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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.

MR. MCGRATH: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works, on a point of order.

MR. MCGRATH: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Yesterday, during our Question Period I committed that I would table some documents today, and I would like to table those now, please, on Humber Valley Paving.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order. There is a place on the agenda for tabling of documents, but there is no point of order.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Lewisporte; the Member for the District of Baie Verte – Springdale; the Member for the District of Lake Melville; the Member for the District of Bay of Islands; the Member for the District of St. John's North; and the Member for the District of Mount Pearl South.

The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an outstanding athlete and citizen of Lewisporte. Michael Austin is a Special Olympian who began life with many physical challenges.

Over the course of his lifetime he has undergone in excess of sixty operations. Sports became the love of his life as he competed in bowling and track and field, accumulating over 100 medals. He has received a Newfoundland Athlete of the Year award, the Male Athlete of the Year award, and too many sportsmanship awards to count.

He has competed in regional, provincial, and national Special Olympic events.

Mike specializes in the 100, 200, and 400 metre races, the shot put, the long jump, and also in snowshoe racing. Michael earned the name "Awesome Mike" for his kind team spirit, and for his uncanny ability to help pick up teammates when they are discouraged or they need some extra cheer to get them going.

In 2013 I had the privilege of presenting Michael with the Queen's Jubilee for outstanding contributions to his community. Recently, Michael was chosen to represent Newfoundland and Labrador at the National Summer Olympics in Vancouver.

Honourable colleagues, please join with me in congratulating a wonderful athlete, a terrific individual, and a great example for all of us to follow – Mike Austin.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the Springdale Pee Wee I hockey team. They captured the gold medal at the provincial championships, hosted by Stephenville on Easter weekend by edging Conception Bay Regionals 2-1 in the heart-stopping championship game. Springdale went undefeated in the six-team tournament.

Teams vying for the coveted title were: Bay d'Espoir, Stephenville, Clarendville, Lab West, Conception Bay Regional, and Springdale.

Members of the teams include: Colton Boyde, Alex Oxford, Joey Sparkes, Madison Tizzard, Jake Tizzard, Jake Matthews, Isaiah Shears, Riley Burt, Mitchel Downton, Lucas Mercer, Robbie Thomas, Josh Andrews, Erin Butt, Kyle Tuck, Christian Morgan, Victoria Hobbs-Regular, and Aaron Hull.

Coach Jason Sparkes and Manager Lori Spurrell are to be commended for their dedication and commitment to the development of these young hockey players. All teams displayed skill, hard work, and team play throughout the tournament.

In the championship game, fans were treated to a very intense and entertaining brand of hockey as the young budding players displayed their sizzling shots, precision passing, and super skating.

I invite all hon. members to join me in applauding the Springdale Pee Wee I hockey team for capturing the provincial title.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to recognize the graduating class from Eric G. Lambert School in Churchill Falls.

This past weekend, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure to attend their graduation in Churchill Falls. I got to meet a group of young adults who are certainly some of the brightest individuals you will ever meet. Each one has a great sense of humour, not to mention a down-to-earth personality that the community of Churchill Falls is well known for.

This year the graduating class consisted of Denika Blake, Kelsey Burry, Catherine Flynn, Kelsey Kent, Mark Marshall, Brooke Philpott, as well as Emily-Jane Clark Philpott and Nicholas Cheeseman who were this year's valedictorians. After meeting the class, Mr. Speaker, I am more than confident that they will go on to be great ambassadors of their town and make their friends and families very proud.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members of this House to join with me in recognizing the graduating class from Eric G. Lambert School in Churchill Falls.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize eleven-year-old, Jamie Hickey, of Benoit's Cove.

Jamie, a Grade 5 student at St. Peter's Academy in Benoit's Cove, won a gold medal in the Bantam Boys Singles Division of the 2014 Youth Bowling Canada Nationals held in Winnipeg this past weekend. He finished with an average of 186.21 over twenty-one games during the three-day championship.

Earlier this year, Jamie won the provincial boys singles with 878 five-game set earning him the opportunity to represent the Province at his first national's championship.

Mr. Speaker, Jamie practices twice a week and his passion and commitment to his sport is an example for all young athletes. Jamie's motto is that it is all about having fun, meeting new friends, and doing his personal best every time he plays.

Jamie is a great ambassador for the Town of Humber Arm South and St. Peter's Academy and he has demonstrated at a young age what can be accomplished when you work hard and are committed to what you do.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating Jamie on his gold medal win and wish him continued success in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize someone who – at a relatively young age – has accomplished much more than most.

Nineteen-year-old Caighlan Smith from St. John's has just completed her second year as an

English major at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Caighlan is also a published author of some note.

Her debut novel, a supernatural fantasy called *Hallow Hour*, was released just last September. Her second novel, *New Year*, will be released this month. This gives Caighlan the rare distinction of having not one, but two novels published before the age of twenty.

Caighlan has been a featured author at the Halifax Word on the Street Book Festival and an invited delegate at the Canada Council's National Forum on the Literary Arts.

Caighlan has also been invited to be a guest author at the Emerging Writers Festival in Melbourne, Australia, which takes place at the end of this month.

Caighlan decided she wanted to be a novelist at the age of nine. Ten years later – she is living her dream.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Caighlan Smith who teaches us that, with hard work and dedication, dreams do come true.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege to stand in this hon. House to speak about a great event which took place in my district this past Sunday evening. This event was hosted by the Kinsmen Club of Mount Pearl of which I am a proud member and was promoted as Celebrity Karaoke. This was a very successful venture which raised significant funds for three great charities: the K-Rock Children's Trust, the MS Society, and Cystic Fibrosis.

A big thank you to some wonderful corporate partners: Steele Communications, Tols Timeout Lounge, the Print Shop, and Browning Harvey

Limited, as well as to the many community-minded businesses who donated prizes for ticket draws and the silent auction. Also, a special thank you to all of the local celebrities who took part in entertaining the crowd including a number of media personalities, local entertainers, city councillors, community activists, as well as a number of members of this hon. House.

Finally, a huge congratulations and thank you to the members of the Kinsmen Club of Mount Pearl for the significant role they play in my community. Their efforts certainly do not go unnoticed and they are community heroes, each and every one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in the hon. House today to recognize Innovation Week 2014, the first week of its kind in the Province. Innovation Week brings together both private and public partners to share ideas and build upon the outstanding atmosphere of innovation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Innovation has a tremendous influence on our Province's social and economic development. Greater creativity invites new opportunities, new industries, and new accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the pleasure of opening Innovation Week at Common Ground, a unique space created by local entrepreneurs for local entrepreneurs to increase collaboration and share small business energy. Later this week I will attend the Innovation Outlook Conference, these events allow me to meet with the people who are making innovation happen, the creative

minds behind so many of our Province's success stories.

It was for these innovators and those they inspire that we created the *Innovation Lives Here* campaign. There are so many incredible stories emerging from all over the Province that demonstrate creativity and tenacity, and through the *Innovation Lives Here* campaign, our government has created a platform to celebrate those successes and acknowledge those who are excelling.

Mr. Speaker, since 2005, our government has invested approximately \$210 million to advance business and regional development and support growth and diversification. We also know that venture capital is critical for the development of innovation. Through Budget 2014, we announced we will invest in two Venture Capital Funds with \$10 million to support Build Ventures, and a commitment to establish a Venture Newfoundland and Labrador fund with angel investors and other venture capital shareholders.

By fostering innovation among young people, small and medium-sized businesses, research institutions, and traditional industries, we are making important investments in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially in rural communities where the strength of ventures is key to anchoring youth and driving population growth.

Mr. Speaker, this is an exciting time to live, work, and do business in Newfoundland and Labrador and innovation is a big part of that momentum. I invite all my hon. colleagues to congratulate all those involved in this year's Innovation Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians

are natural innovators, finding local solutions to many complex problems. We congratulate, as the Official Opposition, the partners who have worked hard to put together Innovation Week: the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Technology Industries, StartupNL, TEDxStJohns, CNA, NEIA, Genesis Centre, CME Newfoundland and Labrador, Common Ground, and others.

The events provide a great opportunity to showcase products such as the DemoCamp and expose youth to technology careers at a day-long conference for 400 Grade 9 students, as well as the NATI Knowledge Summit.

NATI has stated that the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, the technology sector, has 165 companies employing 3,990 people, at one point \$6 billion in revenue annually. That is quite significant. There are lots of opportunities and we have to celebrate the innovation in technology we have out there.

Government has a role to place greater emphasis on advancing our telecommunications, such as rural broadband, promoting further entrepreneurship in the tech sector, and encouraging everyone to work in greater collaboration so we can find solutions and do things better.

Congratulations.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement here today. I was quite pleased to see the government pushing ahead with the two initiatives in question: the Build Ventures program, as well as Venture Newfoundland and Labrador. I know these monies are in the Budget and I want to wish government all the luck in the world in pressing these things forward.

We are innovators in this Province, Mr. Speaker, and there is no finer example I can think of right now within the City of St. John's, a small example, if you will, but not very small in the extreme. It started off with three people at the Genesis Centre at MUN, and I am talking about Verafin; right now, 115 employees.

We know we can do it here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We know the government is trying to supply those tools. We will keep an eye on it to see exactly how it works out in the end, but I encourage everybody to get out there in Innovation Week and express your ideas to government, and government would be the matching partner in all this.

I want to wish the government, again, all the luck in the world with this, and express the sentiments of everybody that is out there. If you have an idea, approach government; they are there.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize the individuals honoured recently at Sport Newfoundland and Labrador's Stars and Legends Awards gala. The annual event welcomes the newest members into the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of Fame and also acknowledges athletic achievements in the Province over the past year.

It is an honour to congratulate this year's Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of Fame inductees – Colin Abbott, Lee Churchill, Max Kirby, Gerry Rideout, Andy Sullivan, and Ray Will. Mr. Speaker, this group has set a wonderful example for our Province's up-and-coming young athletes and our sports community in general, and I congratulate each of them on receiving this well-deserved honour.

In addition, Sport Newfoundland and Labrador also recognized the Province's top athletes for 2013. As highly accomplished athletes, coaches,

and executive members, these women and men continuously strive to reach their goals through dedication and perseverance. Cross-country runner Jillian Forsey, swimmer Owen Daly, soccer player Malorie Harris, rugby player Ciaran Hearn, soccer executive Jeff Babstock, volunteer David Coates, soccer coach Jack Stanford, and the St. John's Under 18A girls soccer team were all recognized as the best in their sport in 2013 and are to be commended for their passion and commitment to sport.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government is committed to supporting athletic excellence. We provide our provincial athletes, in particular our emerging young men and women, with opportunities to explore their potential in sport performance. We continue to provide support through the Premier's Athletic Awards Program, as well as the Elite Athlete Assistance Program, and the National Travel Subsidy Initiative.

Since the launch of *Active, Healthy Newfoundland and Labrador: A Recreation and Sport Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador*, approximately \$192 million has been committed to recreational sport and infrastructure, programming, and athlete development throughout our Province. Continued investment helps our athletes compete at their best elite level.

I invite all members to join me in congratulating this year's award recipients and inductees for their achievements, and applaud them for the vital role they play in the advancement of sport in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy, and congratulations on the first Ministerial Statement as the new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation. Good job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, people on this side of the House, also the Opposition, would like to congratulate all of the Hall of Fame inductees this past weekend. We know of a lot of their accomplishments over the years. It is great to be recognized by your fellow peers.

To all the athletes who won the Athlete of the Year Awards, congratulations, team sports congratulations. It shows a lot of hard work and dedication to get to that level in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I also would like to throw out a bouquet to a lot of the coaches, and a lot of the volunteers who help make these events happen, to the parents who bring the athletes back and forth. I too agree with the government that we need to support our young people in athletics. Anything we can do to keep people more active in sports. On the national stage, we are very competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to say that pretty soon we may have some great elite athletes out of McIver's. The former minister just sent out the \$15,000 capital grant recreation to the town of McIver's.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I thank the former minister for that because it is a great – with 110 students and athletes ready to go with the playground, Mr. Speaker, and all the parents, thirty-five parents ready, I say congratulations. It is what we need to do, is keep our young people active.

Congratulations to the minister. Good job to the new minister and keep up the work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I too thank the new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation for an advance copy of his statement, and congratulations. Bravo to all those honoured by their induction into the Hall

of Fame and for those recognized for being the best in their sport.

How wonderful to celebrate the passion, commitment, and excellence. They make us all proud. It is important to honour achievement but it is also important to ensure that all people have access to facilities and support to establish and reach of our own individual goals.

Most of us will never be the provincial best or get into a hall of fame but we can all find ways to stay active and benefit from that healthy activity. Access to fitness opportunities is a measure of a modern, healthy society. Government must support the many recreational facilities available in our Province so that everyone can benefit.

I myself play hockey on Sunday afternoon on a women's hockey league. We duke it out at St. Bon's arena. The last game I scored two goals with a little help from my friends – two. Bravo!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Bravo, bravo!

MS ROGERS: Of course, with a little help from my friends. No hall of fame for me, Mr. Speaker, no awards, but boy do I have fun. Bravo to our great athletes.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Transportation and Works has been in the media and in this House saying that there was a bond totalling \$9.5 million returned to Humber Valley Paving. In fact there were two bonds, Mr. Speaker, a performance bond and a labour and material bond totalling \$19 million plus HST.

I ask the minister: Minister, you either did not know that there were two bonds totalling \$19

million or you chose to paint a totally different picture, which is it?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when I was referring to the bond, I referred to the performance bond only because that was the bond that was brought up in the media, so that is the one I reacted to. There are two bonds, which I will be tabling later today. One is a labour and materials bond, the other is a performance bond.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: That is funny, Mr. Speaker, because yesterday I asked him about both bonds and he still referred to the bond for \$9.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious he did not know there were two bonds totalling \$19 million. In fact, in Estimates last night, I asked the minister about requirements under tenders issued by his department that contractors must complete a defined number of kilometres by September 30 of this year. He was not aware of that either and his officials had to come to his rescue.

I ask the minister: Don't you think that the lack of knowledge on bonds, the lack of knowledge on tenders is a clear display of your incompetence?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the numbers that the member from across the way is using are still baffling me. I do not know where he is getting his numbers.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the minister shows incompetence on bonds, he shows incompetence on his tenders. A performance bond is one thing and it is issued to ensure that work is completed. A labour and materials bond is entirely different.

I ask the minister: Do you now agree that, considering I asked the same questions yesterday, the labour and materials bond would protect suppliers and subcontractors of Humber Valley Paving?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now I will give the hon. member across the way a little lesson in bonds and what is in place and is still in place for the small businesses that deal through private enterprise. It is called a mechanics lien holdback, and that is still in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one thing, he did not read the labour and materials bond either because written right in there it says that subcontractors will be protected if the contractor defaults.

I ask the minister again: Is he going to read the labour and materials bond, and will he now confirm that bond would, in fact, have protected the subcontractors who are begging for payment from Humber Valley Paving?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the mechanics' lien holdback is in place to protect small businesses and if they choose to put a lien on a business, they do that on their own, and government has made sure that is in place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: That is also what the Labour and Materials Bond is for, and would have provided greater protection.

Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously felt it was important to protect Humber Valley Paving, cancelling the contract and returning the bonds, also propping up the value of that company, I may add; but the minister certainly did not think it was important to protect the suppliers of Humber Valley Paving, which the Labour and Materials bond would have done.

I ask: Why not?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday, I stated in the media and I will state again, first and foremost the first goal of this government was to protect the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The decisions that we made through my department, I think, did exactly that in protecting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the first goal of that minister was to protect Humber Valley Paving and the reasons are obvious.

I ask him why he did not protect the suppliers and the subcontractors using the Labour and Materials bond.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I will say that the mechanics' lien holdback is in place and if the small businesses choose to utilize that, that is what it is there for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the minister said yesterday that one of the reasons he cancelled the contract was to protect the future of Humber Valley Paving.

I ask the minister: Will he now provide a list of all contracts and bonds that have been cancelled by his government in the last five years?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I did not say that I was protecting Humber Valley Paving. I said that in the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MCGRATH: – interest of the priorities –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MCGRATH: The interest that we have is to protect the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, employ the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and protect Newfoundland and Labrador companies.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the minister acknowledged cancelling the two bonds, worth over \$19 million, to Humber Valley Paving as well as the contract.

