that in many cases there was very little, if any at all, consultation done with – the favourite catchphrase now – stakeholders when cuts were done. We also know that cuts in some cases were done very, very quickly with very little notice.

What I would like to do, Mr. Speaker, with the time that I have is I would like to go through, not all, but some highlights of some of the departments that were represented at the social sector. Again, it is a significant sector with over 50 per cent of the Budget of the Province. It included Child, Youth and Family Services, Education, Health and Community Services, Justice, Municipal Affairs, and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

These are all departments that are crucial in providing services to the people of the Province, not as frills, not because the people of the Province are spoiled, not because the people of the Province are entitled, but because this is the business of government. This is the business of government to provide the services so that the people of the Province can live fully. So that the people of the Province can be healthy and live their lives fully; that they can be fully engaged in their communities so that there can be a sense of wellness and well-being for the people of the Province. This only adds to the economic prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, this only adds to the economic prosperity of the Province when we know that we have services where people are adequately housed, where they have access to excellent health care, where they know their communities are safe, where they know that their infrastructure is working, where they know they get the best education possible that they can possibly get, and know that their children are safe and taken care of. It means that everybody can get on with it. Everybody can get on with their work. Everybody can on with the business of living. Everybody can get on with the business of business. That brings to us a healthy community.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak a little bit about Health and Community Services. There was a great representation of the workers who work in this department. We have quite a lot of experts in this department. A lot of people who are well educated, who have gone on to extra training so that they could administer, come up with policies, administer policies, administer programs, manage programs for the benefit of the people of the Province.

One of the disturbing things about Health and Community Services, Mr. Speaker, is we know that 150 management positions are going to be cut, and we still do not know where those management positions are. Many of those management positions are actually front line management positions; nurse management positions that affect the work of front line nurses. As a matter of fact, I heard from a nurse where one of their managers had retired or moved on and that position has not been filled. In fact, they did not have the supplies they needed to do the work they did because that manager was no longer there.

We are going to just start to see the effects, and the trickle down effects of some of these cuts. Again, we do not know where these management cuts are yet. We also know, the government has clearly said to us that they are going after the regional health authorities next year. So what we are seeing this year is only the tip of the iceberg.

We know that over 400 positions were made away with in the Eastern Health efficiency review and we know there are more efficiency reviews coming up in the other health authorities. So that is concerning. We do not know what that is going to translate into.

Home care, Mr. Speaker, is a serious problem, and we see it now. We see the potential of a very serious problem happening quickly because the home care operators, the agencies, and labour came together with a four-year collective agreement from their collective bargaining. It included small incremental increases to the rate of pay for home care workers. It was something that was all agreed on. As a matter of fact, the former Premier apparently said they support this. That he supported the unionization of home care workers and he was very happy with how the process proceeded and the results of the collective agreements.

Historically, the Department of Health and Community Services has given an adjustment to home care operators to help them offset the rising cost of doing business, the rising cost of providing service. We know, Mr. Speaker, that over 50 per cent of home care workers are from agencies and they are supervised. They provide a service to the Province.

Mr. Speaker, these home care agencies now are in jeopardy. Many of them are in jeopardy. We already know of one home care agency, which is a very large home care agency, has sent a letter to its employees saying that by July they may not be able to sustain their business because they have not gotten what they historically have gotten from the Department of Health and Community Services to help offset the rising cost of providing service to the people of the Province.

What we are talking about is providing services to seniors, to some of our most vulnerable people. This is very troubling, Mr. Speaker, because in fact what they are saying is that we cannot take any more clients who are on the subsidy program from the Department of Health and Community Services.

Mr. Speaker, they are providing a direct service; the kind of service that, in fact, government should be providing itself. We need a universal home care program - we know that - a publicly administered, publicly serviced and publicly provided home care service. We know it is going to save us money in the long run. In fact, government is doing the opposite. By not providing the adjustments that are necessary to make these businesses sustainable, in fact, what they are doing is they are actually jeopardizing safe, comprehensive care to seniors and to some of our most vulnerable people. It is a real backwards step, Mr. Speaker. We have not seen the whole rollout of that and it is not going to be pretty. It is really not going to be pretty.

We know that self-managed care is not the option, where you have seniors or some very vulnerable people having to find someone, interview them, hire them, supervise them, and make sure that they are paid. What happens when someone phones in sick? Where is that person then? Where is that senior then? Where is that person with disabilities then, if their home care work phones sick or if their home care worker needs a holiday or whatever? It is not the way to go. It leaves vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Another thing in the Department of Health, Mr. Speaker, which I found really troubling, was the Wellness Plan. That was a plan and a strategy that was about prevention and we know, everybody knows, world-wide we all know, all the experts know, that prevention, in fact, is an investment because it saves money in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, it was the first time that this government did prevention. It was a first time that they had a strategy for prevention and this was 2006. This government has been at the helm now for ten years and what they did is they basically got rid of most of their consultants.

When people say consultants they think of someone that they hire, a freelance consultant; but, in fact, Mr. Speaker, these were consultants who were working on behalf of the department and most of them in the Wellness Plan –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We lost our nutrition consultant. We lost our health promotion consultant. We lost our (inaudible) mental health consultant, and we lost our injury prevention consultant.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Health keeps saying unbelievable, unbelievable. I would love to know, in fact, that if these positions have been reinstated, that is really good news. That is really good news, if in fact –

MS SULLIVAN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services, on a point of order.

MS SULLIVAN: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out that we have increased the staff from three to eight in that particular division that she is talking about. In fact, we have more staff working now than we ever did.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

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

Mr. Speaker, I do know for sure that these positions – I am pretty sure that these high-level consultant positions who actually provided expertise to people working in the field, what they did is they were the backbone of the wellness promotion program. They were the backbone of it. They provided the strategies; they provided the rollout of the strategies.

I am not sure if people really realize the effects of cutting those positions. We lost young, well-educated, committed, passionate, energetic people wanting to serve the people of the Province. That is problematic, Mr. Speaker. We have the highest rates of obesity. We have the highest rates of chronic disease. We have the highest rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. This is the kind of work that these consultants were looking at. It is really a very, very backwards kind of move.

These consultants gave support and expertise to public health nurses, to schools, and to municipalities. We talk about youth retention. Some of these people were young, fabulous people who really wanted to work in the public service, who wanted to be part of helping to make Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the healthiest that they could possibly be. Mr. Speaker, there was this dream of prosperity and of people coming home. There was this dream of finally that we were in a good financial position. I do not know what happened. There was no backup plan to that either.

The whole issue of self-managed care, we know that is not the route to go for our home care. Then we saw again, Mr. Speaker, the cutbacks, the reduction back to the original amount of money for the adult dental care program. We know, because of the uptake of that program, that there was such a desperate need.

What this government has done is roll it back again. Not acknowledge, okay there has been so much neglect – and there has. There has been years and years of neglect; it is not all the fault of this Administration. There was an Administration ten years before them, we know that, and that Adult Dental Program was not there then, adequate resources. What we have are adults in Newfoundland and Labrador who are suffering from years of lack of good dental care.

What this government has done, when they see – and they instituted this Adult Dental Program because they knew it was so important. Then to see how desperately important it was and rather than rise to the occasion to be able to carry it forth and to continue it so that we could take

care of those years of neglect, they rolled it back. I think that is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because there was the opportunity to really redress the neglect of not only this Administration but the Administration before it.

Then also when we look at some of the other programs, we have some other good programs in Health and Community Service like the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program and the Access Program, but they are all capped way too low. We know that the cost of living has increased so drastically, the cost of shelter, the cost of heat, the cost of transportation, the cost of food. We all know that. Who goes to the grocery store without noticing – week by week, we can see the cost of food increasing.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I found particularly disturbing was the cut to community groups. There is a section in Health and Community Services where there are grants to community groups and these are community groups who provide addictions and mental health services to the community. The community groups are non-profit groups, run on shoestring budgets. Oftentimes, they have volunteers. They never know where they are going to get their next dollar. They go from year to year, and they have people who are so committed and so passionate.

They were cut this year, Mr. Speaker, when we know, in fact, that what they are doing is that they are providing necessary services – even the Department of Health and Community Services, even they refer people to these community groups. What have they done? They have cut them. They have cut them back by 10 per cent to 12 per cent. I asked about that. Do you know what was responded to in that Estimates Committee? Oh, they are thankful for the money they have gotten. They were thankful that they did not get cut any more.

Mr. Speaker, I could not believe that when I heard that because I have been speaking to these community groups. They are working under such limited resources providing these crucial, essential services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I will be happy to get up and speak again, but it was a very interesting Estimates and I was very happy with the generosity of the staff who work so hard for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is great to have an opportunity to rise once again in this very warm building tonight, where everybody is a little logy. We have all had our suppers and we are now looking forward to warming things up even further as we continue to debate this particular bill as part of the Budget debate. I think we are dealing with Concurrence on certain Committees, which gives us an opportunity to talk about things that we want to talk about.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure on Friday past, although I was not in Houston, but I did have the pleasure to go to Hampden. In Hampden, I attended the twenty-fifth party; it was a celebration of Burton's Cove Logging and Lumber Ltd, a company in rural Newfoundland. I was pleased to see the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Humber Valley, was there as well. Gerry Byrne, the MP, was also there, as were many other people, particularly people who are involved in the sawmill industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, there was no one there from Houston, but there were people there from Bloomfield. There were people there from Jamestown. There were people there from Deer Lake. There were people there from Hampden. There were people from rural Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker, and I was glad to be there.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up in the City of Corner Brook, a pulp and paper town and a newsprint town. I had what I consider to be a great

upbringing there. I loved it there. I could not think of living in a better place. When I got older, I had a chance to go away to pursue university education at different universities, at Memorial University and then at Dalhousie law school. When it was over I came back to Corner Brook. There I had my first job, met my wife, raised a family, invested, became part of the community, volunteered for a number of organization, and enjoyed life in Corner Brook, Newfoundland mainly because of the people who live there. You cannot meet nicer people in the world than you will find in Western Newfoundland.

Mr. Speaker, as part of that employment I was a lawyer and I was working with people like Kevin Barry, who started the law firm in Corner Brook; Clyde Wells, who was a senior partner in that firm, later became the Premier of Newfoundland, and later served as the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal; and people like my good friend and late partner Michael Monaghan. Part of the thing we did, we did legal work for Bowater's Pulp and Paper Mills Limited.

I remember the shock I received when they announced that they were going to leave the city and they were going to close down. I was totally shocked that our biggest employer was going and I did not understand it. I met with one of their senior executives and I said, I am not convinced at all that you cannot be a successful operation operating in Corner Brook because of the fact, given their history, given the fact they had been there so long, and given the fact their workforce were experienced and knowledgeable.

They told me they could be successful if they continued in Corner Brook, but they could be more successful and make more money if they moved to the Southern United States where the weather was better and the trees grew taller, wider, and quicker and where the labour laws were easier for them. Maybe the employment laws were not as strict and robust. They left us. I remember feeling that feeling of helplessness, that there was nothing you could do about it. I vowed I would never be in that position again. I vowed I would be in a position that, if anything

like that happened again, I could be part of a group of people in the city who could deal with that issue.

Mr. Speaker, fortunately the Kruger organization came in and they did very well. They have been there since that day and have kept the paper mill. Granted, there have been many, many challenges as the demand for newsprint throughout the world has gotten smaller and smaller because of the computers and because of smart phones and things like that, but they have survived. The workforce has gotten smaller because of the competition and because of the fact they have to ensure their cost of producing a tonne of paper is lower than the price in the world market because the price in the world market, of course, is set. We are a price taker, not a price controller.

I understood what happened in Grand Falls and I understood what happened in Stephenville afterwards. I empathized very much with the people of those communities for what they had to go through. When Abitibi was going to leave, based on dealing with both companies, with AbitibiBowater on the one hand and the Kruger organization on the other, we knew the difference. We knew that one wanted to stay, fight, and survive in this area and the other wanted to go. We could see it in terms of the capital investment. Whereas one was investing \$600 million to \$800 million in their mill, the other was investing very little, very little indeed.

Mr. Speaker, we got wind of the fact they were going to leave, or there was a possibility they were going to leave or they were going to go bankrupt. I happened to see some time ago what was called the Charter Lease, which was the original lease given by the Government of Newfoundland to the Abitibi organization back in the early 1900s, which gave them the right to use land, lots of land, at very cheap rental – I think the rental was a couple of cents a square mile – water rights, and timber; so land, timber, and water rights. I cannot remember the exact wording, but it was conditional upon the utilization of those assets for the operation of a paper mill.

When we got wind of the fact they were going to possibly go bankrupt, possibly go into protection, or possibly simply leave, there was concern that those assets could have been sold off by a trustee in bankruptcy or by a secured creditor to the highest bidder. We felt since those assets had only been given to the company for the use of a paper mill, if they were not going to continue the paper mill, those assets, that land, that timber, and those water rights, should come back to the people of the Province. That is why the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador moved the way it did many years ago with the expropriation, with the support of the Opposition and with the support of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, we moved to protect the assets. We moved to make sure the assets came back to the people of the Province. The policy direction was clear; the policy direction was to expropriate the land, to expropriate the timber, and to expropriate the water rights. Again, as I said earlier, our intention was that those assets were owned by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and given to the company for the purpose of operating a paper mill, and if you were not going to operate the paper mill, then the assets came back to the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, the company had invested in different hydro projects, which the Government of Newfoundland required for the benefit of the people of the Province, but they would be entitled to compensation for that, fair compensation. We have lived up to that undertaking to pay fair compensation because we are required to do so by law. We were not going to take those assets; we were not going to steal those assets. We wanted the assets. It was part of the public policy of the government that we would have those assets because of our energy policy. We were required by law to pay fair market value and that is an undertaking that we have honoured.