Does he recognize the fact that by cancelling these bonds –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: – and the contract he has improved the financial position of Humber Valley Paving?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, once again, and as I stated yesterday, when I was making the decisions to terminate the contract, in mutual agreement with the contractor, the interest for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador was our first and foremost priority. We had a small window of opportunity to bundle some tenders together, and that is what we have done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the minister has acknowledged that there are two bonds that have been cancelled and a contract that has been cancelled, and these have improved the financial position of Humber Valley Paving. There is no arguing that.

I would ask him: Does he agree that improving the financial position now gave that company a competitive advantage over other companies in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my role as the Minister of Transportation and Works is to exactly govern the Transportation and Works issues within the Province. That is what I will continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Does he agree that cancelling the bonds and the contract, giving the company a competitive advantage, and improving their financial position has all resulted in increased share value for shareholders in Humber Valley Paving?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will say again that my first goal is to protect the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, do what is best for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and that is exactly what I have done in this particular case.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will he provide that list of contracts and bonds that have been cancelled by his government in the last five years?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I can certainly look into putting that together and I would have no problem once

I get all of that information tabling it here in the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Can the minister indicate a time period for which we can expect that information?

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

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will get it done as soon as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Gene Coleman approached the Minister of Transportation on March 13 and asked him to cancel the contract and forgive over \$19 million in bonds.

I ask the minister: What was your understanding of Frank Coleman's relationship with Humber Valley Paving at that time?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the contractor, HVP, through Gene Coleman, who was the spokesman at the time, did speak with my department and talked about terminating the contractor.

I have to say, just to clarify yesterday, that the words were minced around a little bit and I did not hear the member from across the way say the word prior. He used that to insinuate another thing. The first meeting I had with the Premier, the present Premier Marshall, concerning this contract was on April 28. I would like to clarify that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, there is no mincing of words; the minister chose not to listen. The questions were very clear.

I ask him again: What was your understanding of Frank Coleman's involvement with Humber Valley Paving on March 13?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when we enter into tenders and contracts with companies, I really do not care who the owners or the shareholders are. I had no idea who Frank Coleman was, nor do I care what association he had with the company. I was dealing with a contractor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that the same day Gene Coleman approached the minister to cancel the contract and forgive over \$19 million in bonds; Frank Coleman announced his intention to seek the leadership of the PC Party which, if successful, would automatically make him the Premier and the minister's boss.

I ask the minister: Did it make you uncomfortable that the son of the future boss was seeking over \$19 million of forgiveness?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, number one, fear mongering does not work with me, and I do not feel I was fear mongered. Number two, I think that the

member across the way should check his dates because March 13 was not the date that Mr. Coleman announced he would be seeking the leadership.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: What date did Mr. Coleman announce that he was seeking the leadership?

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

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I suggest that you go back and check that out.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: It is absolutely astounding, Mr. Speaker.

Despite all the negotiations and discussions between March 13 and March 21, does the minister still stand by his statement yesterday that there was no written documentation whatsoever relating to these discussions?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I have to just put this out there again, so the minister is telling the House of Assembly here today and the people of this Province that there was a deal concerning \$20 million in taxpayer money and the minister has nothing on paper to evidence this – nothing?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify that. It is \$19 million in bonds. There were discussions that took place and then there was a formal letter terminating the contract.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the question: Is it common practice in this government to conclude business deals involving millions of dollars of taxpayer money with no written documentation?

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

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is a contract that was in place that addresses the millions of dollars. That contract is a written document.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, does the minister have any written documentation to provide documenting and showing the work that was actually completed by this company that he can show here to the House today?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is a documentation actually in *The Telegram*, on the weekend there was a list of the work that has been completed and the documentation will be in invoices.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the minister negotiated for eight days before letting this company off the hook for over \$19 million. He did nothing to protect the suppliers, the subcontractors, and the taxpayers. He showed preferential treatment to the company involving his future boss. He disadvantaged other Newfoundland and Labrador companies. There is evidentially no paper trail whatsoever to show this, and he is expecting the public to believe that this was all above board. This is nothing but incompetence.

I ask the minister: Will you do the right thing and resign?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will go back to my opening statement, that the first decision when we were making this decision was to make sure that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador were protected, and that is exactly what I will continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

MR. SLADE: Mr. Speaker, nearly three years after the government promised new stadiums to the Towns of Harbour Grace, Paradise and CBS, only Harbour Grace is still waiting for construction to begin. The town has provided all the necessary information to government, yet no tenders have been called.

I ask the minister: Do you still intend to keep your promise to the people of Harbour Grace? If so, will the construction start on that facility this summer?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, I guess the MHA has read the article that was in his local paper or online over the last number of days.

I received a request from the Town of Harbour Grace about a week ago to meet to discuss this project. A couple of days later I met with the mayor and a member of council. We had a very positive discussion on the status of the project. For some time we have been gathering information from the town. We need to be certain that the town can afford not only to build the facility but to operate it as well. We have committed to have that assessment completed by the end of May, and we look forward to working with the town to move the project forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

MR. SLADE: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows very well that it was a committee struck by a member of government there some time back and one of the members from his office sat in on that committee.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is well aware of this file. The funding was in place, the site selection has been approved, and there should be nothing technically stopping this rink from being built.

I ask the minister: Who is asking for the review and the analysis of the project, government or the Town of Harbour Grace?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, in recent months the Town of Harbour Grace expressed some concerns about its ability to sustain the operational cost and it wrote me back at the end of February to say, instead of building a dual ice-surface facility, they would like to proceed with a single ice rink. That is certainly acceptable to us. We still need to complete the important financial analysis.

The mayor and the council member I met with fully understand that. We have a positive working relationship. The funds are still in place to move this project forward. We just have to be certain we do not place an unfair or unreasonable burden on taxpayers. I believe the Mayor of Harbour Grace understands that. It is unfortunate the MHA does not. However, it is positive, Mr. Speaker, that for the first time since being elected he is raising this issue with me.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2009, residents north of Hawke's Bay were told they will not have to worry, sawmills will not close, people will not have to leave, and the economy will be more stable than it has been for years. Five years and \$10 million of taxpayers' money later, the people are questioning government's commitment.

I ask the minister: Are you committed to ensuring the forestry resources on the Great Northern Peninsula mean local jobs and value-added products, or are you content with another white elephant?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, I think I could go around this House and speak to every member and every single member in this House would welcome a \$10 million investment from government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: I think it speaks to our commitment, our investment, and our support for the economy of the region. There have been some challenges with that investment. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. DALLEY: – we have made significant investments in forestry as well, in silviculture, and in roads.

The member opposite knows full well that we are fully engaged in a new company that has a keen interest in furthering the development on the Northern Peninsula with respect to the forestry development, Mr. Speaker. We are working towards that. We are working with companies. We are working with the large industry there in Holson Forest Products and we are optimistic we are going to have a good outcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Long-term jobs in the economy are key.

Mr. Speaker, on May 1, Rentech announced it acquired the largest producer of wood pellets for the US heating market. Rentech already has significant assets in Ontario, and long-term port facilities in Quebec. The minister has confirmed they are the sole company for the former Abitibi lands, and are in negotiations with Holson Forest Products.

I ask the minister: With millions invested in the Roddickton pellet plant, what actions are you prepared to take to ensure that our public resources can capitalize on growing market demands?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, long-term jobs and the economy are key. What a statement, Mr. Speaker. Take a look at what our government has done. Take a look at the investments we have done around the Province.

We can take a look at the forest industry, with 5,500 people working in the forest industry. As well, Mr. Speaker, a struggling industry we have supported in many different ways. Now we are on an upturn in the forest industry. We are optimistic about its future. We are working with a major company, Mr. Speaker, with major assets to come in and help stabilize the forest industry. Not just for the Northern Peninsula, but for the entire Province.

Mr. Speaker, that is a goal we have had. We are working towards that. We are going to do everything we can to make that deal work, not only to benefit the Northern Peninsula but to benefit the long-term stability jobs and the economy with respect to the forest industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for the District of St. Barbe.

MR. J. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, last week an enlarged Cabinet welcomed a new Justice Minister. Welcome, minister.

I ask the minister: Was he provided with the customary briefing book prepared at taxpayers' expense so he could become acquainted with his new department? If so, will he provide a copy to the Opposition, as was the case before Bill 29?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the hon. minister for welcoming me to the Department of Justice.

AN HON. MEMBER: Member.

MR. FRENCH: Member opposite. I could call him one of my learned friends, but I am not to that point yet in my Justice Minister's career. I certainly want to thank him.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, whatever I have – we just had Estimates this morning, he is more than

welcome to that. He spent three hours asking questions. I do not have a book per se but I have all kinds of notes that he is more than welcome to, Mr. Speaker.

I would also say, Mr. Speaker, I am still trying to find my way to the bathroom up there, so when I find out that, he is more welcome to have those directions as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the minister admits to not having a briefing book or not bothering to read a briefing book.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. J. BENNETT: I ask the minister: Does this mean the new minister does not think Justice is important enough for a briefing book, or does he not think he will be in this role long enough to bother to read up on the issues?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, no, I do not have a book per se. As the hon. member would notice, I do not bring books but I do bring files, and I am trying to come up to speed on all the files in the department, and anything that I have in writing the hon. member is more than welcome to read, Mr. Speaker; it is public knowledge.

As a matter of fact, there was one book that I read on the weekend; it was the layout of the department, Mr. Speaker. He is more than welcome to have that booklet. It is a considerable length. It is in a binder form. I would be more than happy to provide it for him. He can go through it, and he might even learn a few things about the Department of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Family Violence Intervention Court was welcomed and endorsed by the police, courts, prosecutors, and defence counsel – one of the few successes of this government. Sadly, the former Minister of Justice did not believe that reducing family violence was worth \$1 per person, per year, and cancelled it.

I ask the new minister: Will he reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court to curb the cycle of family violence in our Province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government takes violence prevention very seriously. We have our Violence Prevention Initiative. We feel that as we go through the Violence Prevention Initiative, we need to ensure that awareness is something – that people are able to understand the issues regarding family violence or other forms of violence.

If we truly want to have a Province where people are not subject to violence, we need to ensure that they understand the roots or the reasons for violence in our society.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Released bonds doubled, alleged ties to the PC leadership, the questions swirling around Humber Valley Paving smell like a Trout River whale.

Why did the government give back the people's money for uncompleted work?

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

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the question was: Why would government give back money for uncompleted work? So that is what I will answer. The government did not give back any money for any work that was not completed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, the government is not being able to clearly show why it released Humber Valley Paving from the bonds. If there is nothing untoward, then government has nothing to worry about.

I ask the minister again, I ask the government: In the spirit of openness and accountability, will government bring in the Auditor General to look at Humber Valley Paving contract and everything connected with it?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, as I said yesterday, a decision was made mutually between the contractor and government to terminate the contract. That was done in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and to make sure that the work is done on time and on budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Last night I attended a meeting initiated by the parents of Holy Cross Elementary school who are concerned about the

closing of their school. Students are to be moved from their school of 130 students to a school of over 500 with room to expand to 700 students.

I ask the minister: Will he reconsider the closure of this fantastic community school?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the member raising the issue in the House of Assembly. I think all of us who have been a part of education at least recognize the tremendous emotion and strain that goes with any discussions around school closures. I am sure that this one we are talking about here, Holy Cross, is no different. I have gone through many in my previous life as a CEO of the school board.

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure the gist of the question asking me to reconsider. I did not consider any issue in the first place around the closure; it was the school board. There is no issue for me to reconsider.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will he meet with the parents who are concerned?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I have meetings with groups all the time, particularly – school councils are the groups that are duly legislated to represent parents and members of a particular school community. If a group is looking to have a meeting with me, I have no issue whatsoever in making myself available to hear what they have to say.

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 sure the parents will be very happy to meet with the minister.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has chosen a private, for-profit corporation to care for the Province's most vulnerable children, letting go of forty-five experienced staff with hundreds of thousands of hours of experience in favour of inexperienced staff who will be making \$13 an hour.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: As a former board member of one of these well-established homes, does he think this is in the best interest of these children?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost in any decisions of this nature, we consider what is in the best interest of the youth and children who are in care. There was a competitive process that was entered into. The proponents who put forth proposals were people who have experience in these fields.

Through that process, Mr. Speaker, these workers and these proponents were chosen. I have no doubt that quality care will be provided to these children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, youth in the Stephenville home are scheduled to be moved by May 19, yet we are told the house that Blue sky has purchased has not been approved by town council for rezoning or renovated according to code yet.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What is the plan for these youth if a new house is not ready for them for the move?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the proponent here is meeting with the council in the particular area to address these issues. We certainly hope and look forward to that coming to a positive resolution. If something different should happen, we will deal with it at that particular time, and that proponent will deal with it at that time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, many of these youths are very, very concerned, they are very worried. They do not know what the outcome will be. It is not likely that the home will be ready by May 19. There does not seem to be a backup plan.

Mr. Speaker, the youth in Grand Falls-Windsor and Burin group homes will be moved before school is out, actually during exam week. These people do not know where they are going and who is going to care for them.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What is the plan for these youth?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, as the former Minister of Education one of the things that I did ask when I came in the department was what impact this might have on exam schedules. Look, it is quite simple; we are going to do what is right by these children. If there is an extended time that is needed – I am not saying here that we are going to extend it until another five or six months or something like that.

What we will look at is we will support these children as they are being supported through the transition. This is about doing what is in the best interest of the children first and foremost.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What exactly is he going to do to support these children who are being moved before the school year is over?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, for a quick response.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if she heard me or not. I have just said that if there are students who have challenges with exam schedules or something of that nature, we will ensure that they are supported through that effort. We will provide for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

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

MR. FORSEY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Government Services Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Department of Finance, Public Service Commission, Service Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Transportation and Works; and from the Executive Council, the Estimates of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs Office, the Human Resource Secretariat, and the Office of The Chief Information Officer.

MR. SPEAKER: Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have four documents that I would like to table. Yesterday in Question Period I committed to tabling three documents. The first document I would like to table is a tender book, Project 1-12PHP. That is the contract between the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Humber Valley Paving. I would like to table that document.

The second document I would like to table is a labour and material payment bond CCDC222-2002, and that is the labour and material payment bond. The third document I would like to table is the performance bond, and that is CCDC221-2002. The fourth document I would like to table, Mr. Speaker, is a letter making the mutual termination of the contract between the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Humber Valley Paving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Mineral Act, Bill 15.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 16.

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

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I am standing yet again to present petitions about the Family Violence Intervention Court. I can stand in this House every day for

the next five years with the number of people who want to see the Family Violence Intervention Court reinstated. This is absolutely ridiculous.

I sat through Justice Estimates today where there were hundreds of thousands of dollars that were not spent last year in that Justice budget – hundreds of thousands of dollars. Do you know what happened to some of that money? Some of it went to buy a car here, some of it went to buy a car there, and some went for this. Mr. Speaker, that money could have been spent, \$500,000, to protect women and children in this Province and to help men who could have gone through the Family Violence Intervention Court have rehabilitation about diverting people from incarceration. It would have saved the government money.

We know this government has done nothing to assess the financial impact of what the court had on the justice system, nor did it do anything. This government did nothing to assess the financial impact on the justice system after closing the Family Violence Intervention Court. There was so much money that was moved around last year that could have funded the Family Violence Intervention Court ten times over.

Mr. Speaker, this goes to show where this government's priorities are. Why will they not reinstate the court when they know it is the right thing to do? Is it simply about saving face? Are the lives of women and children being bargained for simply so this government can save face for the inadequate job they did in cancelling that court?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

WHEREAS the Town of Harbour Grace has been promised provincial funding for a regional stadium since August 2011 and there has been no progress on this facility since that time; and

WHEREAS the stadiums announced at the same time for the Towns of Paradise and CBS are under full construction; and

WHEREAS the Harbour Grace town council has indicated that they have secured financing and has approved the entire site recommendations as suggested by a government-appointed building committee; and

WHEREAS the residents of the District of Carbonear – Harbour Grace feel that their proposed stadium is not receiving government attention and priority, and they are duly concerned that continuous delays will lead to a cancellation of the promised project –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. SLADE: WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to recommit to this project and commence construction immediately, so as to provide the people of Carbonear – Harbour Grace District an opportunity to strengthen their commitments to a healthy lifestyle and use the facility for sports, concerts and trade shows.

As in duty bound, your petitions will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what is taking place here. The Town of Harbour Grace has a financial commitment to support the \$21 million.

I take note, the Member for Port de Grave District is over there taunting. Mr. Speaker, I am doing the same thing as he is doing for his district. I am standing up and speaking for the people of my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SLADE: I would like for him to stay still there for a little bit, Mr. Speaker, so that I can get my point out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. SLADE: They are totally committed, Mr. Speaker. The Harbour Grace Town Council is totally committed to it. Government knew they were going to get the \$21 million. Now they are coming back to a single ice service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. SLADE: This group over here, Mr. Speaker, do not want to allow the Town of Harbour Grace and the residents of Harbour Grace that stadium.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. SLADE: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I am going to stand up every day and fight for the people in my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is regarding the meeting I attended at Holy Cross last night. It is:

WHEREAS Holy Cross School is a small, family orientated school that gives all the children the highest education possible; and

WHEREAS Holy Cross School helps support the many students who have difficulty and/or learning disabilities to reach their highest potential; and

WHEREAS the school has a friendly atmosphere for children and parents, the staff knowing all the children and parents by name; and

WHEREAS the teachers at Holy Cross bring the extra supports that would not be present in a larger school or larger classroom;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to consider keeping Holy Cross open and to allow the children of the area to attend a neighbourhood school as was promised by education reform.

Mr. Speaker, I presented a similar petition yesterday. The reality here is government had announced all-day Kindergarten in this year's Budget. That was not taken into consideration a couple of years ago when the decision was made to close Holy Cross Elementary.

I think the schools will require additional classroom space as a result of that announcement, a good announcement, I say. It is something this party has called for, for some time, but the announcement that government will introduce all-day Kindergarten will certainly require additional classroom space. I ask government, I ask the school board and the trustees of the school board, to reconsider the closure of Holy Cross Elementary taking into account the fact that we now need additional classroom space as a result of all-day Kindergarten, taking into consideration the fact that parents and students were promised a neighbourhood school under education reform and the fact that Holy Cross school is a smaller school.

I am familiar with the smaller schools, Mr. Speaker, having a couple of them in my district. I can say that it is a much, much stronger community feeling within the smaller school than it is in a larger super school. The students, I believe, receive a better one-on-one experience with the teachers, and the students have a better opportunity to receive help from teachers if they require it than they would in a larger super school.

I do ask government to reconsider the decision to close Holy Cross Elementary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I have another petition here today. I look at the people all around Corner Brook; we look at people here from Irishtown. Once again this petition is calling upon the government to start this new hospital as soon as possible.

From my understanding there have been some changes to the design. There have been some amendments made to the hospital, Mr. Speaker. I do not have a copy of them yet, but I will shortly have a copy of them to see if in that fact the radiation and PET scanner – radiation units, not just radiation unit, units – will be in the design of the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I was actually sad to hear that the current Premier, who is the Member for Humber East, made the announcement back in 2011 when I said the hospital is delayed, there is no construction, that he would not resign until steel is built on the site in hospital.

Mr. Speaker, he is trying to get out of that now faster than anyone you can ever imagine trying to get out of politics. This hospital has been delayed upon delayed upon delayed. I said, Mr. Speaker, the only one – I will say this honestly to the people of Western Newfoundland, of Corner Brook, and Labrador – the only one that ever gave me the answer, the up-front answer, is

the Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier. He is the only one in Estimates who gave me an up-front answer of exactly where is the standing of the hospital, what stage it is at. That is the only person that, out of all the questions I asked, gave me an up-front answer, Mr. Speaker.

Even the former minister was out saying it is only 35 per cent – the former Minister of Health out saying 35 per cent. Mr. Speaker, I fought tooth and nail, the Opposition here fought tooth and nail, and now the Premier saying it is not one machine, but two machines.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that this is done in a timely manner. We have to ensure that other services in the hospital will not be taken out to make room for this. Those are the kind of things that we have to ensure, Mr. Speaker. That is why I am presenting this petition, because –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

MR. JOYCE: I will have another chance, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We, the citizens, serviced by Curtis Hospital located in St. Anthony, Newfoundland and Labrador, petition the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador-Grenfell Health to retain the midwives and allow them continue to perform all of their duties at Curtis Hospital.

Our midwives offer services that cannot be duplicated, and which cannot be replaced. The level of care they offer and the knowledge and training they have in the area of obstetrics is immense. It will be a great disservice to the people of this area if midwives are no longer available to care for the people here. Privatizing midwifery or waiting five to seven years for regulation, as stated by government, is unacceptable. We have an operational model of midwifery here in St. Anthony that has been

delivering outstanding care for over ninety years.

We urge the House of Assembly to implore the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador-Grenfell Health to preserve midwifery services at Curtis Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the Health Professions Act was passed in 2010, which had stated there that seven health professions would be self-regulated, and six of the seven have already completed the regulations. Government has waited and dragged its heels, and at this point, no longer will allow the midwives that were operating in a publicly-funded setting to continue the service that they offered in St. Anthony.

This is something that petitioners, citizens of my district, from Southern Labrador, as well as the North Shore of Quebec, and the District of St. Barbe – they are all serviced by this health facility and received immense care from midwives.

So, I put this forward to the new Minister of Health and Community Services to see the immense value that midwifery can have in a publicly-funded setting, and that we need to move much quicker than five to seven years. These regulations should be established. Women experience less pre-term births, less assisted deliveries, and greater satisfaction with care under midwifery. The world needs more midwives.

Yesterday was the International Day of the Midwife, and we have not seen further progress to having midwifery implemented in a publicly-funded setting. We have actually turned the page backwards under this government, under this current Administration, when it comes to the role of midwifery and how women and families can utilize this service in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. I urge the House to urge government to make those changes.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS current government regulations deny busing services to students who live closer than 1.6 kilometres from school;

WHEREAS parents have expressed concern that children living within 1.6 kilometres of school face dangers in walking to school, such as congested streets, busy intersections, and no sidewalks, especially during winter weather conditions;

WHEREAS the \$75,000 review of the school transportation system completed by Deloitte recommended that the Department of Education consider reducing the 1.6 kilometre eligibility zone for Kindergarten and elementary students;

WHEREAS the \$75,000 Deloitte report also noted that only 10 per cent of those surveyed for the school transportation system review agree that the 1.6 kilometre policy is reasonable for students and families; and

WHEREAS parents are continuing to demand more flexible policies to meet the current needs of school children;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to change the outdated 1.6 kilometre school busing eligibility policy in order to ensure safe travel to school for primary and elementary school children in the Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important petition and it is really about protecting our most precious resource – our children. It truly is a safety concern. I know in the past I have brought forth petitions, I have spoken in the House of Assembly, and I have questioned the former Minister of Education on very important matters as it relates to our children and as it

relates to our school system. The former Minister of Education unfortunately did not see fit to listen to what I had to say and to listen to what some of his colleagues on his side of the House had to say about school issues, as we know. I am hoping this is going to be a fresh start and that the new Minister of Education, unlike the minister before, is going to start listening to the parents, to the families, and to the students within our school system.

I will be having a lot more to say as it relates to the Mount Pearl school system in days to come, but in terms of this issue today, also a very important one as it relates to the safety our children in getting to school, particularly the young children, particularly the K-6 kids, particularly in busy areas. I know certainly in Mount Pearl and in the greater St. John's region in particular we see a lot of traffic, busy four-lane roads, and so on. Snow clearing is an issue and it is a safety concern.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, 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. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I move Motion 6, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 5:30 o'clock today, Tuesday, May 6, 2014.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I move Motion 7, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 6, 2014.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 6; and it has been further moved and seconded that this House do not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 6.

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: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give notice and ask leave to make a change to the Public Accounts Committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader has the floor.

Go ahead, please, Sir.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to give notice and ask for leave to introduce a change to the Public Accounts Committee membership, with leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: By leave.

MR. SPEAKER: By leave.

Please, go ahead.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Lake Melville will replace the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune as a permanent member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, to move that the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, the Budget Speech.

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

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the opportunity to again speak on the Budget for 2014. Mr. Speaker, a little earlier today I presented the report of the Government Services Committee and I would just like to explain to anyone who is not aware of it or is interested in it that Government Services Committee is one of the Committees that are made up to review budget Estimates. The departments that come under the Government Services Committee are: the Department of Finance, the Public Service Commission, Service Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Transportation and Works; and from the Executive Council, the Estimates of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs Office, Human Resource Secretariat, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer.

That is just one of three Committees, Mr. Speaker. The Committee is made up of government members, Opposition members, and the Third Party. The members of the Government Services Committee, which I Chaired, were: the Member for Mount Pearl South, the Member for Kilbride, the Member for St. John's East, the Member for St. John's South, the Member for Cape St. Francis, and the Member for Bellevue. I would just like to thank these members for their time and their input.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. FORSEY: The Member for Bay of Islands was not on this one this year; he was on another one, I believe.

In the meantime, I would like to thank them for their input. Usually what happens is it is a great exercise, Mr. Speaker, when we do budget Estimates, especially we get the opportunity and some members in Opposition get the opportunity to ask questions of the minister and the budget items that are there.

Being on the government side, Mr. Speaker, and being a government member, we have the privilege of, I guess, the opportunity, to ask questions around our caucus table as well as when we are doing budgets that we get the opportunity to present our issues and our concerns to our government, and to our Finance Minister and as well to our Premier. That works both ways when we are putting forth our issues and our concerns for the budget and also discussing the budget after it is completed and we will always look at the budget for the previous year, which of course was 2013, and in a lot of cases when we are doing budgets, especially budget items, we go down through the budget and we will see a lot of revised numbers there, and then there will be the budget for this year.

Of course the budget is what it is; it is a budget and it is estimated. We will always see quite a few changes, Mr. Speaker, in the revised and the actual budget for the end of the year because of different changes in the line items throughout the year.

Also, Mr. Speaker, just for a point of interest, I think it is important to know the different departments. We look at Service Newfoundland and Labrador and we look at Transportation and Works and different departments that came under Government Services, for argument's sake. What people do not probably realize is how much is entailed in the different departments.

For argument's sake, Service Newfoundland and Labrador, we had three hours of budget Estimates where we discussed line items and budget items for that department. There are so many different sections of the department that come under Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

For argument's sake, the residential landlord and tenants' office, where we can put in complaints, they provide the mediation of consumer complaints. Service NL provides supervision of insurances, securities, real estate, and mortgage brokers. It also provides for regulation of all pension plans registered in the Province. It all comes under Service Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

What is interesting also is that it provides for the administration of registered deeds and companies, personal property, and limited partnerships. All of this comes under Service NL. There is a cost of operating, there is a cost of rental, there is a cost of maintenance, and there is a cost of staffing.

When we go through the budget items we will always see differences in the budget, Mr. Speaker. A lot of times it is to do with probably some staffing, there are jobs or positions that need to be filled, or there was some office rental that was needed and probably was not acquired at that particular time. There are so many things that could change the figures. There could be new positions; there could be professional services and purchases, all of which is part of the budget.

We also did Transportation and Works. Transportation and Works comes under Government Services. That is another department that has a lot of other sectors that we probably are not even aware of. Some we are, of course, like snow and ice control. I know we did Transportation and Works last night and there was a \$4 million difference in the snow and ice control, Mr. Speaker. That was actually budgeted for, but \$4 million over. I guess when you look and when we realize how much snow and ice we had this year, we can understand why there was extra money spent for things such as salt.

All of the government buildings, Mr. Speaker, come under Transportation and Works, such as the hospitals, the schools and other buildings. You can imagine, along with the expenses and the operations of the government buildings that comes under Transportation and Works, you can just imagine the cost to maintain roads and bridges. The investment we have had this year was unprecedented to many years regarding road investment, road infrastructure and bridges. It is quite an exercise. It is one I was certainly pleased to be a part of, and while going through it – it came out in the Budget, and there were a lot of communications that came out and a lot of releases came out about our investments this year, Mr. Speaker, and there have been many. There have been quite a few.

I would just like to touch on a couple of different departments now regarding investments by our government this year. One in particular – and these are some facts and some information I think that should be out there in the public. I will start with the forestry and agriculture industries, Mr. Speaker, \$20 million to support a diversified and sustainable forest industry. This includes \$985,000 for an agriculture research initiative to fund research and development projects related to agriculture.

We are always investing in agriculture. Even in the past couple of years we have invested heavily into the cranberry industry. We are hoping to see some fruits of that particular labour in the very near future. I know out in the Central part of the Province where I am from, the cranberry industry is certainly doing well. They have expanded, and pardon the pun, but we are expecting it to grow.

We also have an \$8.3 million investment for silviculture projects, Mr. Speaker. Again, in Central Newfoundland, the agriculture and the silviculture, the forestry is a very big part of our industry and our livelihood in the Province, especially in the Central region.

We have the tree nursery in Central Newfoundland at Wooddale. Whenever there is reforestation and replanting right across the Province, it all comes from Wooddale, Mr. Speaker. That is only just a portion of what is going on in the Wooddale region. There is a lot of agriculture in there, a lot of root crops regarding the vegetables that are grown there. Again, investments by our government in forestry and agriculture; \$5.9 million to construct resource roads for timber harvesting, Mr. Speaker.

Right across the Province and in Labrador as well, we are still into the harvesting of forests, of our timber. It is big in our Province. We still have papermaking in Corner Brook. We also have timber sawmills. We are big in lumber. We are doing very well in that industry, Mr. Speaker. We want to utilize all parts of the forest industry, especially our fibre.

I know during Question Period the Minister of Natural Resources was actually questioned on that particular aspect of his department when it

comes to forestry with regard to the timber and the fibre, and what we are doing with it. We are expecting it to grow. We are looking at new ventures and we are very optimistic, Mr.

Speaker. That is why this government is looking towards the future and investing in the very same.

We have \$1.7 million for forest insect and disease control; \$4.1 million for fire suppression; close to \$12 million for programs that will further grow the industry, including \$3.3 million for the Growing Forward 2 program, a Federal/Provincial/Territorial initiative helping industry become more innovative and cost competitive.

That has been a very good program, Mr. Speaker. It is one that our farmers have availed of, and that is why we are able to move forward with innovative ways when it comes to farming and harvesting. Again, as I mentioned regarding the cranberry industry, it has been a great investment for that particular industry, and the same will go for other parts of the forest industry when it comes to lumber and sawmills, the contractors and the woods contractors and so on, Mr. Speaker.

There is \$2.5 million for the Agriculture and Agrifoods Development Fund to help farmers develop larger acreages of land to increase forage production. I know right across the Province actually, we hear more about it, that we are developing more farmland, and we do need to develop more farmland, Mr. Speaker. We, as a Province, have come a long way but we still have a long way to go.

We are self-sufficient in fluid milk. As a matter of fact, we do so well in the dairy industry, Mr. Speaker, that we have even industrial-use milk right now, which is beneficial for the farmers, especially the dairy farmers, because what is not used in the Province to supply all the needs in Newfoundland and Labrador is shipped out of the Province. When we say industrial milk, industrial milk is for export and we ship it out of Newfoundland and Labrador. So, we are self-sufficient in the dairy industry.

We are very much the same when it comes to eggs and egg grading, where we still have a couple of egg grading plants in the Province.

The biggest one, of course, being on the Avalon Peninsula. Probably running around 85 per cent of the production across the Province.

We are doing very well in some of the farming sectors, but we are still using the Growing Forward 2 fund to do better in the agriculture, in the root crops especially, Mr. Speaker. I have talked to some farmers out my way and they have expanded. They have cleared extra acreages of land so they can rotate and increase their crop. We need to do this, Mr. Speaker, because it was not very long ago this winter when we could not get the shipments across the gulf because of ice conditions. We need to make sure that we can avail of certain fruits and vegetables, especially vegetables and food security. I thank the Member for Harbour Main. Harbour Main?

MR. HEDDERSON: Harbour Main.

MR. FORSEY: Harbour Main - for getting that right word in there.

MR. HEDDERSON: Not far from Roaches Line (inaudible).

MR. FORSEY: Not far from Roaches Line. Yes, he is very familiar with the egg grading there, of course.

Another thing I should mention while I am up is that when we go to the supermarket, you will still see products there locally and products from outside the Province, but it is always nice to be able to grab the local product. Look at the label, I say, and see where it is manufactured, see where it is harvested or see where it is packaged. You will probably see something about Newfoundland and Labrador, maybe in Roaches Line. You can pick up your dozen eggs and they are locally packaged, Mr. Speaker.

You can still avail of mainland product and, I guess, we always will. What I am saying is we need to move forward with our food security. That is why we are investing in the Growing Forward program.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.2 million for the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program to fund activities to improve industry competitiveness and promote growth and commercialization. That is

what I was just talking about. It is a bigger investment.