During the discussion, we have key benefits from these assets. Yes, I know that our policy direction was not to expropriate the mill. There was the intention to take the energy assets only and not the mill, but unfortunately the officials

that carried out that role, unfortunately errors were made. People are saying that we are stuck with the environmental liabilities of the mill because of the expropriation. That is not so, Mr. Speaker. Even if there had been no expropriation, those environmental liabilities would still be left to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in the same way that we are responsible for liabilities from orphaned and abandoned mines.

There is no difference there, but what we have done is with the assets we have taken back, our assets are going to provide benefits to the people of this Province for many, many years to come. I would like to repeat what I said in this House in response to questioning from the Opposition, in terms of the value and the benefits that we have received. Mr. Speaker, what we did, of course, is that we paid for the assets, we paid for the equity, and we assumed the debt that was outstanding. Based on that we operated – Nalcor did, under a licence from the government. Nalcor ran the operation, sold the power to Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, and assumed the debt to a consortium of lenders led by Sun Life of Canada.

Since that time, on a cash basis, Mr. Speaker, the revenue that has come in has exceeded the operating costs by \$21 million. That is a benefit to the people of the Province and that will continue. Over the years, the company or the government will continue to operate the hydro facility, the power will be sold, we will get revenue from the power, the revenue will be used to pay the operating costs, the revenue will be used to pay the interest on the loan, the revenue will be used to pay down the loans, and that will continue and we will make a profit on a cash basis for many, many years to come.

The big benefit to the people of this Province has been in the fact that fifty-four megawatt hours of that power that was previously gone to the mill will now go to hydro and will now pass on to the people of the Province. That hydro, fifty-four megawatts, will displace a similar amount of power from Holyrood. The hydro power is four cents a kilowatt hour and the equivalent cost of power at Holyrood is eighteen

cents a kilowatt hour. There is fourteen cents a kilowatt hour which is going to benefit the people of the Province because as we know, in an energy monopoly, in the end the ratepayers are the ones who pay for it. They pay for the operating costs, they pay for the financing costs, and they pay for the return on the investment. By lowering the operating cost, by lowering the cost of the energy, that is a real benefit to the people of the Province.

In addition to that, the rest of the power that had been previously sold into the grid by the Star Lake Partnership and by the Exploits River Partnership are now going into hydro and thus to the people of the Province at four cents a kilowatt hour as opposed to eight cents a kilowatt hour, another saving.

These benefits to the people of the Province will continue now that the Government of Newfoundland will own these assets. In fact, if you look at the fuel savings to date, the fuel savings to date by utilizing electricity rather than Holyrood oil is \$315.9 million. The operating costs to date have been about \$101 million. So you had a net savings to date from that alone of \$215 million, which exceeds the \$160 million that was paid for those assets in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Central Newfoundland and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador can take great solace in the fact that the benefits that will come in to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will well exceed any liabilities that we have had to take on to require those assets, and I include the environmental liabilities in that.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that came back to the people of the Province is the fibre, all of that fibre that was originally in the chartered lease given by the Government of Newfoundland to the original builders of the mill. Now we have an opportunity to ensure that the fibre is utilized once again under new ownership, under new management, for the benefit of the people of Central Newfoundland, for the benefit of the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, we know that in the sawmill industry there are 580 sawmills in this Province; four of the biggest ones produce 90 per cent of the lumber. A number of years ago the Premier, who was then the Minister of Natural Resources, brought in a program to provide government support to three of the four biggest sawmill operators: Sexton of Bloomfield, Burton's Cove Logging of Hampden, and Holson of Roddickton.

I must say that I am very surprised at the constant criticism by the Member for Bay of Islands who continues to criticize the investment that the government made under the Forest Industry Diversification Program to that sawmill in Roddickton. You remember at that time when that was made, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper had indicated that it was no longer going to buy wood from the Great Northern Peninsula because they could get access to cheaper fibre from other sawmills. This investment was made to help the people of the Great Northern Peninsula to have an industry there.

Again, I know that the investment is not working at the present time. I know the mill is idle at the present time, but you must look at what is there. You have the largest wood pellet plant in Newfoundland and Labrador with a capacity of 50,000 to 70,000 tons of lumber, had a capacity of 10 million board feet in 2012, but with no outlook for pulp wood it has been idle since October 2012. The 50,000 to 70,000 tons per year pelletizing plant also remains idle as the company now seeks to renew its economic vitality.

Mr. Speaker, the sawmill industry as a whole has a capacity of 200 million board feet. Last year in 2012, the total production was 75 million board feet, with a value of shipments of about \$33 million. There is a lot of growth that is possible and they will take advantage now of some of that new fibre coming out of Central.

There have only been 75 million board feet of the total capacity of 200 million because of what were strained lumber markets and limited sales of pulp wood. The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that the housing market in the United States,

after having a very rough go, is now starting to come back. It is slowly recovering and improving markets for Atlantic Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador. We have seen a dramatic rebound in the prices in the first quarter of this year, 2013. Two years ago the price of two-by-four lumber was \$343; today it is \$420. Mr. Speaker, I saw in Hampden, this past Friday, the optimism in the industry because of this.

Mr. Speaker, we now have 280,000 cubic metres of fibre. Expressions of interest were publicized. We had fourteen expressions of interest from all over the world. There is a committee in place consisting of officials from Natural Resources, there are officials from Justice, Finance, and they are looking at the proposals. The proposals are going to be narrowed down to a smaller number, a number of five. Further information will then be obtained. Further discussions will then take place, and we hope out of that we will see a renewal in the forestry industry in Central Newfoundland.

Now, of course, there is a major connection, a very important interrelationship between the mill in Corner Brook, the newsprint mill and sawmills. Because the mill is a very important source of logs for the sawmills and it is also an important customer for the chips, the sawdust, the shavings and the by-product of the lumbering industry. So, they need each other. I am told by my officials that if the mill were to go down these large sawmills, these integrated sawmills, would not be able to last long without the mill.

I think, Mr. Speaker, there is reason for cautious optimism about the future of the forestry industry. It has always been an important industry for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that with wisdom this industry can once again be an important employer or even a bigger employer than it is right now and will benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for many, many years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand here to have a few words on the Budget and respond to a bit of criticism that was coming my way, which I do not understand why but I guess I have to respond to it.

Before I go any further, I would like to congratulate Yvonne Jones as the newest MP for Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, as we know, the former Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair was a big advocate of Labrador. Even though some of her critics thought she was not representing Labrador, I think the people of Labrador spoke tonight. I congratulate Yvonne Jones.

I have to give the members opposite some credit. They knew when a person was not going to stand up for Labrador, like Peter Penashue, and they would not even go up and help him. So I congratulate you for having that foresight and ensuring that Yvonne Jones will not come after you guys next.

Yvonne Jones, congratulations for a job well done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I hear them again agreeing, yes, she is a great candidate. She will be a great representative for Labrador. I thank the members opposite for agreeing with me on that.

Mr. Speaker, I will just go through a few issues. I was not going to bring it up, that was not on the top of my agenda. The Minister of Natural Resources was surprised and shocked that I was speaking about Holson in Roddickton. I say to the minister –

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the member before we get started; he is speaking to the Chair, please.

MR. JOYCE: I say to the Speaker, to the minister, that it is my right to ask questions. I should be asking questions. I should ask questions. It is my job to highlight some of the concerns that I have.

There is one point that he is making, very, very wrong that he just do not understand, obviously. It was not me who raised this, it was the Auditor General. It was the Auditor General who raised all of these concerns, Mr. Speaker. If you go back and read the Auditor General's report where all of this came about, it was the Auditor General who said this fund was created in a department at the time, which the Premier was the minister, and the recommendation by all the officials was not to give the money. That was the recommendation.

So when you want to stand up here and criticize the Member for the Bay of Islands for standing up and speaking and raising concerns, I say to the Minister of Natural Resources, check the Auditor General's report. When you do, I will accept your apology. I am just going on what the Auditor General was saying.

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

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order, the hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can refer to the Auditor General's report. He can refer to the fact that certain officials said do not do it, but, Mr. Speaker, this government stood with the people of the Great Northern Peninsula. This government stood with the people of the Great Northern Peninsula, and I would suggest the hon. member do so as well.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: I know, Mr. Speaker, it is hard for him to take the truth, I have to say, but let's go back and talk about it seeing you brought it up. I was not going to bring it up tonight. I was not going to bring that up.

Let's talk about the \$7.5 million grant. I ask the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, how much did we receive back? How much? Eleven million dollars spent down there; a \$3 million grant. How much did we get back? Against all the recommendations from the officials in the department; so when you stand up and say: Oh, well, we tried for an investment.

You do not set someone up for failure. You just do not do it. You give the best possibility that you can to ensure there is a success. When you have officials in your department saying: Hold it, hold it, before you give out this \$11 million they have no markets.

MR. MARSHALL: We do have a market.

MR. JOYCE: Go on the Auditor General's report, they have no markets. After you get by the markets, and if you say they have markets, the second thing that was raised by the officials in writing to the minister, which is the Premier today, they have no way to get their product to the market. They need another \$4 million to build a wharf in Roddickton to get it to markets. That is just some of the drawbacks of investing that money.

The question I have to ask, if I am such a negative person because I am raising these concerns because it was brought up in the Auditor General's report and I am trying to get to the bottom of it and trying to get it back. I ask the Minister of Natural Resources: How much money has been repaid? How much money? Not a cent.

It is so bad this year that his department is paying the insurance at the plant in Roddickton, yet we have \$11 million invested and I am not allowed to ask a question? I am being negative

because I am asking a question? Because I am asking: How can you guarantee that our assets in Roddickton are secure? I am being negative because I am asking: What is the probability of getting our money back in the Province so that we can put it into things like health care, education and others? I am being negative?

I say to the minister, if you want to stand up and criticize me, look at the Auditor General's report and look at what I am asking. I agree with all investment if there is a probability and there is a good chance of success. There is no one in this room who can say I can guarantee you 100 per cent, but you move your odds up when your officials put a red flag up and says: Oh, there is no market. They do not have the markets over in Europe like they said they do. They do not have them. They do not have the transportation system in place to ensure that they are going to get to the markets.

When you put those two red flags up, Mr. Speaker, someone in that department at the time should have said, hold it guys, let's put a stop on this. Let's look at it and let's not set this company up for failure. That is what should have happened. There are times, even with the greatest chance of probability, there are times it is not going to work but at least everybody will know that every possible angle was looked at and was done.

That is what I will just say on that, I say to the minister. If you want me to, Minister, I will be nice enough. I will give you a copy of the Auditor General's report so you can sit down and have a good read for yourself to ensure that it is not me bringing up these concerns; it is the Auditor General. I did not want to bring that up; but, seeing you asked me to, I would.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to bring up again the health care in Corner Brook and the hospital. I am not going to have too many more ticks before that RFP is out. I asked on several occasions – I asked the Minister of Transportation and Works who committed in Estimates and I am still waiting – to have a copy of the Hatch Mott MacDonald and the copy of the Stantec report. It is going on at least three weeks, probably four weeks that I have asked for

this report and I was told by the minister that I would have the report. I am assuming in Estimates that when you ask the minister a question and the minister comes back and says, yes, we will supply you the information, you would get it. That is what Estimates is about.

MR. A. PARSONS: It is on the record.

MR. JOYCE: As my colleague for Burgeo – La Poile said it is on the record, it is in Hansard. I am assuming that the minister is not waiting for the House to close to try to give me the report or wait for the RFP. When you stand there across from me and say, yes, I am going to give you a copy of that report and I am still waiting to get the report, I cannot get it.

Mr. Speaker, you wonder why I am asking questions about the proposed hospital in Corner Brook? If there is nothing to hide – if I get this report I am going to bring it out to the health care professionals, get people to look at it and say listen, what do you think of these reports? What has changed from the Hatch Mott MacDonald report, from the Stantec report? What has changed from that two or three months? Why were the changes made? Those are the types of questions that I would be asking, and that is the type of information that I want.

Mr. Speaker, if people think that I am being negative and I do not want the hospital because I am asking these questions, I am doing my duty. When you ask the question, you get an answer saying, yes, no problem, you will get it, and you cannot get it. Then I start to get a bit skeptical and say what are you hiding? Why don't you present the reports and give the reports to the people of Corner Brook and Western Newfoundland, the ones who are going to be most affected by it? What is the concern?

I ask the Minister of Natural Resources and the Member for Humber West, why don't you guys get the reports? It was committed to me to get the reports. Why don't you get the reports and give them to the people in Corner Brook? Then we could sit down and have an informed debate.

If the Member for the Bay of Islands after sitting down, seeing the reports, going through all the reports and giving it to all the health care professionals and engineers says here is the difference from the Stantec report, from Hatch Mott MacDonald, it makes good sense. If I am told that – the information I have now does not say that but if I am I would be the first to say great, let's move on with the project.

I do not have that. The Member for Humber East and the Member for Humber West should supply that. It definitely should be supplied. It was committed to me, as the Member for Bay of Islands, to do that. I know there are going to be a less number of acute care beds, I know that.

Pardon me?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: No, the Minister of Transportation and Works in Estimates committed to give me a copy of the two reports, Mr. Speaker. He committed to it. It is in Hansard, and I am still waiting.

I asked the Minister of Health in Health Estimates, well I have to check with the minister because it is a co-department report. I said, he already said yes. I am saying to the Minister of Natural Resources, it was a commitment made. It is in Hansard to get the reports.

What are we hiding, if anything? I am not saying we are. I am not making any accusations whatsoever, not one. I am saying let's lay it all out on the table so we can all have an informed discussion. You cannot have an informed discussion if you do not have all the details in front of you, you just cannot do it.

Once it is done, if the Member for Bay of Islands is proven wrong and says no, boy, this is the best thing, this is what is going to suffice the needs of Western Newfoundland, I will be the first one to put my hand up and say let's move on. I would be the first one. I have no problem with it. I did it on several occasions. I did it with Kruger, I did it with Municipal Affairs on several occasions, and I did with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing on several occasions. I

have no problem. When something is good, I have no problem in standing up and agreeing to it, Mr. Speaker, but right now we do not have it.

I look at the legislation that is coming down here, Mr. Speaker. There is not a lot of legislation for this session. There are a lot of things that we could be discussing in this House. I have a funny feeling; I am going to go on the record here to say that this House may close this Thursday because of the lack of legislation.

We are waiting for the whistle-blower legislation. We are waiting for the family caregiver act. We are waiting of all of that to come through, Mr. Speaker. Do you know why? I am willing to bet in the next week or two there are some major cuts to health care. You just watch and see. The word I am getting is that there are going to be some major cuts to health care. They want us out of this House. Just watch, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Natural Resources is asking who I got it from. You said the same thing about Gerry Byrne when he said the hospital is going to be downsized. Who was right then? Who was right then when you said you have good sources?

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. MARSHALL: Downsized from what? Mr. Speaker, the Stantec report came out, that is what the hospital is. Downsized from what?

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Downsized from the commitment that you made when it was going to cost \$750,000 to \$1 billion. Those are the words you used, Mr. Speaker, and I can show you

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

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, this government is going to build the finest hospital in Newfoundland and Labrador, just as we did with the long-term care facility which you did not do, just like we did with Herdman Collegiate, which you did not do, just like we are doing with Regina High School, which you did not do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for the Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Yes, the same member – about the long-term care facility, too bad I do not have the quote; we cannot make the same mistake we did with the long-term care facility. That is the same minister.

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on a point of order.

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a great imagination. He makes things up.

Mr. Speaker, we built another floor of the long-term care facility. I do not think (inaudible). Now we are going to build another (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for the Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, I am hitting a nerve, Mr. Speaker. I am hitting a big nerve here.

Mr. Speaker, here is the quote and I will table this. I will table this just in case your memory – I know what happens, your memory sometimes goes when you are brought attention.

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on a point of order.

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you one thing of what I remember, I tell the truth. That is the difference.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for the Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Once again, Mr. Speaker, when you cannot attack the issue you attack the person. I quote and I will table this –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: “We saw what happened with long-term care years ago when a mistake was made and we saw the extra costs involved to correct that...If something like that happened with a facility of this magnitude, look at the taxes people would have been paid to correct it”. That was the Minister of Natural Resources who made that comment when he announced the hospital.

When you stand up and say I have a good imagination, it is not me. It is your words. If you want to stand up and say I do not tell the truth –

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

MR. JOYCE: Here we go.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on a point of order.

MR. MARSHALL: You are darn right it is mine, because you could not do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I ask the minister to sit down, please.

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for the Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, it is getting very obvious that the Minister of Natural Resources is getting very upset. I have no problem whatsoever standing on my record –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, attack the person, not the issue, is a prime example of this government. I have to say one thing, for a man who could not find 8 million barrels of oil do not go criticizing me. If you could not find 8 million barrels of oils and the new Minister of Finance had to walk in and find 8 million barrels of oil, sit in your seat –

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on a point of order.

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. Member for Bay of Islands is making it up. Mr. Speaker, the C-NLOPB continually makes additional updates. It forecasted (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about such a serious issue with the hospital in Corner Brook and the minister just wants to keep going, the same person who cannot deliver on it, what he promised. It is just getting absurd. Attack me as much as you like, I do not care. Take me outside the building, push me outside, I do not care, but build the right hospital.

I do not care if you stand up and say I do not tell the truth, it does not bother me, Mr. Speaker, but build the right hospital. If you want me to table the information where you said you made the mistake with the long-term care facility, here it is. If you want it, here it is. Look, here it is. Do not attack me any more; it has nothing to do with me. I am just fighting for the people who elected me, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MARSHALL: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on a point of order.

MR. MARSHALL: I did not say you were not telling the truth. I said I do not mistake the truth (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: My, oh my, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry for hitting a nerve on all the things with you. I am telling you, it is just getting to the point now, it is almost like you cannot even raise an issue in the Opposition unless you get attacked personally. It is just unbelievable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: I ask questions – if the Member for Humber East and the Member for Humber West wants to stand up, produce the reports for

Stantec and Hatch Mott MacDonald so we can have an open discussion. Produce the reports.

MR. MARSHALL: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, on a point of order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, we will do more than produce the reports. We are going to produce a hospital. We are going to produce a long-term care facility. We are going to produce a hostel (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I have to say, this is starting to get to the point of ridiculous. Every time you want to bring up a touchy subject like the hospital in Corner Brook – because the minister knows himself that he did not deliver what he was committed to doing. He did not tell the people in Corner Brook when I build the new hospital there is going to be less acute care beds in the hospital; he did not tell them that.

He promised a \$750 million state-of-the-art PET scanner hospital, Mr. Speaker, and guess what? We are not getting that. We are getting 138 acute care beds down from about 162 or 165, and I challenge the minister before you jumps up and attacks me again, I challenge you, go look at Hansard, see how they are going to make up for the acute care beds. They are going to decrease the time by 25 per cent when people are admitted to the hospital; go check Hansard. It is not me. That is what the officials in the Department of Health said.

If anybody here does not believe it, check the Hansard. Once you check the Hansard you can come back to me and say okay, you were right, now let's go on with an informed, educated discussion on the hospital. That is all I am saying. Let's all work together on this. Do not attack me. They are having a meeting, Mr. Speaker, over there in Corner Brook Wednesday

night, go out and attend the meeting, I say to the minister. Israel Hann, the seniors' advocate, is having them in; go attend the meeting. You are the one and the former Premier praising him up when the long-term care facility was built and now he has concerns about the hospital; go out.

Listen, Mr. Speaker, I have to say it is very disturbing when the Minister of Natural Resources on at least seven or eight occasions stands up on these foolish points of order, me discussing such a serious issue and here I am getting interrupted on all these foolish things. I say to the minister, if you want to discuss what you said about the long-term care facility, here it is. That is what you said; it is your quote if you want to see it.

I am just trying to make sure that this mistake does not happen again. That is what I am trying to do. Mr. Speaker, if you want to brand me – at least he tells the truth, giving the impression as if I do not or if you want to attack me personally, go ahead, it does not bother me; but if you think I am going to stay quiet and not speak about the hospital, save your breath for your last breath because you may need it. Mr. Speaker, I am not stopping on this hospital until I get the right information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CRUMMELL: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the students and staff at St. Mathew's School in the great District of St. John's West for allowing me to recently participate in a Shave for the Brave and who provided me this new look. I just got references that I should be dressed in white. I guess people are thinking that I look like the man from Glad. No, I will take that as a compliment, Mr. Speaker.

I have also been confused today with the Member for Lewisporte, at least twice today. I can say, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Lewisporte is a very fine looking fellow and a handsome man.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Estimates of the Social Services Committee, I say to you I enjoyed the process. I attended most of the meetings and I would just like to thank my colleagues from all sides of the House, certainly my colleagues on this side of the House and the colleagues opposite, I must say that you were respectful. You asked mostly insightful questions that were direct, so I thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to most importantly acknowledge the various ministers and their staff. They were well prepared and professional. As Parliamentary Secretary for Advanced Education and Skills and the minister, I attended many of the pre-Estimate meetings with the executive. A lot of hard work went into the pre-Estimate meetings, just to make sure that we were prepared going into the actual Estimates themselves.

I understand the process from working inside internally with the people of the department. I certainly learned that there was a lot of hard work that our people do at the very senior level within our bureaucracy and within the civil service. I can certainly speak on behalf of my colleagues and certainly I can say on behalf of my colleagues on the other side of the House the dedication of these people did not go unnoticed and they were totally professional throughout the process. Again, Mr. Speaker, through both sides of the equation, both sitting in the Estimates and the pre-Estimates process, I must say I thoroughly enjoyed it and was very impressed with the quality of the discussions.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the body of my notes here, I would just like to provide some commentary and the rebuttal around previous speakers. The Member for St. John's Centre spoke about Wade Locke's memo on the

Newfoundland and Labrador financial situation. I find that a little bit surprising, considered what she did say.

I also could reference at this point in time, the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, his quote – actually; I wrote it down. What are we getting for that investment – talking about health care – it cannot be sustained.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to talk a little bit about what Mr. Locke and what he did say in his memo. I know that the Member for St. John's Centre did say that Professor Locke encouraged our government to bring in measured financial sustainability through a longer time frame than we went through in the budgetary process.

I just so happen to have the memo here in front of me. I keep it in the file because it is a good piece of work, very short and concise, and it really does get to the point of exactly where we are. Here is a quote from the document; I will paraphrase it a bit as well, Mr. Speaker. When he talks about our Budget and our 10-Year Sustainability Plan, he references it, "I think the plan is an excellent one...In particular, to ensure that fiscal discipline in the future, the plan specifies a short-run, medium term and longer run targets and goals." He talks about the short, medium and long run, and about what we are doing in our 10-Year Sustainability Plan.

He further goes on to say, "The short-run goals are, for example, deficit reductions within the first two years; an operational efficiency review of the Regional Health Authorities; and a post-secondary education review." In the middle time, in the next year, "The medium-term objectives are to return to budgetary surplus within three years and to review pensions and post-retirement benefits. The long-run target is to bring the province's net per capita debt gradually down to the all-province level within ten years." Mr. Speaker, he talks about what we are doing right now, our 10-Year Sustainability Plan is the right thing to do, and that our reductions we are putting in place in this Budget are the prudent thing to do at this point in time.

I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, another paraphrase here as well. He goes on to say, “I think the sensitivity exercised in addressing your fiscal problem over a period of time without imposing undue hardship on the majority of public sector workers and creating problems for the delivery of public services is a good one. The hiring freeze” – that we had in place previously – “the MHA wage freeze, the gradual layoff of temporary employees, the early retirement package, the core mandate analysis, the effective communication of the seriousness of the fiscal problem faced, the efficiency reviews to be undertaken next year and the commitment to address the unfunded pension and retirement liabilities through...balanced strategy for the current economic environment. In particular, this strategy, while it may have created anxiety for some in the public sector, has also allowed people to become acclimatized to the new fiscal realities...” Mr. Speaker, that is out of Dr. Wade Locke’s report.

I do not know how the member opposite read that report, but certainly the way I read it was that we are on the right track. We are doing the right things and we are doing it in the right time frame, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Unlike everywhere else.

MR. CRUMMELL: Unlike well – Mr. Speaker, he closes his memo to the minister by saying, “The fiscal sustainability plan, in my opinion, is feasible. It has sufficient flexibility and specific targets built into the plan as to ensure that appropriate degree of fiscal discipline will be maintained without imposing undue adjustment costs on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a good plan for the economic times in which we now find ourselves.” That was the essence of Dr. Locke’s report. I find the interpretation from the member opposite surprising to say the least.

Mr. Speaker, I will get into the body of my few notes that I have here and talk a little bit about the service sector committee that we sat on. Budget 2013 was all about reigning in spending without compromising services. Those are the priorities that we heard in Newfoundland and

Labrador and from many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians over the last several months.

During our public consultations this Province, our government, was told by many people, Mr. Speaker, that prudent fiscal management was important, that we must live within our means, but we also need to protect vital services, especially in health care and education. That is where I would like to spend the next ten or so minutes directing my comments this evening. We listened to the people of the Province. While we had difficult decisions to make, we had to make those decisions and we did exactly that. We made the decisions that had to be made.

Health and education front line services were first and foremost on our minds and on the minds of the people of the Province. Education continues to remain a key priority; 18.8 per cent of government spending in Budget 2013 will be on education this year, Mr. Speaker. This represents \$1.3 billion in spending and will be spent to meet the educational needs of the people of this Province.

Of that \$1.3 billion, \$537 million will be spent on teachers’ salaries, substitute teachers, student assistants, professional development, and other services for teachers. Mr. Speaker, these are front line services that we said we would protect, that the Minister of Education said he would protect, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Despite declining student enrolment, 14,000 students less than 2004, government has committed to protect priority services as well as the best pupil-teacher ratio in any province in Canada. Mr. Speaker, there will be 5,400 teaching positions for the school year 2013-2014. This will result in no reductions in regular or special needs teachers.

Saying that, Mr. Speaker, the decision certainly has been made, and we are all aware of the change to the school board structure that will result in two provincial school boards, one English and one French. The changing demographics in this Province are a reality we must all face. This decision is absolutely the

right thing to do. By amalgamating financial and administrative services into one office, the efficiencies that will be realized will allow our government to continue the focus on the front line delivery of educational services that our students need and require.

Mr. Speaker, regional offices in Gander, Corner Brook, Happy Valley and Goose Bay will be maintained with a very strong presence of all senior executive managers. As well itinerant teachers will also remain in place in all of the former school districts. This should alleviate some of the concern out there.