The \$2.3 million for the land consolidation is another good one, too. Sometimes farmers do it – I think they survive in that industry because of their passion for it. It is not so much the money they make. They survive; they make a good dollar. I think it is the passion that they do it, but they also provide a necessity for us. We do not see it sometimes and do not notice it.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.3 million for the Land Consolidation Program to provide an opportunity for non-farm landowners and retiring farmers to sell granted land to the provincial government. We can utilize that land as well, Mr. Speaker. It gives the opportunity for a farmer who spent forty and fifty years getting out there every morning, 5:00 and 6:00 in the morning, and working from dawn until dark.

It is great to be able to give them that opportunity as we have done with the fishery in the past, Mr. Speaker, through buyouts and so on. It is a very similar process. That is why we saw the need for that. We need to invest more and we need to keep an eye on that, but we also need to bring in, as we said, young farmers as well. There are some interested right now.

It was only this past week when this House was closed, in my own district I sat down with a constituent, a resident of the area, who has now gone through an environmental assessment for farming land there. He will be going into farming, Mr. Speaker, and he will also be going into probably dairy, maybe eggs, some animals, and such, which is what we need. They see the need. They are young, but they are willing to take that chance and we want to be there to support them.

There is \$411,000 for agricultural limestone programs so the farmers are able to purchase limestone at a reasonable cost. Can you imagine, almost \$500,000 for limestone? It seems like could it ever be that much money just for that alone? You can imagine the cost for the operation for farmers, what it costs, and the time they put into it, Mr. Speaker.

There are so many good things in the Budget this year. I am sure I will get another chance. I wanted to get into some things that are going on in my district but it affects us provincially. Of course, it was our investment in education and the number of schools that are being built and the amount of renovations.

I recall in 2003 when the Opposition Party, or the government of the day but they became the Opposition Party, wanted to eliminate school fees. That was their big platform that time. Well, we have eliminated school fees, Mr. Speaker. We brought in free textbooks. We brought in skilled trades in the high schools. Today, students do not have to wonder about where they want to go if they want to go into the trades; they are taught it in the high schools now, which of course is great. There are better opportunities than I had at the time when I went to school.

I thank you for your time, and hopefully I will have another chance to speak on the Budget.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say, before I begin, I would just like to wish all of the candidates in the Nunatsiavut election that is taking place today the best of luck and the best of a good future. We are all interested to learn who is going to form the new government in Nunatsiavut today.

Mr. Speaker, I was certainly glad to hear the Member for Exploits talking about the need that still remains when you look at this year's Budget. It is a good Budget. There are obvious reasons for that; it is because it is probably an election Budget. It does a lot when you consider that you had to borrow money, especially coming off of ten years of the most resources, the most royalties this Province has ever seen, Mr. Speaker. I find it hard for that government to go back past ten years and still trying to lay

blame for things that happened in the last ten years.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to talk about the petition that my hon. colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl South, talked about which was busing. I think the law states that at 1.6 kilometres, students have to be bused. I would like to take that rule and apply it up in Northern Labrador, where temperatures reach fifty-two degrees sometimes. I would like to talk about a Kindergarten student because the government has proposed all-day Kindergarten, something that we pushed for.

In January, Mr. Speaker, a Kindergarten student has to walk as much as 1.4 kilometres at minus forty-five degrees. Minus forty-five, walking 1.4 kilometres, Mr. Speaker, if it is further than 1.6 kilometres down here in the sunny south, they get a bus. Mr. Speaker, this government has been contacted, I know the former member has been contacted, about coming up with a plan that will allow these students to be picked up, these young kids having to walk all this distance in sometimes clothing that is not good enough to walk to school in St. John's in.

The Nunatsiavut Government minister has tried to make contact with this government about drafting up a plan. Now I know that the environment sometimes does not permit roads to be paved in all the communities on the North Coast, but there are alternatives. We use snowmobiles all winter. So, there is room for improvement, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly like to be able to see a day when a Kindergarten student can be driven to school in minus forty-five degree temperatures rather than walk.

Any lower than minus forty-five, the schools have to shut down and that is the cut-off up there. I know what it is like to be out in minus forty-five, Mr. Speaker, and so do a lot of us, but there are many of us who have never seen it. I am certainly hopeful there can be some contact made and there can be a plan for students as young as five years old walking around in minus forty-five degree temperatures.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the announcement that was made on upgrading the long-term care facility in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I was glad to see there is a twenty-bed

extension in the plan, because I go into the long-term care facility almost on a weekly basis and it is sad to see a lot of our seniors who are stuck in the hallways. These people have laid the foundation for which we live today, and this is the respect they get. Mr. Speaker, that is unbecoming. It is unbecoming of any government. I am looking forward to an extension.

Just to add to that, Mr. Speaker, we saw the Newman Building in Goose Bay close down last month. All of a sudden there were thirty people out on the street. A lot of these residents who were forced to leave this home were special needs residents from all over Labrador. That is the reason I bring this up, Mr. Speaker. It was good to see there was a prompt response for the short term. There is even some work being done in the long term.

I would just like to stress that there is a need for another facility that looks after single, special needs residents who need that extra little bit of care. It should be provided. It is provided everywhere else. A lot of the reasons for the hardships on these young people, and old people, is the rental rates in Lake Melville – because of the Muskrat Falls deal – have skyrocketed. It has gone to a point where even some middle-income families and individuals cannot afford to pay their rent, Mr. Speaker. They just cannot afford it. You are looking at \$3,500 or \$4,000 a month. That is beyond the reach of many, many people and that list is growing as we speak.

I also saw in the Budget that this government has installed broadband and Internet capability. I think the number was 95 per cent of the communities in this Province, Mr. Speaker, which is good. It is good to see. It is good to see that we have come a long way, but there is still a large percentage who do not know what it is like to have high-speed Internet, cell service. That need is still out there.

An area that I represent, Mr. Speaker, happens to be one of those places. I have said it time and time again to drive this fact home, that when young Burton Winters went missing he had a cellphone in his pocket, and he was five kilometres from Makkovik. It would save lives. It has saved lives. I have heard many stories up

and down the highways of the Province, on both the Island portion and Labrador, where cell service has saved lives. We hear petitions on this side almost on a daily basis of how important that need is.

I have talked to officials at Bell Aliant about the need to upgrade services for Internet capability. Many areas in this Province are expanding in terms of development. My district is no exception. We have had some major developments over the last ten years, both in the offshore and in the mining sector, and there is still potential for development, Mr. Speaker, but what we are not seeing is the services that is required to deliver those developments.

On the South Coast it is the same problem. You have a road that is coming up through, and we hear of accidents almost on a daily basis. Some of them are near fatal. That just shows there is need for improvement. It is just a basic gravel road, Mr. Speaker. I have seen pictures of the South Coast highway and it is hard to drive an eighteen wheeler over that let alone a small car. It is virtually impossible. That just drives home the need for communications that this government brags about but we are still waiting for.

As I said earlier, I did talk to officials at Bell Aliant about the prospects of how you would increase Internet capability and they actually came forward with a number of options. I did speak to the Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs about it briefly. They have been given development plans from Bell Aliant.

When Muskrat Falls was being started, Mr. Speaker, there was no cell service and there was no Internet capability. What did this government do? They spent \$24 million to pipe a fibre op cable into Muskrat Falls. The fortunate thing is that the rest of Lake Melville benefitted from this fibre op link as well. It was just recently that this government made a \$4 million contribution to the Conne River area, which is a good thing. It upgraded the Internet capability.

A couple of options are to bring fibre op cable out of Goose Bay where it is now, either up the coast or down the coast. If it does not reach all the destinations, what it will do is it will free up

broadband radio signals that can be sent via microwave up as far north as Nain, Natuashish, and Voisey's Bay for that matter.

There is always room for improvement. When you look at the fact that Internet capability on the North Coast of Labrador and on the South Coast of Labrador is totally maxed out, there is no room, what does that show for support of development? It shows absolutely no support for development. This is a region that is progressing in terms of development every year.

I talked to the minister just last night in Estimates. We talked about the ferry service and the fact that the contract is delayed. I think one thing that bothered me the most is the fact that the existing ferry is in need of replacement engines. We all knew this, given the service we had over the last two summers.

It is not comforting to know when a ferry with a full load of passengers goes dead in the water, Mr. Speaker, with a full complement of crew and passengers aboard. A multi-engine ship going dead in the water is a danger. They were lucky they were not in some dangerous area like the rugged coast in the Cape Harrison area where there is no forgiveness should something like this go wrong.

Both engines have to be replaced. It is comforting to know that work has started, it is being done. To know that the *Northern Ranger* is going to run on one engine admittedly this year until they can get the second one done just shows the lack of timing and commitment. This work should have been done last fall, not in the spring when shipping season is coming upon us. That is another area where we anticipate problems when we are trying to deliver e-service. Now that Nunatsiavut Group of Companies has taken over delivery of the service 100 per cent, they certainly have their work cut out to try to maintain a schedule and to satisfy the local passengers as well as tourism, which is another expanding development area in Nunatsiavut.

Another area that I was glad to see forward movement was a commitment of \$350,000 in a cost-share agreement with the Nunatsiavut Government, bringing the total up to \$700,000 on housing repairs. It is certainly a step in the

right direction, but I would just like to present some statistics from one housing construction agency in Nunatsiavut. The cost of a three-bedroom home, and this is when you factor in land readiness and installation of water and sewer hookups, which is mandatory, is approximately \$300,000 per home. You take a cost-share agreement and you look at the Province's portion of \$350,000, you have enough to build one home – one home – and if it is a four-bedroom home \$350,000 would not cover the cost of that one construction.

For new housing, this one housing agency says there are sixty-seven applications for new homes, and the list is growing. When you look at applications for repairs, which are what this \$350,000 is earmarked for, there are eighty-one applications for repairs. I am sure the previous minister did visit Nain; he must have seen some of the conditions of these houses. They are almost to the point where it is actually better to tear them down and build new. Anyway, if you took an average of \$20,000 per repair, which is very, very conservative, and you managed to pull in eighty-one applications, it would not require \$350,000; it would require \$1.6 million. That is just for repairs.

There is forward movement through the contributions from this government, and the contributions through the Nunatsiavut Government. It is good news, it is a small contribution, but I know that over the last two weeks housing issues in the campaigns of many of the candidates in the Nunatsiavut election that is actually taking place today did resonate, and certainly they have made plans to address the housing needs.

I think I would just like to talk a little bit about the remediation program for Hopedale. I just have a few minutes and I do know that I will get another chance. I was glad to see they continued the commitment for the community of Hopedale that has been stuck with PCBs because of the American base there in the 1950s and where they dumped their waste products. I guess the environmental guidelines back then are nothing to where they are now.

The reason I am thankful for this, Mr. Speaker, is because if you look at the cancer rates in relation to neighbouring communities, the rate of

cancer in Hopedale is marginally higher than any other community. If you classify Hopedale as an impacted site, like this government has, a whole different set of guidelines are applied; but if you talk to many of the experts that have worked on the site, there are portions of Hopedale, the community itself and nearby areas, that are 100 per cent contaminated with PCBs – 100 per cent contaminated, which makes it a contaminated site.

Now, I know that all of the work to remediate the PCBs or remove the PCBs from this community is not going to happen overnight. Mr. Speaker, the PCBs have leaked into the harbour where a lot of the residents actually gather fish for subsistence. Now they cannot, because it is contaminated; the fish are contaminated.

They struggle through new knowledge, new guidelines, Health Canada guidelines have kicked in, and they are struggling through this, Mr. Speaker. To see that there is a commitment in terms of a site being impacted, I am hopeful that someday that Hopedale can be designated as a contaminated site. If, in fact, it is a contaminated site, as many experts already say, then the guidelines for remediation change and it becomes more of a health issue, more of a focus, and more of a demand for the contaminants in Hopedale to be removed.

I think I am going to leave it there, Mr. Speaker, because I do have a number of other issues and I do realize that I will probably get another chance to address this Budget. I will take my place for now.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to get up in this House once again and speak to the Budget this year. First and foremost, if I may, I would like to say thank you to the people of the great District of Lake Melville for their continued support, their continued faith in me,

and the continuing dialogue where we sit, we talk, we have a cup of tea, we go to sporting events together and we talk about the things that matter to us in the Big Land.

Mr. Speaker, I have that same rapport with the members on this side of the House, and our Cabinet and our Premier; we talk about what matters. I have always taken the time to go out and see as many people as I can. When we are not in the Legislature, we like to get to the various communities in our districts, see the community events, get out and talk with the youth, talk with the elders, and find out how we are doing. All indicators in Lake Melville, of course we are having challenging times because we are growing so fast, we have so much economic development, so much prosperity, of course there are going to be stresses with that; but, by all indicators from the people within my district, they see what we are doing, they know what we are doing, and they are responding to the amounts of money that we are putting into the areas of concern that they have.

Mr. Speaker, like my colleague across the House, the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains, I, too, would like to extend my best wishes to all those people up in Nunatsiavut and in Labrador who are running in the elections today. It is also well known in this House that I served two terms within the Nunatsiavut Government. It is a very challenging job. These people, they put themselves out there as well. I guess anybody who puts themselves out for public office to represent the best interests of the people that live in their communities, they have to have a lot of guts. It takes a lot of strength and fortitude. It takes a lot of nerve. You have to have thick, almost rhino-like skin, if you will, to put up with the demands that people put on you. That is fair. People want and expect a lot from you as an elected official. It certainly, at times, takes the good out of you. It is certainly stressful, but the people want to make sure that you have the right stuff to be in those jobs, and they want to make sure that you are going to be there to speak for them and to fight for the things they want.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: The best of luck to everybody in the Nunatsiavut Government running for election, those new candidates out there and

those people that are seeking re-election. I truly wish them the best for themselves and their families. I wish the Nunatsiavut Government all the best as well, Mr. Speaker. They have a tough job in terms of administering their trust funds doing what is best for the Aboriginal communities. I, being a beneficiary, like my hon. colleague across the way, of the Nunatsiavut Land Claims Agreement, I want to see them succeed in every aspect of what they do.

Mr. Speaker, I was certainly glad to hear my colleague across the way say that he was glad to see the \$6.6 million that I have certainly lobbied and advocated for, for some time, to see the twenty-bed expansion to the long-term care centre in Goose Bay. Is it needed? Absolutely. Did the people look for it when I was even campaigning back in 2011? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Here we are delivering, responding to the needs of the people.

We know that Happy Valley-Goose Bay is the hub of Labrador, if you will. People come from near and far, especially for the opportunities that we have with Muskrat Falls right now, especially with the boom that is happening with all of the new businesses setting up shop. With that, it is guaranteed to have increased demands on our infrastructure. What we have done here with this government is said okay, we need this allocation of funds, we need those beds, we need to serve our seniors and the people who were there for the long haul, those new people who are coming in and bringing their family with them, we are going to be there to see them through.

I would like to thank the outgoing Minister of Health for her hard work. It is certainly not an easy job. I commend her on everything she has done. She was certainly responsive to me. Whether it was allocations of money over the years for new equipment, for new programs to be offered within Labrador-Grenfell Health up our way, she was always there to take the time, to spend the time with me in representation of the people of the great District of Lake Melville, just to talk about our needs and to respond, to get the gear there, to get the money allocated there. This is just the latest one, Mr. Speaker, because not only are we responding to the needs of the people in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and in

the great District of Lake Melville, but also in Lab West.

As you see, the Minister of Transportation too, we have an allocation of upwards of \$14 million to finish up the hospital over there. It is well needed, Mr. Speaker. That community is certainly always booming. I cannot see that there has ever been a slowdown to date in Lab West. I spent a lot of time there and talked with a lot of people, and we are responding to their needs as well.

My hon. colleague across the way for Torngat Mountains also referenced the closing of the boarding home in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. That was something beyond our control. I want to commend the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills on his rapid response to the issue that our community faced. We put together and the minister put together, representing several different departments, an action team comprised of officials to look at, to gauge what needs to be done to respond to the thirty or so residents who had to be moved immediately.

I would also like to take this time, and I would be remiss if I did not, Mr. Speaker, to commend the Salvation Army, and to commend our mayor and our town council for their reaction to this issue as well. The Salvation Army was there to make sure that nobody was going to go hungry during the transition. Our Housing Corporation was there, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

We made sure, Mr. Speaker, that nobody was without a roof, and nobody was without a meal. Labrador-Grenfell Health, our officials, was all there. We had social workers present to make sure that people – and he was indeed right, we do have people who have complex needs. Our response was there, it was appropriate, adequate, and we are continuing to work towards a long-term solution to that issue.