Investing in education is important to the people of this Province and is important to our government. Budget 2013 absolutely reflects that. Our children deserve the very best education possible, in the best environment possible. With that principle in mind our government has provided almost \$102 million for new and ongoing school infrastructure. Meeting the immediate and future demands in growing communities, as well as upgrading existing school systems is a priority.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to a topic that is on the minds of many of my constituents, and that is the construction of the new west end high school in the City of St. John's. In Budget 2013, we announced \$18.3 million has been allocated to begin construction of the west end high school that will move this project forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to talk a few minutes about this because it is very close to my heart. My kids grew up in the west end of the city. They also attended school in the centre of the city, getting bused from the west end to the centre of the city. This has been going on for approximately about ten years, twelve years when they closed down the west end high school at the time which was Beaconsfield High.

There was a plan in place to renovate Bishops College and make that the high school for all the students in the west end, but when the Eastern School District had a look at the plans, they decided that you know what, this may not work. They did an analysis, they did a review. They

came back a few years back and made a decision to build a new high school in the west end of the city, Mr. Speaker.

A lot of parents in my district, a lot of teachers in my district, a lot of people who sat on the school councils became involved in the process. They influenced the school board's decision; they got the result that they wanted. This government has made the decision to move forward and, Mr. Speaker, it has been a long process. People have been very patient in the District of St. John's West and the west end of the city, Kilbride in particular as well. The Member for Kilbride is also benefiting from this new high school.

Mr. Speaker, this new school is going to be state-of-the-art. It is going to be something that we are going to be proud of and it is going to accommodate our students for the next forty years. When we look back at some of the planning that had to take place to understand why we needed this school; the aging infrastructure in the centre of the city, the shifting demographics of the student population moving from the centre to the outskirts of the City of St. John's. That request to build a new school was a sound request and we have moved forward.

Mr. Speaker, as you drive by the new site, the site that has been identified is on Topsail Road right across from the Village Mall. They have the pre-site work done; \$3.6 million was allocated earlier this spring to Weir's Construction of CBS. They have that site almost prepared. It is all fenced in, the land is cleared. They are now getting the land, I guess you would call it, in a configuration they need to go forward with the construction. Presently, Mr. Speaker, the contract is now out there; I think it closes this week in terms of building the actual construction of the school. Again, I could not be anything but pleased to see that is moving forward. We are hoping in the very near future to announce the awarding of that contract of the sod-turning and make an announcement to the people of the Province and certainly to the people of St. John's that this project is moving forward; and in December

2014, that this new school in the west end of St. John's, long awaited, will be open and ready for business and to receive students.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not talk about that. We worked closely with the City of St. John's. We worked closely with the Eastern School District. We worked closely with the parents and certainly we worked closely with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Transportation and Works to make sure this process unfolded in a timely manner. Again, it is fabulous news as we talk about moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to get into a few other investments our government has communicated in Budget 2013 because Budget 2013 had many, many good things happening in it. We need to call it out to make sure people understand that while there were some tough decisions made, there were some positive decisions as well, and actually many positive decisions. For instance, in early childhood learning, experts have unanimously endorsed the importance of early childhood learning in laying the foundation for children to get the best possible start in life.

In Budget 2013, \$1.3 million was allocated for the Province's Early Childhood Strategy, Learning from the Start. As part of that strategy, this year we will see an introduction of an early literacy program as well as further development and distribution of parent resource kits. These kits contain early learning materials for infants, toddlers, and their caregivers.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very innovative program. We fully understand the early years and how important they are in the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills. It is the most crucial time for our young, for our children. We have stepped up to the plate and the investments we are pushing forward are going to see results in the future; that is for sure. These investments in education demonstrate that our government is indeed responsive to what is important to the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, the other area I would like to focus on is investments in health. When the people of the Province were asked what is important, again, they said health was the other priority along with education. We were told unequivocally they wanted health care to be their absolute highest priority. The health of individuals and families comes first and in Budget 2013 we responded accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, while Newfoundland and Labrador is outperforming most other provinces in key areas when it comes to wait times, we are committed to doing more. Our government has invested \$160 million over the last eight years to improve wait lists. We will continue in 2013 with another strategic investment: \$2 million has been allocated to focus on endoscopy wait times and wait lists.

Mr. Speaker, there is another bit of good news in Budget 2013 when it comes to health care. We will also see investments of twenty-two new drug therapies under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program and the Cancer Care and Hematology Program, totalling \$9.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps most excitingly, Budget 2013 will provide \$226 million in infrastructure investment for health care facilities throughout the Province. On top of that, there is an additional \$72.7 million for the continuation of several long-term care infrastructure projects. These investments include advancing the long-term care facilities in Carbonear, St. John's, Corner Brook, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and protective care facilities in Clarenville and Bonavista.

Continuing construction and redevelopment of new equipment repair and renovations in Labrador West health care –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CRUMMELL: – a complex mental health needs centre in Paradise, a treatment centre for youth with addictions in Grand Falls – Windsor,

and the adult addictions centre in Harbour Grace. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on. I could get into them if you want, but we will leave that maybe for later.

Mr. Speaker, we are making a huge investment in the new hospital in Corner Brook. I know there has been some commentary around that on both sides of the House here this evening, but we are moving forward with this project. We are doing it for the right reasons and we are going to do this right. We are going to get it right. We are going to make sure it meets the needs of the people of Western Newfoundland and Labrador. We are committed to moving forward with this project and going through this process in the right way.

Mr. Speaker, these are still only a few of the investments our government is making to meet the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when it comes to health care in the Province. We have the Paid Family Caregiver Option, which is a pilot program we are putting in place, \$6.1 million, we talked about it earlier; \$9.2 million more money to address a need for the home care and support program in 2013-2014; \$1.6 million for the Community Rapid Response Teams allocated this year again; and \$1.5 million for the implementation of Enhanced Care in Personal Care Homes. It is a pilot project. This is new money and a new spend.

There is \$624,000 to add 100 new portable subsidies to the Personal Home Care Program. This will bring subsidies, Mr. Speaker, to 2,348. We are very proud of that program. It is serving many of our elders in our community and many families. We think this is a good way to spend our money. There is \$372,000 to introduce forty subsidized respite beds in personal care homes. Again, the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, the health care sector represents 39 per cent of our total spending with just under \$3 billion. This is what the people of the Province want us to spend our money on. We have identified it as a first priority and we have absolutely acted on that priority.

This year's Budget and our spending on social services are all about plans, principals, and choices. We are investing in health and education, we are investing in families, Mr. Speaker, and we are certainly investing in our future. We will continue to do the responsible thing. As we move forward as a Province, as we move forward as a people, and as we take advantage of the opportunities that are before us, we need to do the right things. We need a long-term fiscal sustainability plan. We are doing it. It has been endorsed by many people out there internally and externally, in this Province and outside of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, we are on the right path. Times have never been better in our history. All the key economic measures are showing we are going to progress as a Province. All the lending institutions, the banks, and the financial institutions are telling us that we are doing the right things. We have balance in what we are doing and we are going to continue to do the things that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians want. We are looking to the future of our children.

On behalf of, and to the constituents of, St. John's West, I certainly look forward to seeing that high school progress over the coming weeks and months. It is very close to my heart, and I have to leave it off on that note because it is such a positive thing that is happening in my district. People in my district are absolutely delighted we are moving forward with this project and they are thanking the government for that.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly the Auditor General in his most recent report on the financial statement really sets the context of where we are headed and questions

government, the Minister of Finance, and the long-term planning basically as to where the sustainability really is; looking at the massive increases of expenditures, looking at where revenue is going to come from, and a whopping increase of tangible assets over the past couple of years. It really questions if you are going to continue spending and tax on debt at the rate it is going, well, it may not be that sustainable.

I managed to sit in on a number of the Estimate meetings and posed quite a number of questions. One of the areas I am quite concerned about is when we talk about the Social Sector, around health care and around education, especially in health care, given that my district represents the greatest number of seniors anywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador based on the population.

One of the things that have happened in my district pertains around the air ambulance, where it is actually located, and where it was previously in that decision. What we are seeing is that we have trained staff in St. Anthony and an air ambulance is actually flying from Goose Bay to pick up a nurse and pick up the staff who are needed at the St. Anthony Hospital, then flying back to Labrador and flying to the hospital in Goose Bay, and then flying back to St. Anthony to drop off the nurse, the qualified staff who are there and available, and then flying back.

It seems like these types of things certainly do nothing to increase efficiencies. Yet, in the consultant's report in the review of air ambulance, location will not be considered and it is not in the purview of the report. It seems the Minister of Health and Community Services really has no interest in looking at location which could save an exponential amount of money.

As well, we look at other things; we look at health care and health delivery in Newfoundland and Labrador. Government is certainly making investments in clinics and they have in my district as well, in Flower's Cove with the Strait of Belle Isle Health Centre. This is a health centre that was budgeted at \$7.25 million, but in

the Estimates, in the capital investments it is coming in at \$8.4 million. It is delayed, it is not open. We are waiting on that. We are hoping that every soon this clinic will become available to the people of the district so that they can gain access to these types of services close to home at a new facility.

As well, looking at some of the barriers people have. I raised them in the House of Assembly, and I have raised them with the Labrador-Grenfell Health CEO for more than a year. The CEO for Labrador-Grenfell Health opts to use the media as an outlet to communicate.

I had penned a letter in April of 2012 and received a response in May of 2013, eleven months later, and it still states the status quo. I will certainly be making those letters public if that is the way the CEO of Labrador-Grenfell Health wants to do business, rather than focus on trying to find solutions when it comes to health care efficiencies and delivery of health.

It is completely not how we would expect our professionals who work in these health authorities to treat a member of the House of Assembly and how they act on behalf of their constituents. I represent the majority of people who are served by these hospitals in these two regions I mentioned. I will continue to fight, like the Member for Bay of Islands, for hospitals and for improvements to health care facilities, like he is for the Corner Brook Hospital that the people do deserve.

We have barriers where there are nineteen stairs at rehabilitative and family and intervention services. These are people, clients who, in many cases, require therapy. They are seniors, people with disabilities. There is no elevator and there is no accessibility there. There are nineteen stairs. To provide alternative meeting space and what not, certainly does nothing to promote inclusion, I say, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the types of things that we need to bridge. We need to make sure that these types of services are accessible to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I will keep raising them.

One of the most disappointing things that we see in this Budget from my view is the significant cutbacks. It is the cuts all over the place, and then the nickel-and-diming of the middle class when it comes to user fees that are being put in, all of these fees and fares that are being added and increased. That is the way; it is like a hidden tax this government is imposing on people. That is the type of stuff that they are doing.

They are cutting out programs. The most vulnerable in society are trying to save money through, programs like the Residential Energy Efficiency Program, which has a very low-income threshold to apply and be eligible for this program. Yet, the department decided they would cut half of that in their Budget. We are only a month into the Budget and when you go to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Web site, you will see that all the funds have been committed already for this fiscal year. Government can continue to say what it is doing when it comes to trying to promote energy efficiency and doing things for the green economy, but it really does not send a strong message when you see such cutbacks to the energy efficiency program.

This is not the first time this government has broken promises. We see that with the wood pellet residential program that was announced years back that they committed to, that they were going to extend. The most recent Blue Book by this government says they are going to enhance it. They are going to have an enhanced program. Well, I certainly would welcome that, but in the Budget there is no reference to that. In the economy, when you talk about wood products and the forestry there, the only mention of wood pellets are the two small operators in Newfoundland and Labrador that are producing about 1,000 metric tons of pellets.

The Minister of Natural Resources stood up and touted how Roddickton in my district has the largest pellet plant in the Province. They could be producing fifty, sixty or 1,000 tons. That is enough to take the equivalent of 11,000 to 14,000 homes off the grid. Taking commercial properties, converting oil and other public

building like the hospital in St. Anthony, or like new facilities where you do not need to convert, can save significant amounts of money and reduce the need of energy, especially during the peak season where we see – This can certainly reduce our operating costs.

That is something this government is not really interested in. They are not interested in creating a local market for wood pellets, looking at doing demonstration projects as other provinces, as other areas across Newfoundland and Labrador have been looking at – I mean other provinces beyond our Province, because this government is not interested in that.

They have been focused on a multi-billion dollar megaproject that, at the end of the day, after the five years of construction, The Economy 2013 states that there will be forty jobs for Labrador and eighty jobs for Newfoundland. Between the two in the Province that adds up to 120. That is far less than the 150 to 250 jobs just on the Northern Peninsula in the forest industry that is struggling. Our forestry is struggling all across Newfoundland and Labrador. When I was in Port Hope Simpson recently I met a commercial harvester who had talked about how they were cut back, how Port Hope Simpson was an area of great logging a while ago and now that shipping is no longer there.

The Minister of Natural Resources is completely failing the forestry when it comes to looking at diversifying and building those revenues in the wood pellet industry. We have seen a stagnant industry on the Great Northern Peninsula when it comes to wood pellets. I hope with these RPFs and whatnot, with all of the infrastructure and investment already on the ground, that we do see vision from the minister and from the department, and that they will move forward and they will look at developing a local market. It is there and that opportunity is there. It has been proven all across Newfoundland and Labrador in reports that have been produced.

We only have to look to our neighbours and what they are doing, where they are converting schools, hospitals and other areas. It is so much cheaper than looking at electricity, looking at

oil, looking at other properties, and how they are being heated.