To know the people were cared for, everybody – and jump is a good word to say it, Mr. Speaker. When it became known that this was a problem we were going to face, everybody jumped. We jumped together and we jumped high enough to solve the problem. Everybody is taken care of and I am glad to see that response from not only

the local community, the municipal government, those not-for-profit groups like the Salvation Army that are there with their hearts on their sleeves making sure that they are there to support real people in need. Everybody came together and it was a beautiful thing. The work is still ongoing, I will say.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say just a few comments about the pavement. Everybody loves pavement no matter where you are. I will say something –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Thanks, guys. I will say something that I said in this House before; as a young man growing up in Labrador, the Churchill road was really not much more than a trail. I hunt, I fished, and I trapped that trail, if you will, with my father.

I can remember crossing some of those places in the winter where there were just sheer cliffs on either side, Mr. Speaker. It was an exhilarating yet scary experience. Back in those days we needed to hunt, we needed to fish, we needed to trap, and we needed to have gardens. You needed that in order to sustain your family, in order to supplement your income, and supplement your diet. People in Labrador are not strangers to having to rely heavily on the land. The Big Land certainly offers up all we needed, Mr. Speaker.

My point being is that I remember somebody saying to me as a young boy: Why don't we have this? Why isn't this paved? Why isn't this done? Why are the curves in the hills so steep? Mr. Speaker, they said: You will never see it paved in your lifetime.

Here we are, Mr. Speaker – and I am going to segue into why I want to talk about the road right here by my recent trip. For those who were watching the proceedings in the House today, you saw me talk about the great people of Churchill Falls. This past weekend they had a wonderful graduation. I tell you what, they say it is a company town in Churchill Falls – of course, I had to drive that 300 kilometres to get there, which is how I am tying this into pavement.

They say that this is a company town, but if you go and you spend a little time with the people of Churchill Falls – and certainly now they are there to fulfill a purpose, to run the plant, to make sure the power flows and the water is regulated, and all that good stuff – but how intimate and how beautiful the graduation was in Churchill Falls; it cannot be said enough. If you have 100 students, Mr. Speaker, in some of the bigger municipalities, it just would not have the level of personal attention to these young adults that we did have up in Labrador in Churchill Falls.

Once again, Mr. Speaker – and this was my third consecutive grad that I attended – it was an honour and privilege to get up, bring greetings, and present the certificates of accomplishment on behalf of Premier Marshall to these eight outstanding individuals. To see what the town, the people, the volunteers, the beautiful work they did on the Safe Grad was just a wonderful event for the kids. To see how the company, Nalcor, of course, comes in there and helps support the youth in the town and the people was a beautiful thing.

Mr. Speaker, my wife and I – of course, my wife wanted to come to the grad. Her work schedule and my work schedule, for once in a blue moon, if you will, actually coincided that we could actually get to an event on the outskirts of my district at the same time, but we had to drive that 300 kilometres. I tell you what, everybody is anticipating that sixty or so kilometres in between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Churchill Falls that, once done this year, with the money allocated in this Budget by the Minister of Transportation, will see us with that full stretch of pavement.

The road was beautiful, the work was top-notch, Mr. Speaker, and if you have ever driven that road you will know it is beautiful in terms of the wildlife, the scenery. In years gone by, those big hills, those dips, those are all gone; we have taken care of that. What we have now is a beautiful drive, Mr. Speaker. When the road is completed both going from east to west and then going from north to south, it is going to make a difference in terms of people coming in to see our beautiful communities in the Big Land, spending some money, and helping with the economic generation within the communities.

So, with that, I would just like to say that sixty-kilometre stretch is about to be a thing of the past, Mr. Speaker, because you do have to reduce your speed. You want to make sure whoever you have in the vehicle with you are safe. We are on the cusp of finishing the Trans-Labrador Highway from east to west.

Also in this Budget, and it counts because the branch to turnoff, Mr. Speaker, is in Lake Melville. So we have also committed to go eighty kilometres toward Cartwright Junction, which says, one, we are committed and we are responding to the needs of the people. In my district, they are made up of everybody from Cartwright and from the smaller communities on the South Coast. They are all coming up my way for the opportunities we have there and they are most welcome, I will say that.

What you are seeing is a government that responds. We put the money where we need to. You look through the Budget documents that are coming, we are not only spending money in blue districts; we are spending money in districts that are represented by other stripes in this House, Mr. Speaker. We are doing what is right by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and that is what we do.

Before I stop talking about pavement, Mr. Speaker, and I know there is a lot of drama going on in the House and all that about pavement and about paving companies and all this, but I tell you one thing. If you have not been in Labrador and you have not been up the Trans-Labrador Highway, you have to understand this: there are no alternate routes. There is no other way to go.

When there is a forest fire on, that is it. You have people backed up. You have vehicles upon vehicles backed up. They are being escorted through zones that are covered by fire and smoke, Mr. Speaker. To think that we are going to be able to engage in laying down asphalt during a time like that, where pretty much Labrador has been disconnected from itself in terms of the communities reaching from Labrador West into Lake Melville, it is just not possible.

Now, in terms of keeping everybody safe, keeping contractors safe and their workers, that

has to be paramount, too. Everybody has to take their time in crossing that stretch of road, Mr. Speaker, when you have an act of God in progress that happens to be a forest fire that nobody can help. It is as simple as that. You do not put anybody at risk, certainly not.

I tell you what; we have \$11.7 million, Mr. Speaker, in new water bombers to help with events like that. This is response from the government. If you were in Labrador, you look at our timber stands and you will realize Labrador is beautiful in its majesty in terms of the wilderness we have and the resources. The logging is huge. When a forest fire hits, it hits; nothing can be done about that.

We had \$11.7 million for two new water bombers, and that only builds on the \$40 million or so that we spent in the year before. This is a government that says, not only are we going to invest in the safety of people in our communities, but also in terms of our wilderness, our natural resources. We want to protect that as well. Sometimes you cannot help these things but it is nice to know that the government is going to be there to put money where it is needed in order to deal with tragedies such as that, Mr. Speaker.

I am running out of time again, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope to get up again but I would just like to talk about a few more things before we go on, in terms of what is offered in this Budget. I just talked a little bit about pavement but I will talk about \$76.3 million for the widening and upgrading of Phase II and Phase III of the Trans-Labrador Highway. We know the importance on this side of the House of the connectivity of the road. We know what it means to the people in these isolated communities who are driving these dirt roads, and we will call a spade a spade.

I am blessed with having my wonderful wife from the Northern Peninsula, and her family has always been there. I have driven that south coast road many, many times, although my colleague from Torngat Mountains said if you want to drive it in a small car it is virtually impossible. Well we have made the trip in my truck, my car, many, many times to get the kids to the Island for medical, to visit the family, to get out and enjoy some of the things that

Newfoundland and Labrador has to offer across this great Province for families as well, Mr. Speaker.

It is not as bad as it is being made out to be, but it is a gravel road. When weather does not work with us in terms of keeping that nice, dry surface on the road, Mr. Speaker, that is all we can do. When it gets soft, it gets mushy. When the water comes down, what do we do? We send our people out and we grade it. We maintain it as best we can.

The one thing we are seeing as a result of all of that from this government is a continued focus on making sure the people of Labrador will enjoy asphalt and blacktop on that road progressively over time, and year after year we will make a dent in it until it is done, Mr. Speaker. That is our commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is the way it goes.

Mr. Speaker, we talked already about the \$13.3 million for the hospital in Lab West. We have talked about, and I cannot talk about this enough, Mr. Speaker, the \$6.6 million for the expansion in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, one that is currently being celebrated by the people of the great District of Lake Melville. They have watched me respond as the MHA. They watched this government respond as the government of the day. What they have seen is that we recognize and respect, as is done in Labrador, our elders, those who have paved the way for us, and pardon the pun, we are paving the way for them too, Mr. Speaker, with not only asphalt but with the right amount of infrastructure to meet the needs of the people.

Are we growing? Are we going to have growing pains as we keep having this prosperity in this great Province? You are darn right we are, Mr. Speaker. That is all part and parcel with economic success. With increases in mineral shipments, with new ventures such as Muskrat Falls, with new mines that are going to open up, with new power available for these mines, all things done by this government, Mr. Speaker, we are in good shape.

If you look at some of the economic indicators that are out there for all the world to see – the people from across the way might want to tell all

you people out there in TV land and out there who are in the public: oh, they might put spin on stuff and they might create drama where there is none. The bottom line is this, this Province has never been better. More people are working here than ever before. More people are working.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. RUSSELL: More people are making more money, Mr. Speaker, than they ever have in their lives.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Not only that, but in terms of growth, we are number one across the country, Mr. Speaker. Do not listen to anything you hear, do not listen to the spin and the rhetoric being used out there. The bottom line is this; things are great right here at home. It is only getting better.

When it comes to those measurements taken across the country, we are right up there in the top in most if not all of them, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, people are making money than they ever have. People are buying automobiles. They are having higher levels of disposable income than they have ever had, which means after the bills are paid, after the mortgage –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) fact.

MR. RUSSELL: This is fact, this is irrefutable. Once you have the bills paid, Mr. Speaker, then you have some money to chip in and have some fun with the family for recreation, like never before. We have control of our unemployment rates. We have more opportunities coming for people in this Province. You cannot refute that.

The bottom line here is this; I stood up with the intention of talking mostly about my district and went a little further. I talked a little bit about Lab West and our investments in asphalt, blacktop, about health care services, and about responding to those in need.

I talked a little bit about some of the issues that we jumped on in a rapid response type of fashion, Mr. Speaker, to deal with people with

complex needs up my way in the great District of Lake Melville. It all comes down to this, if people are saying oh we have to change, this is a tired old government. This tired old government is putting us to heights that have never been attained in our past as a Province, leading into the future.

What I am saying is things are good, we are strong. This Province is strong. Our youth are going to be strong and have opportunities like never before, Mr. Speaker. As we go forward as a government, we will talk with the people and sit with the people. If it takes a cup of tea or a formal presentation via committees at the town halls, whatever it takes, we will be listening to the people. We will be responding to the people. We will maintain the prosperity, the economic development, and the success that we have had. This government has put into place, fostered, and facilitated the supports here in the great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege for me to stand in my place here and offer a few more comments with respect to the Budget, and in particular how it relates to the Department of Education, seeing that I am the critic for the department.

I first wanted to say a special thank you to the Wigmores Seniors Association who had me out to their monthly meeting last night and talked about some issues of relevance to the people who live in that area of St. John's North. Whether they are municipal issues or provincial issues or federal issues, it is always useful for me to know what my constituents are thinking.

I think, like a number of members in the House, I have a privileged position in that while the House of Assembly is sitting, I can participate in district events in the mornings when the House is not sitting, and in the evenings. I know that

lots of members who are in from out of town do not enjoy that option and, in fact, spend time away from their families. So, it is not lost on me that is a great privilege that I have.

In addition to having a seat in the House of Assembly, I wanted say a special thank you to Pearl, Ralph, Carm, Ros, and Gert who all volunteer with the Wigmore Seniors Association and have been very kind to me over the years.

I would like to welcome back the former Minister of Education, who has now returned to – I do not know if it is like *Welcome Back, Kotter* or not. He is an educator, and I guess Mr. Kotter was an educator, and we have the minister returning. I believe he originally was appointed that position back in 2009, and here we are and he is back again.

I was interested to question and hear from the former Minister of Education in the Estimates Committee. Some of the things he said I agreed with, some of them I did not agree with, and some of them I am still trying to figure out. One of the things that I have raised in the House of Assembly, my colleagues have raised in the House of Assembly, we have raised publicly, is the whole issue of school size and capacity to house and provide a decent level of education to students in this Province. We have pointed out on a number of occasions that government seems to be building school facilities that are too small to house and to provide education to the school population that it was intended to serve. We have seen that with Carbonear Academy, with gym class in the lunchroom and students eating their lunch at their desk, which is certainly unsanitary, amongst other things.

The former Minister of Education had said in Estimates, and I am still trying to figure it out – I went back a couple of times and listened to the audio recording, even though the transcript is not up yet. The minister talked about the literature, I guess he meant the research literature, not supporting or having as many – he said: We could build schools that houses as many as 2,000 students, but the literature does not support that. He said: We are trying to build schools that are more appropriate, or suggests they will be more appropriate to house about 600 students.

I thought that was interesting because we have many schools that have more than 600 students, and many of those that were built under capacity have modular classrooms, portable classrooms, where students are basically having education delivered in the front or the back lot in a temporary facility. Now, a lot of people question that, and I certainly do. Some people do not have any problem. The former minister did not have any problem with that. I am not sure about the current minister. It really comes down to a question of whether or not people are entitled to receive the same level of education uniformly across the Province, if indeed that is what government's intention is.

So I went back and I looked at some of the statistics online for schools that the minister implied would be overcrowded, those that would have over 600 students in them. I certainly noted that there were quite a number: Holy Trinity Elementary has 752 students, Holy Trinity High has 710 students, Paradise Elementary has 710 students, and Holy Family Elementary School has 715 students. Beachy Cove Elementary as we know is overcrowded with 688 students. Goulds Elementary are undergoing reorganization due to overcrowding there. They had 636 students, and this was data from 2012-2013.

As we know, there has been quite a lot of discussion and turmoil as it comes to the Mount Pearl-Paradise system: Mount Pearl Intermediate has 816 students, 619 at Mount Pearl Senior High, 719 at O'Donel, and St. Peter's Elementary, which we all know is overcrowded, has 750 students. Then other schools in the Province that meet the former minister's definition of being overcrowded, and I am not sure if he was just implying this would be the case with elementary schools or all schools but Prince of Wales Collegiate in my district, in St. John's North, has 702 students, MacDonald Drive Elementary has 702 students, Mary Queen of Peace has 703, Gonzaga has 716, Holy Heart has 956, and that would be massively overcrowded according to the former minister's definition.

I could go on and on and on, but I think at some point somebody over on the other side is going to have to get a handle on what is big enough, what is too big, what overcrowding in schools

constitutes, and then whether or not it makes sense to have students in portable, modular classrooms for up to a decade until we assume our government is hoping that the pressure goes away.

Their hope that the pressure goes away is not consistent with their Population Growth Strategy or any of the purported belief that our population is actually going to increase with time. If it would, we would have even more overcrowding or at least we would have a static situation; there would be some consistency in the overcrowding that was suggested in what the minister said in Estimates.

That was one thing I wanted to mention, and maybe the new Minister of Education can look into that. We could build schools that are large enough to house the students who have their education provided in our schools.

I wanted to also talk about evaluation because evaluation is the cornerstone of quality assessment, of improvement of student performance and student success in our schools. I know the former Minister of Education amalgamated all of the English language school districts last year with the promise that we are going to save millions of dollars, and it looks, from the budget Estimates document, that in fact actually it is costing more now than it did before. There was no cost savings that anybody can really see, and the minister has been asked numerous times and he has not been able to provide any answer about what it is he was talking about last year. No one seems to know.

Since he created the mega school district, which I do not know if he was hoping that they would be able to control it from this building rather than having a democratically elected system of school trustees, but either way, the mega school boards still has, as far as I know, no constitution in by-laws and no formal evaluation policy.

Basically the cornerstone of education is missing. It raises a lot of questions. One of the things that I asked the minister about he seemed to – well, I am not sure where he is still, the former minister, but I would certainly like to hear from the new minister about this so-called no zero policy that the Eastern School District had, a number of other school districts had, and I

guess a number of parents and teachers are wondering whether the new English language school district is going to go down that road. There are many reasons to avoid this so-called no zero policy. That is why many students and a great many teachers oppose such a policy. They oppose it for a variety of reasons.

It is pretty obvious to me as an educator that this policy really flies in the face of the idea that teachers would have some professional discretion in what they do, that they would more or less have their grading policy dictated to them in such a micromanaging way. In fact, my wife is a teacher and there are certainly a lot of teachers in this House of Assembly and former teachers. Teachers know who their students are. It is not like they need to be told this sort of thing. They know it is unrealistic to expect to have a one-size-fits-all model for evaluation for students. They know that.

Another thing a no zero policy does is it takes away significant consequences that teachers can use for students who fail their work. I had a parent say to me the other day: My student is doing reasonably well in school and now they realize they are getting into the high school years and they do not have to submit the work if they do not want to. They just do not have to do it. This is actually causing their child to slack off.

If you look at it really, it makes a lot of sense. That child is actually reasonably smart. If you look at a child who does hand in their work, who does work hard and say they get a grade of – if they were to submit the work and only get a failing grade of 40 per cent or 30 per cent, they would be better off not handing it in at all under this so-called no zero policy that the former minister seemed to embrace before we left for the Easter break.