Only natural gas is actually cheaper based on heating costs alone when we look at wood pellets and that form of biomass. It is something that the Minister of Natural Resources has stated, that the Province is not interested in a liquidified natural gas plant. Then a couple of minutes later in Question Period, this would be an exciting investment, an exciting addition to the Newfoundland and Labrador economy. That certainly seems like government really has no idea and no direction where it wants to go when it comes to looking at energy and how we are going to use our renewable energy resources; because back when it invested in the pellet plant, the report said that it is not viable unless you have a year-round port and shipping facilities. They go ahead and invest in it anyway because, I believe, they were looking at developing local markets.

Something had changed. Maybe it was Muskrat Falls that had changed this initiative to stop looking at the conversion and the transition and bringing all of these either residential or commercial properties off the market. If we look at just the fifty-four megawatts of wind down on the Burin Peninsula, these wind farms, they would take the equivalent of about 12,000 homes off the market. We look at where other provinces are going when it comes to wind and our wind capacity, we have lots of it there, but the Minister of Natural Resources is not interested at looking at our wind potential.

Reports could show that just 5.25 megawatts in St. Anthony, off Cape Norman area, would be enough to take 1,000 homes off the grid. It is viable. It can be done. There is nothing that can be said that would show that it is really not feasible.

The minister can get up and call me on a point of order if he believes that simply is not the fact, but I will stand by that while I am here talking about the Concurrence. I do believe that government has fumbled when it comes to a number of natural resource initiatives and so would the people of my district in The Straits –

White Bay North. They would say that government is not moving in the right direction when it comes to our forestry, when it comes to wind, when it comes to many of our natural resources on the Great Northern Peninsula, and we have a wealth of them.

When it comes to looking at the fishery, when it comes to looking at really building sustainable fisheries and fish practices, and looking at the limitation, we have a resource of sea cucumber on the Great Northern Peninsula and we have permits there. People actually produce it, yet they have to ship off the peninsula for any type of processing. I do not understand why, with companies on the Great Northern Peninsula, why they cannot be given a permit or a licence to do this on a small scale to produce and create valued jobs and have that product local. There are so many barriers. There is red tape. To see that government has eliminated its director of red tape – they issued a release in no time that they met their 25 per cent reduction and now we have done even more, but we are seeing red tape added all the time in different barriers that are put forward.

When we look at these types of things, when we look at our economy and the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development, we need to some clarity under the new programs because all of the programs were collapsed into two major portfolios. With that, that gives the option, certainly, for the department to be more flexible. We have seen that a lot of money was never invested in areas of the Province and in certain categories, but it could lead to a few companies taking the bulk of these investments. It could lead to, for example, a certain sector of the economy maybe getting 80 per cent, 90 per cent of this portfolio that is there when before it was a variety of programs. So certainly some smaller groups may not benefit in the same way that they would have access before to look at a portfolio that is diversified, that benefits people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Those are types of things – and one of the alarming things that I have to question is the lending practices of the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development,

looking at making an equity investment at 3 per cent. That is lower than any commercial institution will be looking at, commercial bank, credit union or whatnot. People will be looking at, at least prime plus 1 per cent or 2 per cent. To look at a 3 per cent equity investment which is really high risk, you may do a long-term loan at 3 per cent if you have appropriate collateral in place but to do an equity investment at 3 per cent, I mean that is sheer embarrassment for the public purse here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

You would make that equity investment at 7 per cent, 8 per cent, 10 per cent, or 12 per cent to make it a legitimate equity investment. The alternative measures and the tools are there where we could be looking at doing things in long-term loans if that is the way that it needs to go, and that is the way that it should have been. It should have been done in a long-term low interest loan, taking security over things like a vessel versus looking at equity.

Equity exposes us at greater risk and there is no incident – we do not even have any proof that equity has ever been paid when it has been lent out. It can be converted at the end. So the dividend does not need to be paid, it can be carried over, and then at the end this can be converted into a loan. Something that would have been ten years can now be twenty years before we even see any type of payment or at least ten years before we would see a payment. Those are types of concerns that I have.

I have concerns in my district when you look at the Department of Environment and Conservation. Why they looked at cutting interpretation at Burnt Cape, one of the most fast-tracked ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador. They had support from all sides, from the Nature Conservancy of Canada. They really did. This is one of the only places, the only ecological reserves that has geology, that has over 300 species of rare plants, one only found on the Great Northern Peninsula, and now that is going to be just there without that interpretation, without that educational experience, and it is the only one.

The other sites that are there on reserve still will have interpretation. The one on the Great Northern Peninsula was seen that it is okay to cut that, with really no justification. We look at Nature's Classroom, a program touted by former ministers, the Minister of Tourism, talking about how wonderful this is to give school children hands-on learning to this vast resource that we have – and to cut that, cut that from the Budget.

We see all sorts of things that have been cut. Cuts to the College of the North Atlantic, as the Member for St. John's North had talked about earlier in debate quite extensively, looking at the various programs that have been cut. It is quite incredible. We do not grow an economy based on tourism, culture, and recreation that has a billion dollar budget by cutting its marketing dollars. That is no way to grow – and to cut specific things.

If you depend on the local market for more than half of that billion dollars and you just cut public services, you just cut a variety of positions, you are increasing fees that tourism operators depend on, the entertainment industry and bars and lounges, you introduced all these licensing fees, you are increasing rates everywhere in this Budget, basically, that would have an impact. You say, well maybe I will weather this storm this time, but unless these funds are reinstated, we get more creative with how we are going to increase high-yield tourists, we are certainly going to see adverse impacts when it comes to employment, when it comes to income levels for this Province. It all has a domino effect. Like the forest industry, I say to the Minister of Natural Resources, it is all interrelated, it absolutely is.

For years the Great Northern Peninsula has been cut off from selling pulpwood to Kruger because it was too expensive, and finally in recent weeks it has been seen as it is feasible now to sell this wood there. So, let us see where things are headed and why the change of heart from Kruger. We have lots of potential to develop local markets, lots of potential in the rural economy. We need to have greater consultation when you are making such crisis decisions, when you are looking at planning for

sustainability. We can really all work together to do that.

Sitting around the Public Accounts Committee we have had very productive conversations, put forward productive solutions. We are certainly willing to work with members of all sides here, and be dealt with and treated like adults when we have conversations around how we move forward and look at putting forward solutions that can help increase revenue but also help save money, I say to the Minister of Health and Community Services.

I have been trying for quite some time to work with the CEO of Labrador-Grenfell Health. I really hope we see some attention paid for in some of the suggestions that I have put forward because we can save money and we can deliver better value. These are types of things that we need to start looking at doing and Budget 2013 certainly fails on many accounts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to stand in this hon. House tonight to speak on the Estimates. I just want to take some time to make a few comments with respect to the Concurrence Motion as we talk about the Estimates of the Social Services Committee to which I was a member. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of this Social Services Committee since I was elected in February, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, this Committee reviewed the budgetary Estimates of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Community Services, the Department of Justice, the Department of Municipal Affairs, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the overall Budget and look at past Budgets of this Administration, the bulk or the majority of our spending goes into the programs of these departments that offer and provide the social safety nets that the people of this Province need and request. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that we will spend \$4.482 billion in the social sector this year, or 57.4 per cent of our total Budget. As we go through this important process of the budgetary process, we get an in-depth overview of the programs and the spending of each department.

As we went through each department, Mr. Speaker, it was obvious that tremendous work has been done in each, and tremendous amounts of money has been allocated or invested in each department to ensure the delivery of services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is indeed great to see the solid and strong foundation that this Administration has built, the new initiatives that we are embarking on, and, Mr. Speaker, we are doing this despite the challenges we face globally. What is equally important with all of this is the fact that we are securing a future for our children and our grandchildren.

Our Province has seen and sustained great economic growth over the past nine years, Mr. Speaker, and we must continue this momentum, but we must do it prudently and responsibly while spending and governing within our means. We know the fundamental economic driver of the economy is the revenue from our non-renewable resources, such as oil and gas.

This revenue has given us the opportunity and the means to invest in programs, services and infrastructure. Our government has managed this resource revenue responsibly by balancing investment with debt reduction, an investment that secures our future financial stability for future investments in our social programs.

Mr. Speaker, an important piece of this year's budgetary process was the implementation of our 10-Year Sustainability Plan for the Province, a plan to ensure a sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier's commitment to principled government is reflected in her leadership in securing Newfoundland and Labrador's fiscal future. When we talk about principled leadership it means making the right decisions that are neither popular nor politically popular but has to be made in the best interest of every Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNECT: Mr. Speaker, going through the Estimates process gives us an indication of how programs and services are to be delivered and how it is to be implemented or rolled out. This spells out government's plans to deliver effective and efficient programs and services to its people. It tells us how much is being spent and where it is being spent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNECT: Mr. Speaker, let me go through the departments and give an overview of each. First, let's look at the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. This department is responsible for the planning and development of policies, standards and programs as well as service delivery to help ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in our Province.

The legislative framework which governs the provision of services for children, youth and families in this Province includes: Children and Youth Care and Protection Act; the Child Care Services Act; Youth Criminal Justice Act; and the Young Persons Offences Act.

Mr. Speaker, expenditure in this department this year is budgeted for approximately \$185.3 million. *Budget 2013 A Sound Plan, A Secure Future* is about investing in our families, a secure future for our children and youth. It is about investing \$31.5 million for child care. It is about investing \$14.3 million for the Child Care Services Subsidy Program.

It is about investing \$5.8 million for the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. It is about investing \$1.8 million for the Child Care

Capacity Initiative. It is about investing \$1.6 million for the Inclusion Program. It is about investing \$1 million for the Family Child Care Initiative. It is about investing \$500,000 to develop and start a Workplace Training Program.

It is about investing \$50,000 for a new Community Needs Assessment Tool. It is about investing \$20,000 to develop and maintain a Centralized Child Care Registry. It is about investing \$14.3 million to continue the implementation of the Continuum of Care Strategy. It is about investing \$401,000 for Supporting Youth with Transitions program. It is about investing \$314,000 to hire four new front line positions, bringing the department's total front line positions to over 500.

Mr. Speaker, we also considered the Estimates of the Department of Education which is responsible for developing and administering a provincial system of education that encourages and promotes all students to achieve their highest potential. It administers the primary, elementary and secondary school system with programs sufficiently flexible to meet the individual needs and capabilities of all children.

Specialized educational programs are provided for disabled children who are unable to benefit from regular classroom instruction. The Department of Education is responsible for the provision of literacy, library, and information services in the Province. This year, Mr. Speaker, the Budget Estimates indicate that \$1.3 billion will be spent in education for the Province.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2013 includes investing \$1.3 million in the third year of implementation of the Province's early childhood learning strategy, Learning From the Start; \$77 million is allocated to continue with major capital improvement projects such as new construction development projects, renovations, planning and design work; \$537 million, or 64 per cent of the education budget is allocated for teachers' salaries, substitute teachers, student assistants, professional development and other services for our teachers. Mr. Speaker, investments in

education are made so we may continue to have the best pupil-teacher ratio of any province in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, since 2007, in my district alone approximately \$3 million has been spent just on renovations and repairs to school infrastructure. We have work done at École Sainte-Anne, Lourdes Elementary, Piccadilly Central High, École Notre Dame-du-Cap, Our Lady of the Cape School, St. Thomas Aquinas, Stephenville Primary, Stephenville Elementary, Stephenville High, and the Pathfinder/Directions Alternative School.

Mr. Speaker, some of the improvements that were carried out were roof repairs, door and window replacements, PA system, electrical upgrades, siding replacement, windows and screens repairs, security system, fire alarm, mechanical ventilation repair, lift repairs, water line and dam upgrades, lines and draperies, lockers, and so forth. These are fundamental investments we have made and continue to make because we know over on this side that every student in this Province must have access to high-quality education and a safe and caring environment to do so. I make no apologies for those investments in education and certainly those in my district. I am delighted this government had the capacity to do so.

We also met, Mr. Speaker, to discuss the Estimates of the Department of Health and Community Services, whose mandate is for the overall direction of the Province's Health and Community Services system, which provides services and programs aimed at the prevention of disease and the promotion, restoration, and maintenance of health and well-being. These goals are supported by the various programs of the department, which include funding for the operations of hospitals, health care centres, and long-term care facilities, and the provision of medical care, public health care, and other community services.

What is astounding, Mr. Speaker, is that this year's Estimates show that 37.3 per cent of our total Budget or \$2.9 billion will be spent on our commitment to the health and well-being of

families throughout our Province. This includes \$9.5 million for twenty-two new drug therapies. This includes \$92.3 million to strengthen Long-Term Care and Community Support Services. This includes \$227 million for a new West Coast regional hospital planning and design. This includes \$226 million in capital infrastructure, \$165.8 million for continuing construction and redevelopment, \$40.2 million for new equipment, and \$20 million for repairs and renovations.

This includes, Mr. Speaker, \$3 million so that seniors can continue to receive a 35 per cent reduction on drivers' licenses and vehicle registration. This includes \$500,000 for the Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Project. This includes \$285,000 for the continued implementation of the Adult Protection Act. This includes a 35 per cent reduction on licenses and fees for hunting and fishing. Since 2007, well over \$5 million has been spent for infrastructure upgrades and renovations to medical equipment purchases or upgrades to healthy living initiatives, Wellness Grants, and Age-Friendly Grants to our seniors groups.

Mr. Speaker, we are delighted for the purchase of a 64-slice CT scanner at Sir Thomas Roddick Hospital. We made an investment in urology outreach program at the hospital. There was funding for endoscopy unit as well. I am proud of our government's investment and commitment for the improved and increased dialysis services at Sir Thomas Roddick Hospital. I certainly make no apology for any investments we made in the repairs and renovations at the Lourdes Medical Clinic, the Bay St. George Long Term Care Centre, and the Bay St. George medical care centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice provides legal services to government and is primarily responsible for the protection of citizens of the Province in respect to their persons and property. This objective is met by providing legal advice to all departments of government, providing for police protection, the prosecution of accused persons, the administration of the court, the operation of the Province's

correctional systems, services to victims of crime, protection of human rights, and legal aid services. Drafting of legislation for the House of Assembly by the Office of the Legislative Council is also provided.

Mr. Speaker, I was also happy to read in the Budget, and I will read from the Budget itself, "...Budget 2013 will provide \$1 million to form a new integrated provincial policing task force – the first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador – to investigate organized and serious crimes such as illegal drug activity and child exploitation." Mr. Speaker, this is a joint initiative between the Province's two police forces, the RCMP and the RNC. In addition, the Department of Justice is also responsible for the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division, the Support Enforcement Program, the Family Justice Services Division, Fines Administration, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

I see that my time is getting short, Mr. Speaker, as we will conclude our Concurrence Motion on the Social Services Estimates Committee. Budget 2013 will benefit the people and the communities that make up our Province, with target expenditures in areas of health, education, child care, infrastructure, and economic development.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be on a team with a leader, our Premier, who understands what this place means to us all. We are certainly blessed to have a leader of her calibre. She is providing great leadership, and she is focused and energized to bring this place we call home to great heights, thus creating an economy that is sustainable and prosperous. Throughout her life, today and even before entering politics, she has led change through a principled approach to social justice, community activism, policy, and governance.

Mr. Speaker, as our Premier so often says, we in this government are planners. We are visionaries. We are doers. We are committed to making tough decisions that will be in the best interest of each and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition parties talk about reckless spending and financial mismanagement that we have undertaken. They asked the question: Why did you spend what you spent? Well, I make no apologies for the investments in my district. I will even go further. I challenge the members of the Opposition parties to come to my district and tell the communities, its residents and its leaders, the money invested in my district should not have happened and would not have happened under their plan.

Mr. Speaker, we have and will continue to invest in our communities, our seniors, our youth, our children, our families, our students, our businesses, our schools, our roads, our health care, our infrastructure, our fisheries, our tourism, our natural resources, our education, our culture, and our environment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNELL: Mr. Speaker, we will remain focused, determined and committed in our work to make Newfoundland and Labrador a prosperous and growing place, with a sustainable and affordable economy and future that secures a bright horizon for today and tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for debate on Concurrence of the Social Services Committee is now concluded.

The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

On motion, Report of Social Services Committee, carried.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, the main Budget Speech, Order 1, that the House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to have the opportunity to respond once again to *Budget 2013: A Sound Plan, A Secure Future*. Budgets are about opportunities, opportunities to explore, define, create, innovate, and to plan for the future and for the future well-being of our people. Those are the hopes that we have for Budgets.

It is about creating well-being, securing well-being, and planning for well-being for our industries and for our people, for our economy, and for our futures. It includes both the well-being of our people and the well-being of our economy. They are not mutually exclusive. We cannot have well-being of our people without the well-being of our economy. We cannot have a well-being of our economy if our people are not well.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that government has both a fiscal and a social responsibility to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is here where that opportunity lies. The decisions that government makes in these two spheres are so interconnected and reflect government's priorities and allegiances.

Since becoming government in 2003 this government has had the most prosperous years ever in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. The most prosperous years of

revenue from our natural resources, the natural resources that belong to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, revenues that belong to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It does not belong to the Premier. These revenues and these resources do not belong to the Premier. They do not belong to the Progressive Conservative Party or to the government. They belong to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The resources belong to the people; the prosperity belongs to the people, and the benefits of the resources belong to the people. This government has been tasked with administering this wealth, this prosperity, and these resources. The benefit of these resources this government was tasked to administer on behalf of all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what a Budget is about. A Budget is about opportunities.

Now, as a majority government for the past ten years they have had opportunities. This government has had golden opportunities, never before seen such golden opportunities – opportunities never before seen in our history. They built roads, they built schools, and they developed some great strategies.

There was a Poverty Reduction Strategy that had a fabulous mandate with concrete programs. They had the Northern Strategic Plan. They had a social housing strategy. Not an overall housing strategy, mind you, Mr. Speaker, but mostly a strategy that dealt with maintaining the existing social housing units and programs. They added a few more units; they managed a Rent Supplement Program, managing the National Housing and Homelessness Initiative.

For the most part, aside from some of these, it was kind of status quo, managing the social housing stock that they had and adding to it by rent supplements. Mr. Speaker, they did not really, though, have an overall plan or strategy for the whole Province in terms of housing, how we use our land, and how we use our unused buildings. They never had that.

They developed a strategy for health and wellness, and for prevention. That was a great strategy, Mr. Speaker, because we know that prevention is a great investment. It saves us money in the long run in our health care costs. Also, it helps with that sense of well-being for the people of the Province. We do have some significant health problems in our Province with chronic disease, with diabetes, with cardiovascular problems, and with obesity. Their health and wellness plan was a great, exciting program that was going to save us health care costs in the long run.

They developed Nalcor, the people's energy company. The current Minister of Finance was instrumental. Mr. Speaker, I have to give him credit, he was instrumental in helping to develop some of the most wonderful programs in justice and health; the creation of special courts like the Mental Health Court, and the Family Violence Intervention Court.

The current Minister of Finance championed, Mr. Speaker, the needs of people who needed mental health and addictions services and programs. I even saw him as a hero. I saw him as a hero for the great work that he did. We would stop and talk in the grocery store about the problems that the people of the Province faced, and also about the new possibilities and some of the solutions.

It was a golden era. It was very exciting, and there were jobs. There were good jobs with security; there were jobs with a future. There were more jobs in the public sector, but not jobs for the sake of creating jobs. They were jobs because they were serving the people of the Province. They were jobs that were providing essential services, again, for the well-being of the people and the well-being of our economy which are not mutually exclusive.

There were jobs for our young people, Mr. Speaker, our young people who wanted to serve the people through the public service. Bright young people who wanted to be part of building this have Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that we were all dreaming about. We

were all willing to go along with the ride; a Province with prosperity and promise.

There was a youth retention strategy. People were hired in this public service to deliver these programs and services to the people of the Province. Our young people were feeling hopeful. Some of them were coming back home, some of them were thinking about coming back home. People were coming back home. Yes, Newfoundland and Labrador was open for business. It was exciting.

Now, Mr. Speaker, something has happened. Something has ground to a halt. What has happened? I cannot help but ask what has happened? With all of this prosperity, with all of this promise and now we have ground to a halt. We see that there is upwards of 2,000 job loses, maybe even more when we take into account the number of jobs we are losing in the non-profit sector who are affected. –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

We see these upwards of 2,000 jobs that are lost, jobs that are devastating to the people who have lost their jobs. It affects not just individuals, it affects their families, it affects their community, and it affects their places of work. It affects the services they were providing to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The far-reaching effects of these job losses are enormous. It is undeniable and we still even have not seen the full roll out of it.

Also, we have not seen the full roll out of the jobs that are affected by people in the non-profit sector who are providing excellent services in the area of mental health services, addiction services, and the employment programs. People who were delivering comprehensive services to people who are having a hard time finding work, comprehensive services that help them in their search for work and also help them, Mr. Speaker, in maintaining that work because for

some people it is tough. We all know that. We all know people who have had difficulties like that.

We are not just talking about the odd fringe people, because the people who were providing the Employment Assistance Services, there were a great number of them who were doing a great service in their community, a valuable service in their communities, getting people back to work, because that is really what we want to do. We want to provide services so that everybody can participate fully in this economic boom that we were having, in this prosperity that we were having. We are not talking about giving people money; we are talking about helping people, giving them a hand up so that they can participate in building the well-being of this Province, building the well-being of our economy.

We have not seen the full impact of all of these cuts in the different sectors, let alone the impacts on the people who are relying on services. What we saw, Mr. Speaker, with this Budget was a complete destabilization of our public service, of our workforce. There was stress and the thing is, Mr. Speaker, there was no plan. It certainly was not based on the core mandate reviews. We do not know what it was based on. We keep asking: Was there an economic impact analysis done on the cuts? Was there a gender based analysis on some of the services that have been cut? We do not know. What was it based on? We do not know that, Mr. Speaker. We really do not know. We keep asking for it and we do not have the information.

Mr. Speaker, community groups who delivered important programs in mental health and addictions supported by Health and Community Services, cut 12 per cent from already overstretched budgets and under paid staff, scrambling to somehow continue to provide their crucial services that they provide to the people. The privatization of our Adult Basic Education program, a program that is a basic education right – it is a basic education right for our people, Mr. Speaker, and every citizen has a right to an accessible and effective basic education provided by our public service.

Mr. Speaker, when I was in a grocery store the other night, a man came up to me - and he is an ABE student at the College of the North Atlantic - and he asked me: What are they doing? What are they going to do with our programs? He said: I have to tell you something. I started in January. I did not even know how to write my name. He started to cry, Mr. Speaker, right there in the grocery store. He said: I did not even know how to write my name. I was so ashamed and I was so afraid. I can write and I can read. It is because those teachers knew what they were doing and they gave me all the support I needed to learn and there is not going to be anything to stop me; I am going to keep on learning because I want to work. It was really moving, Mr. Speaker. Those are the people who are so negatively impacted by this Budget.

Then, Mr. Speaker, when we saw the cut initially to the Waterford centre ABE program – and I am glad to see that is reversed; they will have that program still in the Waterford centre. Such a basic program that is so needed and I am so happy that the government has decided to leave that in place. We will see yet how that rolls out with the instructors.

Housing: \$10 million cut to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation in a time when Newfoundland and Labrador has never experienced such a housing crunch. It is nothing short of a crisis, Mr. Speaker. Rents are still skyrocketing, a zero per cent vacancy rate – we know part of that is in response to the resource development that is happening in different parts of our Province. We know that is creating a housing shortage. We know that drives the prices up.

At this time, when the government should actually be looking at helping to alleviate that problem, in fact what they have done is they are washing their hands of it. They have cut \$10 million and it is affecting rent supplements. We are not going to have any additional rent supplements, even though all the rent supplements are used.

People are calling us, senior citizens and single people, and these are not people who are

homeless on the streets or who you think of as typically homeless, but in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is our grandmothers and our grandfathers, and our aunts and our uncles. It is people whose retirement income is so low, who really are not getting any increases, yet the cost of shelter are going up, the cost of heat is going up, the cost of transportation is going up, and the cost of food is going up. Some of that is a reflection of our prosperity, but that prosperity is going sideways. It is not trickling down. It is not making its way down into the pockets of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It seems to be just moving across to the people who already have a lot.

Mr. Speaker, to imagine that with this \$10 million cut to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, they cut the Residential Energy Efficiency Program in half, when governments world-wide, in fact, are helping their citizens to make their homes more energy efficient. Our government does exactly the opposite. It is so regressive. This is not a Progressive Conservative government, Mr. Speaker. This is a regressive; it is a step backwards.

Again, when we had all of that hope, when it looked so good, when we were all lured into the promise and to the hope of something so great, that everything was going to be able to take part in it – that was the thing, as well, that there was a promise that everybody was going to share in this, everybody was going to take part in it and it is ground to a halt.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that this government promised young working families a home ownership assistance program, and we are not seeing that at all. There is nothing in this Budget for that at all. There is nothing to help working families purchase their first home. We know how important that purchase is, Mr. Speaker, because it builds up family equity and we know how important it is to have family equity. It builds up family wealth, it gives people options, and it gives people possibilities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus a little bit now on the cuts to justice and we have talked about the cuts to legal aid and to the Sheriff's Office, but one program I would really like to

focus on right now is the Family Violence Intervention Court. The Family Violence Intervention Court was a court that finally understood the dynamics of family violence. It was a court that was initiated through the Poverty Reduction Strategy and it was working well. It had experts in so many areas. They had a trained judge, trained prosecutor, trained legal aid lawyers, and trained social workers and counsellors to really help make this a comprehensive program.

One of the things about this program is that it was successful, it did what it set out to do, which is such a wonderful thing. They spent so much money, Mr. Speaker, and so much time and expertise on developing this Family Violence Intervention Court and the women's community were part of consulting around it, the police were, they had support from everyone and one of the wonderful things is that the number showed that it reduced recidivism.

There have been numbers floating around about how many people actually used the court. Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is quite more than what the Minister of Justice had said to us. In fact, we know that there were at least twenty-eight cases that completed going through the court this year and another twenty-three or twenty-one that were in process. So, far more, over double what the Minister of Justice had led us to believe when he was reporting on the numbers, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things about the Family Violence Intervention Court is that in order for a family to go through this court and take advantage of the services of the court, the offender had to admit his or her guilt, and for the most part the offenders were males. They had to admit their guilt. Right away they were given a legal aid lawyer. They did not even have to apply for legal aid. Right away they were given treatment, and they had to agree to treatment. The research has shown, Mr. Speaker, the closer that treatment is started, the closer to the incident of offence, the far better likelihood that the treatment is effective.

Mr. Speaker, from the time of offence to the time of completion of the case was eight months. Whereas in a regular court system it is at least two years, and then the offender does not even get counselling until at the end of the case. At the end of sentencing, only then do they receive treatment. That is two years, Mr. Speaker, from the time of the offence.