Conscientious students, students who work hard, students who hand in their work get penalized while others do not learn any value at all of completing their work. It really fails students in my opinion and certainly in the opinion of others because there is basically no research backing this up at all. In addition to being logically flawed it is unsupported by research. As far as I have been able to gather, this particular policy is supported by exactly one study that was

conducted in British Columbia with students with special education needs. It is sort of odd that is forming the cornerstone of our evaluation policy in our schools.

I go back to what I was saying before; it really fails to prepare students for life after school. Employers do not pay people for doing nothing. We do know that the Minister of Transportation and Works does pay – at least he paid Humber Valley Paving 60 per cent of a contract for doing 30 per cent of the work. I would not want that minister to be the Minister of Education, I do not think, if you get 60 per cent for doing 30 per cent. I think it is an odd way of doing business.

Most employers, a vast majority of employers, would not pay somebody for doing nothing. I certainly understand that a college, a university, private training institutions across Newfoundland and Labrador in the post-secondary system, they are certainly not going to be rewarding young people for doing no work, for plagiarizing work, for cheating on assignments, for copying from somebody else, or just not handing in their work at all. No one is going to reward our young people for that. No one is going to reward our students who learn not to hand in their assignments in high school; no one is going to reward them for that in college, university, or in life.

I was reading an interesting article about this. It said a pilot who never flies a plane, an electrician who never wires a house, and a journalist who never hands in a story can never expect to be paid. Employers are never going to accommodate workers who do not do their work, so teachers need to prepare our students for these realities of the work world. So, I wanted to point that out.

People say: Well, what are the consequences beyond not preparing our children for the real world? Well, all we have to do is look at international test scores. Last December, we had scores released by the Program for International Student Assessment, PISA – not pizza. That is a test of competencies of fifteen-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science. It is carried out by all the member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. One of the great thing about this, it provides a province-by-province breakdown of

all of our students' performance in reading, writing, and science.

We can look across the provinces, we can look at the Canadian average, we can look at the OECD average, and we can look at all the member nations and participants in that study. Of course, former educators across the way will have some familiarity with this.

In this test – and I will give you an example of some of the consequences of not providing a decent level of education to our children. Mathematical literacy – I do not want to get too technical here – is assessed on a six point scale with this particular test, with level one being the lowest end of the scale, so one being the lowest end of the scale. The tasks gets more and more difficult as you go along and more complex towards the higher end of the scale, which is six.

So it goes from one up to six. Thirty-nine per cent of students in Canada were at least at level three, and 86 per cent of students in Canada were at least at level two. Level two is required. Educators will know that level two is basically considered to be a baseline of mathematical proficiency that is required to participate fully in modern society. It is the basic level of mathematical knowledge one would need to survive in our world, effectively.

Well, how did our fifteen-year-old students' test scores compare with the rest of Canada and the rest of the member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development? We should be concerned about how all that turned out. In Canada, only 14 per cent of students scored below level two. That is below that level of mathematical proficiency that is required to participate in our modern society and to get by. In this Province, no less than 21 per cent of our fifteen-year-olds were below level two on mathematical proficiency on that PISA international test.

It is one of the worst results in Canada, and it really pains me to say that because I know how hard our teachers work. I know how hard our principals work. I have spoken to many of them and I have spoken to many people who give freely of their time to become involved with school councils and try to improve our school communities. The fact that we have our students

failing to this degree to approximate the Canadian average and to more or less keep up with the rest of the industrialized world is nothing short of shocking and something that we ought to be deeply concerned about.

If you look at the other end of the scale with the PISA, like I said earlier, remember, it goes from level one, the lowest end, with increasing complexity up to level six. Well, at the other end of the scale, toward six, with respect to the performance at the highest levels of the mathematics test, over 16 per cent of Canadian students, so of all Canadian students, perform at level five or above – 16 per cent. Here in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, just 9 per cent of students were performing at the highest levels; again, amongst the worst results in Canada. It is something to be seriously alarmed about because we know the vast majority of jobs – when we talk about Outlook 2020 and the number of jobs that are going to become available in this Province over the coming years, over the next, say, fifteen years as a result of resource development, whether that is in the oil industry or further extraction of other natural resources, minerals, whether it is a revival in our fisheries, a further revival in our fisheries, a revival in our forestry industry, whether it is in information technology, or the knowledge economy and the service industry, in finance, in health care, we know the majority of those jobs, a vast majority of them, require higher levels of education.

These test results demonstrate that we are not providing the most basic level of education to a significant number, a significant percentage of our students. There are really nice charts and graphs in this report, the PISA report, that demonstrate where we are, that provide a visual representation of where we fall with respect to other provinces in Canada and other countries in the world.

If you look at our performance in mathematics, I think it is most concerning. We are behind. Newfoundland and Labrador falls behind Latvia, behind Iceland, behind France, behind the Czech Republic –

AN HON. MEMBER: Moldova.

MR. KIRBY: Moldova is not on here.

Denmark, we fall behind Slovenia, behind Vietnam, behind Poland, behind the rest of Canada, as I said, behind Finland, behind Estonia, behind Lichtenstein, behind the Netherlands, behind Switzerland, behind Korea, behind Taiwan and on and on. That is just mathematics.

If you look at our student scores on science and reading, the same pattern emerges. We are behind all of these other countries.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. KIRBY: There is something we have to do, Mr. Speaker, to resolve this.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I recognize the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I have to say, I am going to go a little different route than the former member who just stood up and spoke. I have a lot of confidence in our teachers and our students in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I want to rise today, and first of all I want to welcome the newest member here in the House of Assembly, the Member for Virginia Waters. I would like to welcome her here and hope she enjoys it, and enjoys the job as an MHA because it is a great, rewarding job.

It is the most rewarding job I have ever done in my life because you get to meet the people and you get to listen to their concerns, and there is a lot of help you can do out there. There are a lot of things you can do on a daily basis from your calls. Every day I get calls from constituents of mine, and it gives me great pleasure to be able to help them and be able to assist them in different things they are doing. I am sure you will enjoy

that also. It is a great job, it is a great position, and it is great that people show trust in you to be able to do that type of job.

Also today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I think he is going to do a fantastic job. He has been on the ball a lot. He has done a lot for this party. He has done a lot for everyone, and I think he is going to do a fantastic job as minister. He is pretty good at the Twitter and he is pretty good at everything else. I do not know if he will have the time to do some of the stuff he was doing. I know some people in his district and they tell me he is a great district person also. So I hope he continues to do the stuff for the people in his district and I wish him all the best.

Mr. Speaker, I am just going to start off today, I had the opportunity actually to go to a function for the Department of Tourism. The former minister could not make it and he asked me to do it. When I had the opportunity to do it – involved in sports all my life, I really thought this was a great opportunity for me to go down and see what it was all about, inductions into the Hall of Fame and things like this.

Mr. Speaker, when I went down there my eyes just came open. They came open from the people who were down there and the praise they were giving our government for the investments we are after doing in sports and recreation. Since 2007, we have invested \$192 million in recreation, strategies, and different sports and facilities, infrastructure and everything else. Do you know what the big thing in the room was that night? It was how good our athletes were doing right across Canada, and internationally.

We look at Kaetlyn Osmond over in the Olympics. We looked at different athletes who have performed all over the place. That night there was some inductees. It was pretty interesting watching the inductees. I knew two, and actually competed against two of them.

There was Colin Abbott who was inducted for softball. I can remember being down to the

nationals in Pleasantville. They were playing British Columbia in the semifinals game, and Pietnick was one of the top pitchers in the world at the time, and Colin Abbott was coming up in the tenth inning and the coach from BC went out and said to walk him. Pietnick said, no, I am not walking him. Anyway, the next pitch he threw Colin put it out over the beer tent and Newfoundland went on and won the game. It was unbelievable.

AN HON. MEMBER: Were you in the beer tent?

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, I was in the beer tent. It went over my head.

Mr. Speaker, just to tell you that Colin Abbott competed internationally for Canada all over the world. I know the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island did a member's statement on him a little while ago. Colin represented Canada all over the world and everywhere he went he won awards. He was always selected as the top and a Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

I happened to play ball against Colin. A lot of people do not know that Colin was a pretty good hockey player. He played with Portugal Cove in the Avalon East hockey league.

AN HON. MEMBER: As good as you?

MR. K. PARSONS: No, not as good as me. A different style of hockey player we will say than I was. He scored goals, I scored goals. I got a few more penalties than he did but it was different stuff. He was a good athlete all the way around.

Now Colin gives back a lot to minor hockey as a coach. He is also recognized as one of the best referees in this Province. I went down and watched the finals in the Avalon East hockey league and he was refereeing nearly all the games. Colin was another great athlete.

Then there was Lee Churchill who won so many awards. He was a cross-country skier. There was a gentleman, Max Kirby stood up and spoke. I did not know much about Mr. Kirby. I was amazed with his speech. He is an older gentleman and he gave one of the best speeches

down there. He talked about how it was in track and field and stuff like that in days gone by.

There was a gentleman there, Gerry Rideout, who was in cross-country skiing. Actually, the Minister of Transportation and Works was there as one of his invited guests. He was from Labrador City and a lot he did for cross-country skiing.

Then there was Andy Sullivan, another fellow, a little bit different hockey player than I was.

AN HON. MEMBER: He was smooth.

MR. K. PARSONS: He was a pretty smooth hockey player. I had the opportunity to play against Andy Sullivan in both the Avalon East hockey league and the inter-city hockey league. I can tell you if the scouts had to be around like they are today there is no doubt in my mind that he would be one of the NHL players we would be talking about for years to come. He had the skill level and he was just a fantastic hockey player.

The last one who went in was Ray Will. Ray Will was a track and field guy. He came from England, I believe, originally and took over track and field here. To this day, I think he still coaches and helps out in track and field.

It was a great opportunity and I want to thank the former minister for giving me that opportunity. I just want to recognize those people here today because we have to invest. Like I said, since 2007 we have invested \$192 million.

Infrastructure – would we like to see stadiums in every community? Yes, we would. Would we like to see soccer fields in every community? We are after growing so far with our recreation program since 2007, it is unbelievable.

When I look in my own district, I look at the absolutely beautiful arena we have down there that this government invested in and opened in 2008, which was the Jack Byrne Arena. I always say when I stand up here just to give you an idea of these investments and what they do, in 2004 there were 165 children involved in minor hockey in the Northeast Avalon, it was called then. Today there are up to 700. So just

by putting an arena in and doing that kind of investment, and any time we can have our kids out playing hockey, skating, or figure skating – the arenas are not just for hockey players. People like to get out and general skate. I know the schools down there participate all the time. This time of year in particular, they will have some of their gym classes there. I know the other day when I was down there was a group there from Cape St. Francis up skating in the morning. It is a great opportunity for everybody to get out and enjoy these facilities.

Again, like I said, it was a great evening. I was speaking to the president of Sport NL, and his name is Mr. Nicholl. He just said to me: Kevin, I want you to tell your government that I am really pleased with the investments you are making, investments you are making in our young people, old people, or whatever it is, to put the best facilities we can possibly have in this Province. I just wanted to get up today and say a few words about that.

Mr. Speaker, I had another opportunity, too, and it is great as an MHA sometimes when we have busy ministers and we get the opportunity to go around to different events, bring greetings on their behalf, and do a little announcing or whatever. Also, I went to one recently. It was down to the Red Cross, and actually the Red Cross building there on Major's Path is in my district, so I was down in my own district doing an announcement. It was the Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Transportation Project. I did not know much about the project, actually, until I really got the few notes and got down there. Our government is investing \$1.3 million in an Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Transportation Project. This is a great project. What this does –

MR. POLLARD: Yes, Springdale (inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Springdale has one, too, yes. There were five projects that were chosen, and each project gets \$100,000 for up to three years to carry out their proposals. The people who got the projects, and I was really impressed with this, were the Canadian Red Cross, Metrobus, the Town of Springdale, the Town of Clarendville, and the Bay St. George South Area Development Association. They were the ones who were chosen.

Mr. Speaker, what an opportunity for us to really show our seniors how much we appreciate them. This gives them the opportunity to get out and partake in all different kinds of activities. No matter if it is going to a doctor's appointment, it could be going out to a social, or whatever it is. They really do appreciate this. They have been the backbone of our society for years, they are the lifeblood of Newfoundland and Labrador, they have grown this Province, and they are the people we should be taking care of.

This initiative, I have to say – and I just spoke to the people who were there at the event and they said it is unbelievable we will have the opportunity to take people who normally cannot get to a doctor's appointment or cannot go get their groceries. It is simple things like that a lot of us take for granted. While I know most people would prefer to call their son, daughter, very good neighbour, a good friend, or whatever, there are a lot of people out there who cannot do that. This initiative, and I must say it is a great initiative, gives them the opportunity to do so.

I know I spoke to a resident in my district who has some medical needs and does a lot of different – I think last year he told me he had about fifty different appointments, and that was with specialists. I explained this to him and hopefully he was going to contact the Red Cross. He may be able to avail of this because he does not have family in the area and it is hard for him to get his wife to take time off to go even to the doctor's appointments, to go all the way down and come back.

I really wanted to just mention that because these are initiatives that people do not see every day. They do not see these investments. Someone might say it is only \$1.3 million, but what an investment for our seniors and for people who are stuck in their homes, cannot get out, and need a little help.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I want to applaud the former minister. I think she did a fantastic job on this project. I know the people I spoke to really appreciated the money government was investing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit today about different things, and I am going to speak now about our Budget in general. It is easy to get up here and say positive things, just like it is over on the other side. They say negative things all the time. We really have to look at where we come from. In 2003, when this government took over – and there is no doubt about it, the oil industry has boomed. The oil industry has given us a lot of money. It has increased what we have done and what we are able to do, basically, with our health care, with our education, and with everything – with our roadwork. You name it.

Mr. Speaker, we are spending that money, and we would all like to have more. I know every year when I go over and look for my transportation needs, I go to the Department of Transportation and I have a list about a mile long, like everybody does. I would like to have everything. I think the Minister of Transportation told me this year they have an \$80 million budget and he said the requests were around \$800 million for the different roadwork they want to be done.

What I do in my area, I looked at the parts of the roads that really needed work. I was very pleased the other day to be part of an announcement, basically, for Cape St. Francis for roadwork this year. At the end of the bypass road there is a real rough section coming into Flatrock. I know the people from Flatrock to Pouch Cove are really going to appreciate that. There is 1.1 kilometres going to be – levelling is what they call it. That will be done and that is probably the worst spot in the whole area.

Then the other section that we are going to do a piece between is Pouch Cove and Bauline. Last year, we had 1.2 kilometres done and this year we are hoping to get two kilometres done on that stretch of road. That is very important because the people from Bauline and the students – there are children coming across that. It is a very rough section of road. The students are coming across that every day and now, by the end of this year, I am hoping that half of that road will be done, the worst half will be done, and then we will work on it as years go by to make sure it all gets done.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am realistic and I knew that. I would like to get the whole thing done. I would like to get other roads done that are not so good in my district, but there is only so much money to go around and we all have to realize that.

I am very fortunate. I am very, very fortunate that in my district I do not have the roads that other members do, hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of roads. Here I am down there with about forty kilometres of road in total that goes through my district, a very short district.

MS PERRY: Oh my God.

MR. K. PARSONS: Here is the poor Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Lune. Oh my God, she says, if she only had that.

I realize there has to be a lot of road work done in her district. I realize the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale, he is in the same boat and other members are, too. Mr. Speaker, it is a juggling act for everybody, but do you know what? Since 2003, just look at the difference in what we are doing in our road work. Improvements are getting made. It is unbelievable the amount of investments we are making.

I know I had the opportunity a little while ago to go with my friend from Bell Island; we went over when they did the announcement for the new ferry over on Bell Island. It was a great day. We were down in Portugal Cove and they did the media thing, but then I said, well, I am going to go on over on the boat with you. I was hoping I would not get sea sick. It was a calm day. I do not get sea sick very often, now, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, I went over with him and we went over to a hall over on Bell Island. When we walked inside there were all kinds of people there. They had cookies and they had all kinds of drinks, but the place was absolutely packed. Everybody over there was just so excited that the minister was over there, the member was there, and the announcement of a new ferry.

That new ferry, I think, altogether, when it is all said and done, is going to be about \$70 million, and that is to do the wharf and everything else.

That is because of the hard work of the member and what he did. Again, that is part of our total Budget. That is a huge investment. I know the hon. Member for The Isles of Notre Dame is also getting a ferry.

We would like to invest in everything. We would like to give everybody a new ferry, but we have to do it time after time. If we go and invest it all in one year, Mr. Speaker, we will be back to the days of when we did not have a cent to do anything only pay off debt. We have come a long way. That is the thing I want to emphasize here today. Since 2003 our government has come so far. We have paid down our debt. We did infrastructure investments in this Province like never seen before.