The other thing about this is that the woman is not taken on the stand and torn apart, and her children are not taken on the stand and torn apart, whereas in a regular court system the woman can be tortured on the stand, even though she is the victim, and she is re-victimized again and again and again. With this court system that was not necessary. In the long run it saves us money, Mr. Speaker, because this is dealt with expeditiously, it is dealt with in an efficient manner, and in a manner that reduces the rate of recidivism. For the most part, as well, families who choose to go this route are young families who want to stay together.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is inconceivable as to why this government has decided to just chop and close that court. It is a court that added protection and safety to women. It is a court that was so supported by the entire legal community.

Mr. Speaker, I think what this Budget has done is given a message to our young people. We are closed for business, there is no plan. They are saying now that they are going to do a 10-Year Sustainability Plan. We have not seen it. They have been at the helm for ten years. They should have had one by now. They should have had that starting ten years ago.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Budget of broken promises. These cuts were made in panic with no plans; no plans to develop, no plans for the cuts. It is an austerity Budget, Mr. Speaker. We know, and Europe knows that austerity does not lead to prosperity. It does not. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite.

Many of these cuts were inconceivable. They make no sense for the prosperity agenda that this government has. They have created chaos.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member that her time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I was speaking earlier and the Member for Humber East jumped up like a jack-in-the-box. I guess if he wants to do it again he can jump up again but I am not going to stay quiet. I am not going to stop talking about that hospital in Corner Brook. If he wants to interrupt me as much as he like, he can go right ahead, I can guarantee you that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I made a statement here tonight and I am going to say it again. I am willing to bet this House is going to close before Thursday because there are major cuts coming in health care. Mark my words, there are major cuts coming in health care and they want this House closed, Mr. Speaker. They want this House closed because they do not want to have to put up with the health care cuts that are coming down.

Mark my words, Mr. Speaker, by the time Thursday comes around we will be heading home with the whistle-blower legislation not done. We have not even discussed the family care giving policy that was supposed to be in here months and months ago. It was promised in 2011. There is a lot that we can talk about. Mark my words, Mr. Speaker, Thursday we will be gone. There will be probably one more piece of legislation brought in here and that is it.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say it is confirmed. Yvonne Jones is the MP for Labrador. All the polls are in now, Mr. Speaker. All the polls are in, so I congratulate Yvonne.

Mr. Speaker, I will not go back to the pellet plant in Roddickton because I think I explained that. That it was not me who brought all the issues forward, it was the Auditor General. Any time anybody wants to check and see about all the details, why the money should not have been approved, \$11 million, if you do not want to listen to me read the Auditor General's report. The Minister of Natural Resources, I told him I will supply him a copy.

Mr. Speaker, I was speaking about the hospital in Corner Brook again, something that is very near to my heart. I asked this question on many occasions and the Member for Humber West and the Member for Humber East can answer it because obviously I cannot get the answers. How many surgeries were cancelled because of a lack of acute care beds? How many?

Mr. Speaker, there is something here, and I know the Member for St. John's South said something very, very startling. When he was up and spoke, he was talking about the fiasco in Abitibi when it was taken over, when they expropriated the Abitibi mill –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: - when it was done by mistake. The startling revelation he made is that the backbenchers were not given all the information. That is coming from a backbencher at the time who said he voted for it but he was not getting all the information.

I ask the Member for Humber West, do you have all the information on the hospital in Corner Brook? If you do –

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask the member to direct his comments to the Chair, please, and not engage members on the opposite side directly.

MR. JOYCE: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

I would love to know if the Member for Humber West is aware of how many surgeries have been cancelled in Corner Brook in the last six to eight

months. I would love to know if he is aware of the readmission rate in Western Newfoundland as compared to the rest of the provinces in Canada. I would love to know.

Mr. Speaker, these are things that we need to know. I would love to know if has seen both of the engineering studies, the Stantec report and the Hatch Mott MacDonald. If he did, Mr. Speaker, produce it so everybody in Corner Brook can see it. Produce it. It is a great opportunity for all of us to work together on something because if I go on what the Member for St. John's South – I am willing to bet that the members out there, from out in the Western region have no idea what is going on with it. They have no idea.

Mr. Speaker, when the report was committed to be given to me as the Member for the Bay of Islands by the Minister of Transportation and Works, I take that member on his word. Mr. Speaker, in this House we are all hon. members. We are all hon. members in this House. So when I am told I will be given those two reports –

MR. DAVIS: Show me Hansard.

MR. JOYCE: The Minister of Transportation and Works is saying show me Hansard. I will get you Hansard. If I can get you Hansard will you promise this time to fulfil your commitment to get the reports? Because it is not hard to bring you down to the taped sessions and you can listen to it.

Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of thing that I am fighting with here, as if given what is going to be put in Corner Brook there is something wrong. Letting people out there, health care providers and people who can make an informed, educated decision, there is something wrong with giving people the information.

That is what I miss, Mr. Speaker. I have no idea, and it eludes me why people think that you should hide information. If you hide information you can go out and sell whatever bill of goods you want. Not with me, Mr.

Speaker, because I learned from this government you have to ask questions.

Mr. Speaker, take the family caregivers. That was promised in 2011. That was a program that was committed in 2011 to us. The people of this Province voted for this government. One of the reasons why a lot of them voted for it is because of that commitment by the Premier. I might add, by the Premier of this Province to that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, we were told back about a year ago, yes, it is coming. We were told six or eight months ago yes, very, very soon. Mr. Speaker, we are told now, I think it is \$6.1 million or \$6.2 million in the Budget for the family caregiver budget. Guess what? We have to vote on a bill, the Budget bill in this House of Assembly, for the family care program and we cannot even debate it here in the House of Assembly. So we have to stand up and put our hands up and say, yes, we will vote for that, when there is \$6.1 million or \$6.2 million and you are taking it, putting it aside, we do not even know how it is going to be spent. We have no idea. You do not have input into the decision, but you have to vote and say yes, it is okay to put \$6.1 million into it, Mr. Speaker.

I would love to see the program; I think it is a great program. I would love to see put in place what was committed to, Mr. Speaker. Everybody in this Province felt that when the Premier was elected, she was going to live up to the political commitment she made to have a family care program where you could stay home and take care of your loved ones. That was the commitment made by this government, Mr. Speaker. That was the commitment that was said many times in this House: We will deliver. Guess what? Now we are told there is \$6.1 million or \$6.2 million put aside for that, but we cannot see the program. So these are the kinds of things of why I think we should keep the House open. This is why I think we should keep the House open, Mr. Speaker.

I will just bring up another issue that is prevalent on the West Coast – and I am sure the Member for Humber West hears about it – it is lack of

doctors. Now, I am not standing here to say that there was not a recruitment plan done and there are not a lot of doctors in Western Newfoundland, but I can say there is a shortage of doctors. We are all getting e-mails from Western Newfoundland from people who are looking for doctors. I think the list is up now to 2,500 to 3,000 people without a doctor. I am not saying that it is an easy thing to do to recruit doctors. I am not saying that government is not trying their best. I am not saying Western Health is not trying their best to recruit doctors. What I am saying is that we have to try to revamp it some way, because we need more doctors out in Western Newfoundland, and in the Corner Brook region.

This is where we all have to work together. It is easy to stand up and say oh, we spent this amount and we did this, we did that, we spent another \$4 million or \$5 million – it is just not enough right now. It is just not enough. There are a lot of people who contact me through e-mail – and I know members opposite are getting some of these same e-mails, that people cannot get a family doctor. They just cannot get a family doctor. So we have to collectively find some way, if it is not working now, to see what we can do to try to recruit more doctors for Western Newfoundland.

I am sure there are other issues. I am sure there are people in other districts with the same concerns, Mr. Speaker. As a person from the Bay of Islands who receives many calls, I have to bring that issue forward to ensure that someday members opposite, the government side, cannot say well, that is the first we heard of it, or you did not bring that up before. We have to find a way to work together to get it done. Mr. Speaker, just throwing money at it is not the way it is going to work all the time. It is just not working.

That is another thing I urge the government, to try to work with the health authorities to try to find some way for doctors. We need more doctors.

Mr. Speaker, I am not here casting aspersions or blame. I know it is difficult. I know how hard it

is to recruit and I know the world market for doctors – and I know, even in Canada, it is hard to get doctors, but we have to try to find something different, find a different way, work a bit harder or to recruit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, who are going through the program here at MUN, try to get them to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a major concern, Mr. Speaker.

I know the school boards are another big issues out in Western Newfoundland and all throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The big issue that you hear when people talk about the school boards in Newfoundland and Labrador is the lack of consultation. It is the actual lack of consultation. I think the meeting tonight that they had at the Avalon school board they rescinded the motion and opened the schools.

MR. BENNETT: No, and then closed them again.

MR. JOYCE: Closed them again.

Mr. Speaker, we heard from the media tonight that they rescinded the motion. Are they going to have consultations? They are going to have some consultations which should have been done prior. We saw here, Mr. Speaker, the lack of consultation. They passed a motion – from my understanding the school board did have a legal opinion saying that the proper consultation would hold up in court, but I guess they felt somehow there where parents out there in Whitbourne who wanted to stand up for their rights – congratulations to them; they stood up for their rights. They felt that they were not properly heard, they sought legal advice and because of the pressure, Mr. Speaker, they rescinded their motion. They are going to have public consultations and who knows what is going to happen then.

You take it on a bigger scale, when you take the four school boards in the Province, you are going to amalgamate them into one and keep the other one, the French board, and amalgamate them into one without any consultation –

without any consultation whatsoever. It is just going to be taken and put into one.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the minister talk about the schools: Well, we can do it in St. John's. Well, if it is so good, why didn't you do it two or three years ago? Why did you have to wait for such a financial crunch that you found your government in because of mismanagement, why did you have to wait for a financial crunch to do the right thing? Do you know why? It is not being done because it is the right thing to do; it is done because of the financial crunch.

They are saying: How can we save some funds here? We saw a couple of indications here in the last little while of this government and some departments talking about the financial crunch.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the protection.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about some funds being wasted. Let us talk about the \$150,000 communication plan that we cannot get to see. There is a communication plan that was taken by this government, \$150,000; we cannot see it because of Bill 29.

This is what I admire about the Minister of Finance. You may not like some of the stuff he says, but he is going to say it. When he stood up today and said no, Cabinet, Bill 29 – when we stood here and discussed Bill 29 every member stood up and said Bill 29 will not affect what is going to happen in Cabinet. What did the minister say today? He was honest. He said it would not come out because of Bill 29 because we are using it in Cabinet. We said that would happen. We said they are going to take it and use it in Cabinet. Guess what? It was done.

AN HON. MEMBER: That is not true.

MR. JOYCE: I hear the member who loves sneakers, the Member for Mount Pearl South, over there saying something. He loves sneakers.

I guess he might go kiss a few sneakers, Mr. Speaker, but if he wants to say something, saying it is not true, it is in Hansard again. Then you go back and read about Bill 29, I would say to the member, if you want to, go back and check. Mr. Speaker, we said it was going to happen, this Bill 29, Mr. Speaker, and sure enough it did. I have to say.

MR. COLLINS: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: I say to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs – he said: Who wrote that? I do not know. It must be someone from Moldova; I can say that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on a serious note there is – I guess I have to ask: This \$150,000 communication strategy, did that include stacking all the polls on *VOCM*, *The Telegram*, *The Western Star*, and *CBC*? Was that part of the strategy to have the caucus call in and stack all of the polls? I would love to see the strategy just to see if it was. I would love to know because that is the strategy that came about in the last year or year-and-a-half, phoning into all of the polls, pushing as many keys as you can. It is funny. That would be nice to know, Mr. Speaker.

MR. F. COLLINS: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: I say to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the day that this member has to stack a poll about the coalition of disabilities, it is time for me to move on. If I have to stack a poll against the coalition of disabilities I would move on. If I think that is what I have to do because what I am doing is wrong, it is time for me to move on.

If the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs wants to stand up and say better than us, I say you can do it. I will not be doing it. I would not do that, and I think most members opposite would not. I am sure there are some who did, but most members opposite would agree with me, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I hear some people over there harping, trying to get at me again and I refuse. I look at the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the only thing – I will say to the minister, with the fiscal arrangement that the municipalities need I think we all collectively have to get something done. There are a lot of good things happening in Municipal Affairs, I will be the first to say.

If you ever want to ask one thing to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and this is what I admire about the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr. Speaker, you may not like the answer but he will give it to you, and that is all you can ask for. That is all you can ask for. You may not like it, but you will get it.

If I had any wish for the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I would love for him to go to the Department of Health so I can get the answers on the hospital in Corner Brook. That is what I would like, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: There would be no prouder man, Mr. Speaker, than me if I could get that minister over to the Department of Health, or even the Minister of Finance. If he was in the Department of Health I would not be going around begging and clawing for information on the hospital, I guarantee you that. I would get the information. I might not like it. I might not agree with it. I might have to debate about it, but I would get it. When people get the information they can make an informed decision, Mr. Speaker, and that is what I am saying about a lot of this stuff.

MS SULLIVAN: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: The Minister of Health said I might not understand it. Minister, I might not understand it – Mr. Speaker, you can tell the minister, I might not but there are a lot of educated people in Western Newfoundland. You may not know it, I say to the Minister of Health, but there are a lot of educated people in Western Newfoundland. There are people who understand a hospital design.

There are people who can understand acute care beds. There are people who can understand that their mother or father had to wait and the surgery was cancelled. There are a lot of people in Western Newfoundland who can understand when they are rushed out of hospital because of not enough beds.

There are a lot of people, Mr. Speaker, who realize there are not enough services when they get out of hospital and they have to be readmitted. There are a lot of people in Western Newfoundland who can understand it. You may say I do not, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot who can. So, to make a statement like that, it is awful derogatory to the people of Western Newfoundland who are asking me, as their MHA, to find out what is going on with the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I still remember the private meeting the Premier had with the council, and I had it confirmed by three councillors: If the hospital is \$400 million to \$500 million, it is not on. It is not on. I challenged the Member for Humber West to stand up four or five times and deny it. It never happened.

When Councillor Leo Bruce, a good friend of the Member for Humber East –

MR. GRANTER: She was saying a billion last year.

MR. JOYCE: I know she was, I agree with you. The Premier was saying a billion.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: I agree with the Member for Humber West.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: It was the Member for Humber East, Mr. Speaker, who was saying that it was going to be \$752 million. If you want me, I will table it.

Mr. Speaker, when Councillor Leo Bruce, a good friend of the Member for Humber East,

and the Member for Humber West, too, I might add, at the PC golf tournament – I can show you a picture of him and the Premier standing up – he had to stand up for the hospital in Corner Brook and say: Here is what the Premier said. That is not what was committed to here in this place.

I will say to the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, if you say that I do not understand, that is saying to the people of Western Newfoundland, it is no good to give you any information you do not understand it. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, saying you cannot understand it? Something as major as the hospital, we should sit down and have an informed decision, but you cannot get the information because you will not understand it.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that I heard in this House, I will tell you, that is one of the – then again, I will challenge them. There is a public meeting Wednesday night at the Local 64. Go out to the public meeting and let the people have their say. The people will be there, let them have their say, Mr. Speaker, because I can tell you one thing, if you do not think I can understand it, I challenge the Minister of Health to walk out to the public meeting and say I will not give you the information because you cannot understand it. Mr. Speaker, guess what? She will not be on any flight Wednesday afternoon.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It is good, finally, to speak to the main motion, having spoken twice already in the Budget debate. I think it is quite significant, Mr. Speaker, that we are finishing the main motion

after midnight when many people are in bed. People who might normally watch us are now gone to bed, and under the cover of darkness, as I once said with regard to this government, under the cover of darkness we are here having our final debate on the Budget and will be voting on this Budget.

I can understand why this government does not want the majority of people in this Province to be listening while we are doing this tonight, and I can understand why they do not want them to be watching when we are voting on this Budget, because they have to be ashamed of this Budget, Mr. Speaker. They have to be ashamed of it. They cannot be proud of this Budget. I would find it absolutely impossible for them to look me in the eye and tell me that they are.

No matter where I go, no matter where I am going in the city, no matter where I have gone in the Province since this Budget was brought down on March 26, people are coming to me, people are speaking and people are saying: What is it about? What were they thinking? This cannot be happening.

That message is coming in e-mails. It is coming in phone messages. It is coming from people when I meet them one on one. It is coming from people in all walks of life. It is coming from people in all kinds of professions. It is coming from trade skills people. It is coming from people at the university. It is coming from business people. It is coming from all over the Province, Mr. Speaker. People cannot understand what this government was thinking.

They understand deficit. They understand having to deal with reality, but, Mr. Speaker, just as Dr. Wade Locke warned this government, and he said it publicly: Go slowly, take it easy. They ignored it. Well, the people in the Province are saying the same thing, how could they have come down with such a sledgehammer the way that they have?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of evidence that this government and the people sitting on the other side of this House from us, that they do not want to hear what people are saying because I do

not think they want to be in touch with the reality of what the impact of the Budget is. We are getting all kinds of e-mails from people who will say in their e-mail, I have –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: They will be copying every single MHA on that e-mail and they will say I have written this e-mail before. I have written it to every single MHA in the House of Assembly and only two or three people have responded. Then they wait for a response from the government side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and the response still does not come.

The e-mail I had today, Mr. Speaker, was from a gentleman describing – I spoke about him in here in the House a few weeks ago who is having a real difficult time with a medical situation. This time, he said, I am only writing to the three who responded to me because nobody from the government side of the House – I think one person had responded to him - they do not respond to people.

We get e-mails from people who say my MHA will not respond; my MHA will not answer. I had an e-mail even this afternoon, another one: Thank you so much, Ms Michael. Thank you for listening. Thank you for hearing – this was a home care worker. My MHA has not responded to me. Of course her MHA, Mr. Speaker, was somebody from the government side of the House.

They do not want to hear what people are saying. No wonder they can make fun of us when we talk about the impact on over 1,000 people who lost their jobs. No wonder they can mock us when we talk about the home care support workers who are going to be losing their jobs. No wonder they can mock when my colleague, the Member for St. John's Centre, talks about the Family Violence Intervention Court.

They do not want to hear the reality of what has happened to people because of this Budget. I

mean it really boggles the mind. We are elected by the people of the Province and we have to stay in touch with their reality as members in this House. It does not matter what side of the House you are on. They, Mr. Speaker, will not even answer e-mails from people. Not just people in general, but not even from their own constituents. We are continually, on a daily basis, getting that message from people.

Mr. Speaker, I have been trying to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

Since March 26, Mr. Speaker, I have been trying to figure it out myself. I have been trying to answer the question, what is going on here? What has happened? I have not agreed with a lot of things over the past years this government does but I have never had the reaction before to a Budget the way I have had it to this one.

The Budget itself is broken. The Budget is broken and I have kept asking why, why, why? What can be the reason for this? Why have they gone so far?

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the question: Is this the price for the loan guarantee for Muskrat Falls? Is that the price that we are paying? Because, Mr. Speaker, what they are doing is copying everything that Stephen Harper is doing on the federal level, everything that he is doing. The loss of jobs in the public service sector when Stephen Harper –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: I can remember when we had discussions in this House, and the point was raised: How many jobs are being lost in the federal government? How many jobs are being lost in this Province in federal offices? They were upset about it. Well, they are not upset

now when the jobs that are being lost are the ones that they have knocked off.

Everything that is happening, Mr. Speaker, is the same as what Stephen Harper is doing. I have to ask the question: Is that the price of the loan guarantee? You follow the policies that I am doing here in Ottawa. You make sure that you start doing more debt repayment. You make sure that you bring the public service sector down to bare bones. You make sure that you start doing cuts in education and health care and development. You make sure that economic policy is your priority, not the people of the Province. Because that is Stephen Harper and that is what this Budget is all about.

Whether the government wants me to say it or not, Mr. Speaker, it does not matter, but that is what people are saying to me. I do not have to say it to them. They do not want to hear that what we are saying is what the people are saying. They do not want to hear that. They do not want to listen to that. They do not want to believe that.

Person after person after person is saying to me, all they are doing is copying Stephen Harper. It is the people in the Province who are saying to me, this has to be because of the loan guarantee. Once again, I repeat, Mr. Speaker, it is what I said in the very beginning, people from all walks of life, older people, younger people, professional people, people with skilled trades, retired people, men, women, everybody is saying the same thing and they do not want to hear it.

Mr. Speaker, I have been thinking over the last few days and saying, what is it about this that feels familiar? What feels familiar is what we went through on a global level. This government accused me earlier today, some of the members across the way said I must not understand global reality and global economics. I understand it very well, actually. I have been involved in doing analysis on an economic level, on a global level, economic analysis for the past forty years. It has always been part of my work.

I remember in the 1980s and 1990s, Mr. Speaker, what we were dealing with in the work that I was doing, was dealing with what was going on globally. It was called the Structural Adjustment Programs. The Structural Adjustment Programs are programs of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It was the way they dealt with developing countries that were heavily in debt. What they did was, they said you play the game our way and you will get money, but only if you play it our way.

The structural adjustments they brought in, Mr. Speaker – that was what they called them. It was a euphemism. The structural adjustments they brought in were exactly the kinds of things that are in this Budget.

First of all, saying you have too many people in government, you have too many people working in government. You have to pare down government. You are spending too much money on education. You are spending too much money on health care. You have to pare down. You are spending too much money on development that you think is good development. We are telling you it is not. You are going to have to follow the economic policies we are telling you that you have to follow.

It finally struck me. That is exactly what is going on with this government, Mr. Speaker. The policies they are into are the same policies of the Structural Adjustment Programs that happened in the 1980s and 1990s. Because they have made economic policy their number one, that is why we have this kind of Budget that we have today.

We heard that today from the Premier, when the Premier gave the statement that she did with regard to attending the Offshore Technology Conference in Houston. She said: “we continue to make strategic investments in our offshore, to grow this industry, to build our prospects, because there are still many benefits lying under the ocean floor, waiting for us to harvest.”

Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with having things developed, with having our (inaudible) developed –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: - but when the government makes a priority of the investment in what is happening under the floor of the ocean and its priority is Muskrat Falls, then, Mr. Speaker, we get decision making that ignores the present need of people.

What happened with developing countries where Structural Adjustment Programs were brought in, Mr. Speaker, is that bringing in these policies of cutting in health care and education, of laying people off, of putting their priority in economic policy instead of in the needs of the people, ended up in having more poor people, ended up in having poverty increase in those countries. That is what we are going to have happen here in this Province.

For example, this Budget did not even think about increasing Income Support. At a time when people, Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis – as has been pointed out earlier this evening by my colleague for St. John’s Centre as well, on a daily basis people are being hit with the greater expense for food, in particular, and everything else that has to do with the cost of living in this Province.

The people, Mr. Speaker, were not even thought about. They did not even think about people who have been living on Income Support. It is fine for us, we all make good salaries, but people who live on Income Support are being dealt with the extreme rise in the cost of living and they have the same amount of money that they had four years ago. It does not make sense, Mr. Speaker.

What they are doing is putting economic policy ahead of the people. They have been wanting to say, and they have been pushing the fact, that investing in Muskrat Falls is not going to affect anything. Investing in Muskrat Falls, for

example, is not going to affect our debt. Investing in Muskrat Falls is an investment in the future. The investment in Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker, takes billions of dollars of cash out of our hands. The money becomes an asset in Muskrat Falls, but it is not really helping out debt load, which I do not think is a problem personally right now and it is not helping us in terms of meeting our needs.

What they are doing is putting money in the future and in a future that they have not proven to the Province really exists. That is the part that is really awful, Mr. Speaker, is that they voted for Muskrat Falls and for everything else happening there based on a fantasy right now, a fantasy with regard to where the market is going to be in ten years' time, a fantasy with regard to what the cost of electricity is going to be based on – not based at all, actually, on a sound economic analysis.

From one perspective, it is. The federal government will not lose as the loan guarantor. It will not lose if anything goes wrong, but we will. For example, Mr. Speaker, if our costs for Muskrat Falls increase by \$1 billion, which is quite possible – and it has been projected by people who are in the know that it is absolutely likely that it will go up by maybe \$2 billion or \$3 billion from where we are right now. For every \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, that is another \$350 million in equity that this government will have to pay. We know that the money for the equity in Muskrat Falls is going to be coming from loans.

As I pointed out the other night in this House, we know from this Consolidated Revenue Fund that since 2003 this government has taken on \$2 billion in loans. The loans for Muskrat Falls are going to be other billions of dollars on top of that. Yet, they say that Muskrat Falls is not going to affect us; it is not going to affect our debt. That is nonsense, Mr. Speaker, and they know it. They have themselves so convinced that this is the way to go that they have been blinded. They have blinkers on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: People see it and people say it, and people are not being blinded by it.

As I said once before in this House, Mr. Speaker, I hope, even probably more than they do because I have such a fear, I do hope that Muskrat Falls will be the success that they say; because if not, what is going to happen in this Province is going to be devastating economically. We are already devastated because this government does not know how to plan.

The reason we have the Budget that we have, Mr. Speaker, is because they have not planned.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: Just as Dr. Wade Locke told them, take it easy, slow down, spread what you have to do over maybe a ten-year period, and plan. They should have done that upfront as well. When the billions were rolling in, they should have been thinking, let's do a ten-year plan. Let's look at what needs to happen in education. Let's look at what needs to happen in health care. Let's make home care part of our system, but let's do a ten-year plan and show, over a ten-year period, how we can slowly work towards that. That is not how they have done it, Mr. Speaker.

They have done decision making based on we have so much this year, we will spend it. Next year if we do not have it, we will borrow, and that is the way that it has been. We have had surplus deficit, surplus deficit – they know that and they think the people do not know it. The people do know it. The people are smart. I would hope that we believe that the people in the Province are smart and the people know that what they are saying is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS MICHAEL: They know that. So, no matter how much spin the government does and no

matter how much twisting and turning they do with words, the people in the Province know the reality, Mr. Speaker.

That is why I will not be able to vote for the Budget that they have brought to this House because the Budget is not a Budget for the people of the Province. The Budget is a Budget for their plans, for their economic policy, and for something that we cannot even figure out where they are going. That is the problem, we cannot even figure out where they are going.

How they can possibly think that taking over 1,000 people out of the workforce in this Province which depends on the public service sector and not have an impact, is unbelievable. How they can believe that taking ABE, Adult Basic Education, away from people where we have the high level of illiteracy that we have and that that will not have an effect, is ludicrous.

Their push, Mr. Speaker, towards privatization is frightening and that was another feature of the Structural Adjustment Program, privatization – something else that Stephen Harper believes in, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this week, I made the comment that this Budget was their omnibus bill. I am going to go further tonight. This Budget is not their omnibus bill, such as Stephen Harper's was; this Budget is a real Stephen Harper Budget.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development, that we do adjourn debate on this motion at this point in time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded the debate do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you.

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

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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