Mr. Speaker, I did not think I was going to get twenty minutes in today, but I want to talk a little bit about people in my district and volunteers. I had a great opportunity on Sunday to go down with the heritage committee in Pouch Cove. I know you are not allowed to show anything, but I am just going to give you a quick look at the book that they did. It is a beautiful book that the heritage people put together in Pouch Cove. I think it is 365 pages. It has all kinds of pictures. You should see what went into this book.

They had a heritage committee down there. Different people in the heritage committee had a different role to do. They went and they researched this and researched war veterans and stuff like this. One lady in particular, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Shirley Bragg gave them a lot of information. She was the first person to get up and speak. She was a nurse in her day. She got up with her little nurse's uniform on and did a reading from the book of years gone by.

I have to tell you a little thing about Shirley. I was at a function a little while ago and the place was absolutely full. Actually the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island came down too because he knew her son. It was her ninetieth birthday – ninety years old, Mr. Speaker. She was up the other day and she gave a reading out of this book. We had a gentleman who got up and played a tune and she got up and she did a little dance out on the floor. I tell you if you want to see a spirited Pouch Cove that day

and how much people appreciated what Mrs. Bragg was all about. She is just a wonderful lady.

I am very proud of what the heritage committee did in Pouch Cove. I want to congratulate Dan Rubin – some of you people know Dan – and other members of that committee. There is a lot of work and a lot of effort goes into putting something through like this.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about another little thing I went to this weekend – I go to a lot of stuff during the weekend – it was the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department. I am going to do a member's statement on them in a little while.

They had their fortieth anniversary on Saturday night. I went down there and it was amazing to see that the chief in Torbay has been there for forty years. He has been there since day one. It was nice to see the town gave him a real nice present. He had all kinds of different presents given to everyone else. It was nice to see the whole spirit that night.

I have to say the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department takes care of the Town of Torbay, and the Town of Flatrock. A little while ago they came down and took care of me; I had a little fire down in my yard. They do a fantastic job; it is unbelievable. They are one of the best trained fire departments in the Province. They have the top-notch equipment. I have to say I congratulate the Towns of Torbay and Flatrock for supporting such a great organization. These are volunteers, Mr. Speaker. I know in all communities in the Province we have great volunteers, but I can tell you in my district in Cape St. Francis we have some really, really good volunteers and people who want to put things back in their community.

In the community of Flatrock we have a group together, three ladies who take care of the Flatrock Community Centre. I used to be involved with it for a while. It is unbelievable – I tell them all the time that in the small community of Flatrock they have you from birth to death. Because when you are born they are there to take care of you, and when you die they are the ones who do all the arrangements down to the church to make sure everything runs smoothly. That is what they are all about.

That is the type of volunteers we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Every opportunity I get up here to thank them – and it is not only in those communities; it is in the communities of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove, a fantastic bunch of people over there that volunteer. They do a lot with the rowing. They are all the time involved – if you talk about Outer Cove, you always talk about a rowing crew. You would not believe the people who put back in that sport time after time after time again. Every time you go down to the Regatta, you will notice that there are a lot of people there from Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. They are all volunteers. They get up and do a fantastic job.

Mr. Speaker, my time is going down and I just want to say since 2003, we have come a long way. I am very proud to stand on this side of the House with this government and the accomplishments we have made over the last number of years in all districts in this Province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak for the second time to the Budget debate. Before I get into that, I want to acknowledge my esteemed colleague, the Member for Virginia Waters, as our Opposition Finance critic and looking forward to working to working with her, as well as the new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, welcome in that role, and I look forward to working with you.

As the Member for Cape St. Francis had said, talked about the importance of recreation, I had the opportunity to go to the Jack Byrne Arena and watch a game there. I watched the Straits Riffers take home the gold in the midget division C and bring that banner home; it was quite nice.

Then I also went to Placentia and I watched the Straits Riffers Bantams be able to take home that gold medal there as well. I was in, I believe, St. John's West and the St. Anthony Polars, the

Atoms A, took home the gold banner as well. We certainly have some great athletes in the District of The Straits – White Bay North and that is just the tip of the iceberg for all the medals, the gold, silver and bronze that the minor hockey leagues in my district were able to bring back to the district.

It is great to invest, and invest in recreation and high-quality recreation facilities. I am very proud that we were able to see a newly opened facility, the Polar Centre, in the District of St. Anthony; and that is quite exciting because it is exceptional to see, to have that high-quality centre.

We have seen a new school open in St. Anthony, yet we have not seen the minister come up to officially open that school, and it has been open for months. I have had the ability to tour the facility. It is a great asset to the community. People are very, very pleased with that. I hope the new Minister of Education – and I invite him to come up, and hopefully he will tour that facility.

I hope he is also going to reinstate the public library in St. Lunaire-Griquet, which the former minister said would not close. Well, where is that library today? It is temporarily closed and listed on the Web site as temporarily closed. The former Minister of Education assured me this public library will not close, and the minister said many times before: No public library in the Province will close. Well, the one in St. Lunaire-Griquet has closed – it is closed. It is temporarily closed. That is months now. We are five months in and the library is closed. When is the Minister of Education going to reopen that public library? They are doing it at a cost savings of just \$5,000 – \$5,000.

We have seen government spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on doing a review, doing another review, and giving \$20 million back in bonds to a company in Humber Valley Paving, rather than keep a public library open with the public dollars we have in our Budget, taking books away from those who need it most, young children and people in communities who do not have access. It is incredible – it is incredible, Mr. Speaker – that we would see this from this government, that they would take away books

and close down public libraries. It is just unacceptable.

Another thing we need to look at, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister had talked about the investments previously in broadband. We need to do that. We have not seen the real, creative solutions that need to be implemented so that we can get global, universal broadband wireless coverage in Newfoundland and Labrador. I welcome the new Minister of IBRD, the former Minister of Health and Community Services, to this role, a role she has had in the past as well.

There are easy, simple solutions as I said for the community of Pines Cove, which has a multi-million dollar project going on in their backyard where you are drilling the subsea cable. Nalcor is spending hundreds of thousands, millions, of dollars. They paid out \$3 million to fishers who are going to be impacted financially for laying that cable crossing there. These are things that are happening in the community of Pines Cove that does not have broadband Internet.

Why are we allowing such large-scale developments happen where we are not looking after the people who are attached, close, and adjacent to resources? A simple change of switching the telephone exchange from 456 to 475 at a low cost and running those cables can allow them to have broadband Internet, a simple solution. I have raised it before. I have raised it with the past minister. I have raised it with other ministers that this needs to be done. The community of Pines Cove should have broadband Internet.

There are other communities, as well. There are other solutions and other proposals how we can get good, ubiquitous coverage. It is not just broadband. Some of it could be done with cellular technologies and some of it can be done with wireless, but we have to bring down the caps and we have to make sure it is fair. I have applied, myself, for intervener status and I have been there as part of the CRTC investigation when we look at the wireless industry and how Internet is provided via wireless. The government is not listed there. Other governments are.

Why is this government dropping the ball so many times when it comes to advancing our

telecommunications industry? They are just not there. They are dropping the ball on so many things, and broadband Internet is one of those. They should have been an intervener with the CRTC status and the investigation they are doing. I will get the information; this government will not.

We are not seeing any creative solutions when it comes to looking at how we deal with public transportation in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have been ridiculed in this House of Assembly by members opposite many times before for talking about how rural areas need public transportation for seniors. How can we look at implementing in our regional service centres that have hospitals, that have banking, and that have groceries and retail outlets so that we can look at implementing a scheduled, small-scale transportation where they can access the services they need and so we can keep people, seniors, in their homes longer and in their communities? We have seen a very simplistic pilot project that was implemented that is not reaching the broader base. These are in what I would say are larger suburban areas in the Province, and we need to look at smaller-scale solutions so that we can create stability in our rural communities.

If we look at what the member opposite had just talked about when we look at road infrastructure, road infrastructure is key. I know that. In my district I have several hundred kilometres of roads. I have Route 430, Route 432, Route 433, Route 434, Route 435, Route 436, Route 437, Route 438, as well as Goose Cove Road and many secondary roads that are in communities that are the responsibility of Transportation and Works or Municipal Affairs through town councils that are there.

I want to really throw a bouquet to the Department of Transportation and Works staff. They really did a phenomenal job there over Easter weekend when the road washed out and when the culvert gave way. No one got hurt, no one got injured, and resources were deployed. There was a quick response. That action was taken and they worked through the weekend, put in a temporary fix, and then worked for a longer-term solution in that area. That is the key. Those type of things need to be done.

In emergency situations like that, where we see those repairs, that should come from a different fund. We need to look at making sure those types of emergency repairs do not take away from the general maintenance and repairs that need to be done. We need to make sure when we remove culverts and things like that, that we do put back the larger culverts to be more emergency prepared. That is something that did happen in this situation. I have had good communication with the Department of Transportation and Works and that is very, very positive, I have to say, in that situation.

I have a lot of problems and a lot of issues, like a lot of other members when it comes to the road infrastructure. I have presented many petitions in the House of Assembly, especially looking at Conche road being a gravel road and the economy they have. We have so many areas where we need to see investments made in road infrastructure. We need to take the politics out of road paving and we need to look at a multi-year plan, a multi-year budget, to deal with these efforts. We need to look at dealing with the priority areas and we need to make sure that primary routes, like Route 430, are taken care of. That is where transportation that is flowing north, that is flowing into Labrador through the ferry, that is going to St. Anthony, and that is going to other areas on the peninsula using Route 430. That road cannot be in deplorable condition.

As well, we look at areas where we have a UNESCO heritage site going to Route 436. There are a few kilometres there that need work and you have an economy that is built around small independent business that make their living through a by-product of tourism and this site that brings tens of thousands of tourists each year. Also, cruise ships come and visit. There have been investments, significant investments, made by the people in small business.

These are the people who are taking the risks. They are creating the jobs, they are creating employment, and they are building a stable economy in our rural communities. We need to be working with them as Members of the House of Assembly to find solutions so they can continue to add to the revenue base, so we can make sure we put back into services and programs in this Province, and so we are not

seeing things continuously erode. There have to be strategic investments certainly made.

I want to say that when I sat in Estimates with the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement I was very pleased to hear him talk about there will be a renewed focus on the social enterprise because that is something I asked for that former ministers had just basically ignored. There was not that appetite to go down that route to look at the social enterprise in a true, meaningful way.

If we look at the success of the social enterprise, I only have to look to St. Anthony Basin Resources Incorporated that has put almost \$16 million back in infrastructure in the local economy through a cold storage that has been able to attract international shipping, a container port through Eimskip. That is through biweekly shipping going directly into Europe.

A second containerized port in Newfoundland and Labrador is in my district because of a social enterprise that has been very successful in utilizing a public resource to put those investments back in the region. They have invested in tourism assets, in boat building, in trails, in regional infrastructure, in recreation, and in scholarships and bursaries. These are the types of things that sustain and build economies.

I look at the Straits-St. Barbe Chronic Care Corporation that started out and it is a non-profit. They run the Ivy Durley Place, a personal care home in Newfoundland and Labrador that started with twenty beds and has now recently expanded. They have expanded again to thirty-six. They focus on recreation, they focus on making sure the seniors have a high quality of life and that they do things around recreation like Cruising the Coast so that the seniors can visit. The residents who are there can visit, take in local attractions, play games along the way, do shopping, and take in entertainment to take them to Corner Brook and back. They do this annually.

This is not a typical type of approach that you would get from any other type of personal care home. Because of the fact it is a social enterprise, it gives back to those who utilize the facility and to the workers. It gives back to the

region as a whole. This has been a huge success.

This is where we need to look when we look at how we deal with the struggles of adequate housing in Newfoundland and Labrador and rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We have to work with the operators; we have to find different solutions to work in community. Sometimes the business case is not as simple.

I have brought up in this House many times about venture capital. Long before this government ever talked about venture capital when the Immigrant Investor Fund came up and talking about utilizing that \$200 million-something talked about how we need to utilize a portion of this fund in venture capital as other provinces are doing to create economic wealth, to create economic jobs, and to advance our economy, whether it is in the tech sector or whether it is in medical research. These are opportunities.

Government has chosen not to use that fund that constantly gets money cycled in and payments cycled out. It is continuous cash coming in, and if you use cash to go out and then create some success with it, then the cash will come back, as it has in other Provinces. This government is set on using general revenue from the tax base to put out in its programs and in its lending, rather than utilizing a separate fund and utilizing the public revenue that comes forward to deal with larger-term capital investment, roads, different programs, or health care. They use some of this fund for business lending, which there could be another avenue to deal with that and make sure the taxpayers are getting a significant return on investment. It can be a win-win, but government is not looking at going that route when they could be.

I want to say there are significant Arctic opportunities, and government announces strategies all the time. The minister came up in 2011, I believe – maybe it was 2012, but it has been a while ago – to St. Anthony announcing the Arctic Opportunities Initiative. Since then, what we have seen from this opportunities initiative is that we are going to attend conferences and promote the opportunities there, rather than look at: Where do we need to make the strategic investments? What are the capital

investments? How are we going to partner with the feds to make those investments happen? Nobody has a clear plan or direction on how we are going to capitalize on the Arctic, whether it is for Arctic shipping or whether it is Arctic research. What type of programs can we put forward?

In my district, St. Anthony is poised to benefit from Arctic opportunities because it has the College of the North Atlantic, because it has the international shipping, and because it has port development. What further investments can be made there so business can set up, so we can expand, and so we can grow the economy on the Great Northern Peninsula? These are opportunities.

We see a strategy, but then again we do not see the actions to follow up, and that is a failure of government. It is a continuous failure and you can speak about it to other strategies that become announced. People are getting tired of hearing a strategy without seeing the results at the end of the day.

One of the things, though, is that our College of the North Atlantic – I toured it with the Leader of the Official Opposition in St. Anthony. We got to see a successful program that has been added, and that is the power line training technician course, and getting to see people participate and get the hands-on training where they may be able to get local jobs in the region, provided we are not continuing to see Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro continuously erode services, erode jobs, and ship them away from our rural areas. That is what is happening. We are giving people almost this false hope that jobs will be available, yet government is paring away and taking away services again and again from our rural communities.

There are vacancies in places and in departments that have not been filled that are just there. They are vacant, so the people are not getting the service, that income is gone from the community, and that family is gone from the region. It does have an impact. Those types of decisions which government makes has impacts; it has impacts on the economy and on the region.

If we are not looking at making the right investments in people and in our regions, then we are going to continue to see a real inequity of resources and how regions develop. If we look at the forest industry, for example, on the Northern Peninsula East, Roddickton has always been a forestry town. We have a significant capital asset that has been put in place at Holson Forest Products in a pellet plant and also in an upgraded sawmill and in a kiln. It is integrated. There is harvesting of upwards of 120,000 cubic metres available to sustain that pellet plant and do 10 million board feet of lumber per year. You get the value added and all the waste material can go through that plant.

It should be able to employ, through the contractors, through the harvesters, through the operations, and through people working at the pellet plant, indirect and direct jobs of over 150 to 250 people in that economy. That is quite large when you are talking about a town of Roddickton-Bide Arm that has about 1,000 people, quite significant – very, very significant. It transcends. It is not just Roddickton-Bide Arm because if you look at when you create stability in business, then there is spinoff. There is other business that is created.

When you create instability in economy, and because of government's inaction, poor planning, and some of the decisions it has made, then you also see the other side of that. You see business close and we have seen business close in the Town of Roddickton. You lose – you lose significantly.

I do not know if government understands small business in the way they should because when you create an industry that should be able to sustain itself, and pellets are demanded all over the world, we should be able to fulfill that locally. There was a plan to fulfill that locally. Government has moved away from that direction, but when you allow an industry to go on a standstill you also end up losing the institutional knowledge, you lose the contractors, people sell, and get out of business. Where is the local value in that – where is the local value?

Time and time again, we see it in our fishery. Where is the local value? If you are not allowing the local people to have local jobs and

also make those investments and benefit from the resources that surround them, then government has missed its job.

One thing I am proud of that is in the Budget is the cut to the small business tax. It is something I have been pushing basically since I have been in this House of Assembly. It is good for small business; it is good for the region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for my time here today to speak to the Budget and point out a lot of failings that this government has in presenting Budget 2014-2015, and I will have more to say.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, I do believe I heard the member who just spoke once say that he lived out of the Province for a while. After what I just heard, I suggest he leave the Province again – I suggest he leave the Province again. If he has no more optimism in the people of the Province than he has just spewed out in the last twenty minutes, I suggest he get on a plane to take him back to where he came from before he came back here. I am not joking about that.

Mr. Speaker, that is one of the –

MR. MITCHELMORE: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North on a point of order.

MR. MITCHELMORE: It is certainly not the people of the Province I have an issue with; it is the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the man has the faith in it, but some of the people who work in our government are our public service. I have full faith. I just moved into a new department. My first meeting with them was on Friday, and if you and that member – he can make smacks at me as being a member of the Conservative government, but all of these employees are a part of this government. They are the ones who work day in and day out. The group I just saw are a group who is committed to the cause of children and youth in this Province.

Mr. Speaker, I just listened to twenty minutes of bemoaning – bemoaning. Here is one of the statements I took from what he said: It is so easy; there are so simple solutions. He has been putting a spin on St. Lunaire-Griquet for the last year. He has been saying it is \$5,000. The man knows the difference –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: The man knows the difference in that. It is not \$5,000, Mr. Speaker. To do what he is asking is more than that, much more than that. He is spinning it, Mr. Speaker, for his own political purposes.

He talks about the roads. This member was probably away from the Province and did not drive the Northern Peninsula before we came in government. I am not speaking to what the Liberals did or did not do. I am speaking to the conditions of roads on the Northern Peninsula. The conditions on the roads, Mr. Speaker – and a lot of my colleagues can speak to it. That people would not drive their trailers up over the Northern Peninsula because the roads were in such deplorable conditions.

I would ask him to speak on the conditions of that road. That road, I have driven over it numerous times – one of the best roads in this Province. Why did we do that? We have a National Park, we have UNESCO site upon the tip of the Northern Peninsula, a very valued part of this Province, and we recognized that the roadwork was needed there, just as we have done down in Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. We

have a growing aquaculture industry down there, thus our commitment and investment in the roads in that particular area. We know product is shipped in and out of that area, we needed investment in that area and we did it, because it supports the industry that is down there.

The other thing – this is an indication where this member's head is, Mr. Speaker. He said the government is always developing strategies. I would hope so. If not, what he is promoting is you fly it by the seat of your pants. Mr. Speaker, I am just going to name off three that I am very familiar with: the Early Childhood Learning Strategy, our investment in zero to three, our investment in full-day Kindergarten, the broadband initiative, the strategy. Mr. Speaker, the one that I am involved in right now, the child care strategy.

Through all of these strategies frameworks are developed, time frames are put in place whereby you aim for it. This department that I am presently in looked at being in place within the three to five-year range. Mr. Speaker, they are in the fourth year. My initial meeting with them tells me that they are in a very, very good place when it comes to developing strategies around protecting our children and our youth.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, when I hear a member get up and just preach and tout what he has just done, the doom and gloom of it. I am going to let this man know that I do indeed have faith in our teachers. I have faith in our social workers, those who provide the front-line services to the people on a daily basis who face the many challenges that they face. I have faith in our nurses.

I have been in government now going on eleven years and I have to truly say that I have faith in the public service who works on behalf of government. He may not and he must remember that when he criticizes, he also criticizes many of these individuals who work day in and day out in a belief that they are committed to.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have been honoured in my entire career to have worked with are youth and children. I spent my year previous to this in education. I was very, very honoured to be able to come in to government after the last election and get appointed to the

Department of Education. I am going to speak a little bit about that. I also am quite honoured to be now appointed to the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

In my past portfolio as Minister of Education I am looking at that we operated with an \$860 million budget. The schools that are being constructed – I said it when I was in that portfolio; I do not think there is ever a time in government when more schools were built and more major projects and renovations that have gone on than have been done in our term as a government.

Some people were tired of hearing me say it when I was in there – the best student-teacher ratio of all provinces in Canada. The number of student assistants that went in – and one of my former colleagues stood up and spoke and talked about what we have done in the elimination of school fees and free textbooks. Those of us who are in education know how important that is to the students and parents who come to school on a regular basis. In this last Budget to be able to stand up and announce that we are moving forward with the implementation of full-day Kindergarten in September of 2016.

Mr. Speaker, all of these things in the name of education have been tremendous, tremendous commitments and announcements. Whether the member who spoke previously wants to recognize it or not, they are part of strategies. They are part of plans. We did not just decide that in 2006, all right, this year we are going to go free textbooks. Well, we are not sure what we are going to do next year; we might do something or we may not. It is all part of the strategies.

If this gentleman is suggesting we not operate in that type of framework, I would suggest he is probably venturing the road that he mentioned. Yes, it is easy. It is simple. It is not a solution though and it is not very effective, that is for sure. It certainly would not be a very effective way to operate, if that is what he is suggesting, Mr. Speaker.

I now have moved into the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. I said to them, the people I met with over the last number of days, it is a very young department. Previous, it was

an attachment to the Department of Health. Files and whatnot get addressed in different manners.

There are many of us who have gotten up in this House and have spoken about our most important resource. I can ask anybody here now if they know what I am talking about, our most valuable and our most important resource, and they will tell you exactly what I am talking. It is not oil. It is not fish. It is not the members opposite, for sure. Mr. Speaker, it is about our children and our youth. That is exactly what our most important resources is.

What did we as a government do four or five years ago, Mr. Speaker? We established the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. What is that department dedicated to? It is our youth – it is our youth. It is our youth that this department deals with.

As I started to say in my lead up, one of the things I have noticed is that there is an energy within the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. The former minister came over to me and he said: You are going to enjoy this department, Minister, because they are engaged – they are very much engaged. Their goal, of course, in the development of a new department is to make it work. To ensure that the children and the youth of this Province receive the best possible care that they need and that they require.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we were discussing that and I made a comment to them that I have made several times. I have been around some households from time to time and I have heard this comment: Our children do not know how lucky they are. Now, I have to be honest with you. I never use it; I chose not to use it. My reason being, I do not think children should have to realize how lucky they are. They should be able to be born, to grow, and to have a good life.

It is very unfortunate sometimes that there is that darker side to society and some children find themselves in very difficult, difficult situations. I did not want my children to know that they were lucky and I do not want my grandchildren to know that they are lucky, all I want is that they grow up to be good, sound individuals who

do their part in society to support their fellow human beings.

Through the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, Mr. Speaker, that is the goal. Our goal is to support those children who find themselves in very difficult situations and to make sure that they receive the best possible care that we can, with the ultimate goal of having that family unit in place and we continue to work towards that.

Mr. Speaker, I was impressed; I did not expect the department to be as big as it was. There are 800 individuals in the department. It is funded now to the tune of close on \$200 million. They are four-and-a-half years into it. When I look at some of the programs that they have undertaken, the recent media campaign Foster a Future, they showed me the success – I believe they have come up with ninety-two additional foster homes and they have been able to place some additional 140 or 145 children in these homes.

It speaks to the people who work in the department. It speaks to where they want to take an initiative. Do you know the important part of it? It speaks to where we, as a government, have made our investment. We have decided, as a government, that these youth and our children are our future. They are our future, and we are investing to make sure that they have that sustainable future, Mr. Speaker.

As I have said, I have been honoured and it has been a privilege now to work in two recent departments that deal with children and youth. Like I said, it has been somewhere where I have spent my entire career and I am honoured to be there.

Mr. Speaker, it is amazing how twenty minutes can pass by and how some member can stand up and rile you up enough to stand up and chat about that. I do want to mention a few things about my district.

The District of Burin – Placentia West is a great district. We are on the boot, as it says. I know the Member for – he has tortured me every now and then about my blankies. He has not done any of it today; I have to commend him for it. I am hoping he is not going to come on about the boot that I have mentioned, but we are on the

southern part of the Burin Peninsula. My district runs from Burin down to South East Bight.

There are many rural communities, as many of us in this House would have. One community, South East Bight, is serviced by a ferry. There have been issues. There have been issues around the ferry; there is no doubt about it. I want to commend the Minister of Transportation and Works. He came down with us a couple of months ago and worked on an issue that the community wanted addressed. He worked on that one, but there have been some mechanical issues and we are continuing to work through that. We will ask the patience of the people who are involved there.

The three particular areas that I am looking at, the Burin area, one thing that was announced in this year's Budget that people have long awaited down there – and once we get all of the details out and I am looking forward to the Minister of Health coming down with me before too long. Minister King and myself will go over because we share districts. We are a peninsula and I have said there are 20,000 of us down on the peninsula, along with the Member for Bellevue. We have to work as one community down there. It is no point in two MHAs trying to battle it out and get everything. We cross-reference so much that we have to share in projects, and I think it has been successful.

One of the things that is going to happen when the minister comes down is we will announce the details on a dementia unit that is going to be down there, the number of rooms, and the service that it will provide. That will be built around the Salt Pond area around where the Burin hospital is.

I was very pleased to hear just recently within the last month or so that there is a rec facility being built right when you are driving into Marystown. People who have driven there will remember there was an information chalet there and it was shaped like a lighthouse. It is around that particular area that this new rec piece is going to be built. People have awaited this for a while. It is something that one individual told me at the meeting from the rec commission they have been working on for twenty years to get and they finally have it realized. The details will certainly become clearer as that project

progresses. The tenders have been called and we should see groundwork starting on that very soon.

Then if you leave my district for what we would call down over the road there is a new health clinic being built there. That health clinic will hopefully be open maybe this coming spring or fall. The work is progressing rather well. I am looking forward to going down this weekend, taking a look at the building, and seeing how far they have come along with it.

For the member who spoke before me to talk about serving the needs of some of the seniors in the rural parts of our Province, Mr. Speaker, I have to commend the communities down there. They came together and what they did is they closed out some of their smaller clinics and have a centralized clinic that will provide services such as blood collection. The seniors in that particular area now will not have to drive all the way to Burin or drive down towards Clarendville or something of that nature. They will now be able to receive that service right in their immediate area. It is something I know the people in that area are very pleased with.

A project we also entered in that particular area is called an ecotourism museum, Mr. Speaker. It is a facility we funded jointly with ACOA. It is around a \$500,000 project. Again, it is something that is adding to the rural parts of our Province. Then we look to what that may be able to draw.

To suggest, as the member did, that we are abandoning rural Newfoundland – Mr. Speaker, I have to close out with that. If this is the thought of the member, then I suggest as I started out with, the plane he rode in on, it might be time to get the ticket and ride out on it again because he does not have the same faith in this Province that I have.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move at this time, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that debate do now adjourn on this particular item.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the debate be now adjourned.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 3, second reading of a bill, An Act Respecting Public Interest Disclosure, Bill 1.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister Responsible for Public Engagement, and the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs that Bill 1, An Act Respecting Public Interest Disclosure be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 1, An Act Respecting Public Interest Disclosure be now read a second time.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting Public Interest Disclosure." (Bill 1)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a real pleasure to rise in this House today to start the debate on the Public Interest Disclosure and Whistle-blower Protection bill, a new and

very significant piece of legislation for this Province. As you are aware, government announced in the recent Speech from the Throne that it would be advancing whistle-blower legislation in this session of the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, our decision to move this legislation forward is more evidence of this government fulfilling its Blue Book commitments. It is also consistent with government's broader commitment to open government, ethical conduct, and enhanced integrity within the public sector.

This legislation will fill the gap that currently exists in this Province with respect to mechanisms that are available to employees who have knowledge of serious wrongdoing that they wish to disclose, and legislation which will afford them protection from reprisal when doing so.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that there are current legislative provisions –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to point out that there are current legislative provisions that provide whistle-blower protection in this Province. These include section 425.1 of the Criminal Code, section 49 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, section 97 of the Environmental Protection Act, section 89 of the Personal Health Information Act, and of course, Part IV of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act which deals with public interest disclosure. We would all be familiar with that piece of legislation in the House.

However, Mr. Speaker, while these provisions are essential, they represent a patchwork of protection with obvious gaps which we are aiming to address. The proposed legislation will cover these gaps by affording whistle-blower protection to the employees of the public service and public bodies within Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we have completed a thorough legislative and jurisdictional review to inform our policy decisions regarding this legislation, and we have obtained information on the experiences of other jurisdictions that have implemented whistle-blower legislation. Based on this research and the subsequent analysis, we have developed a comprehensive legislative framework which is based on the following four main pillars.

First, a very critical component of this act is it will ensure that employees can disclose serious and significant wrongdoing without fear or threat of reprisal. This is the fundamental principle of this legislation.

Second, the legislation will allow for an independent office, the Office of the Citizens' Representative, which will be given power and authority to provide advice and to receive and investigate allegations of wrongdoing and publicly report the findings.

Third, Mr. Speaker, there will be anti-reprisal protections for employees who disclose wrongdoing. The fourth critical pillar is that the Labour Relations Board will be empowered to hear complaints and award remedies, including reinstatement for any reprisals taken against whistle-blowers.

Mr. Speaker, this act will provide for a single, independent mechanism for the disclosure and investigation of wrongdoings in the public service in that the Office of the Citizens' Representative will be given the power and responsibility to accept and investigate disclosures of wrongdoing. Departments and public bodies will not be involved. They will not receive or investigate disclosures under this legislation. In addition to facilitating and providing an independent process for disclosure of wrongdoing, the act will protect employees who make disclosures from reprisal.

Mr. Speaker, the act is not intended to deal with routine, operational, or human resource issues since there are other mechanisms available to deal with these types of issues. It is intended to deal with serious and significant wrongdoing. Existing policies and protocols will continue to be available for dealing with routine and operational matters.

Mr. Speaker, wrongdoing is clearly defined in the act. This definition is very important to the implementation of this legislation as it provides guidance as to the types of matters that can be investigated. Our definition of wrongdoing in this new legislation is consistent with other jurisdictions. Wrongdoing means an act or omission constituting an offence. Therefore, if an illegal act is occurring or suspected to be occurring within the public service, an employee will have the right to disclose that information for investigation under this legislation.

Wrongdoing also means an act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to life, health, or safety of persons or to the environment, other than a danger that is inherent in the performance of the duties or functions of a public servant. Wrongdoing includes gross mismanagement, inclusive of public funds or assets. It is also considered a wrongdoing to knowingly direct or counsel a person to commit any of these acts.

To whom will the act apply? This legislation will apply to public service employees of government departments and public bodies such as Crown corporations including Nalcor, Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, our Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission, the Public Utilities Board, Regional Health Authorities, the Legal Aid Commission, the College of the North Atlantic, school boards and school districts, among others.

Mr. Speaker, this act is comprehensive in terms of the public service in this Province. It will help protect the integrity of the public service by ensuring that there are mechanisms in place to appropriately address issues related to serious wrongdoing.

With respect to disclosure procedures that are outlined in this bill, if an employee reasonably believes that a wrongdoing was committed or is about to be committed, that employee may make a disclosure in writing to the Office of the Citizens' Representative. This single disclosure process provides for external disclosure to the Office of the Citizens' Representative. Other jurisdictions and our own House of Assembly

Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act allow for or require internal disclosure to the head of a government department or another public body in addition to external disclosure.

While many provisions in this bill mirror those contained in whistle-blower legislation in other provinces, the one key exception is the single disclosure route as identified in this bill. All inquiries, requests for advice, and complaints of wrongdoing would be disclosed to and investigated by the Office of the Citizens' Representative.

Mr. Speaker, we believe our employees and the integrity of this process will be significantly enhanced with the process outlined in this bill. It is obvious that some employees may be reluctant and uncomfortable with disclosing significant wrongdoing internally to a supervisor, deputy minister, or a CEO, as would be the case if we decided to utilize a dual disclosure process.

It is possible that employees would refrain from making a disclosure due to discomfort, concern about confidentiality, or fear of a threat of reprisal if their own department was involved in the investigation. Through this bill that obstacle has been removed. We want to facilitate disclosures of legitimate wrongdoing in a safe environment. That is the core and fundamental premise of this bill.

We have also learned from our counterparts in other jurisdictions that allow for internal disclosures that a significant amount of time and financial resources are required to administer internal disclosure processes. Time, for instance, to prepare policies dealing with the receipt and investigation of disclosures within individual government departments and entities, to ensure that these policies are consistent across all departments and public bodies, to consult with unions, and to conduct ongoing training to all of those employees in each department and public body who are tasked with receiving and investigating allegations of disclosure.

Also, by having a single, independent office deal with all inquiries, disclosures and investigations, that will allow for expertise to be built. In turn, that will enhance the process and the outcomes of it over time.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has decided to opt for the single disclosure process. A single, independent, external office that receives inquiries and conducts investigations, as outlined in this bill, will strengthen the comfort level and contribute to the enhanced confidentiality for employees who make or consider making a disclosure.

If there is wrongdoing within the public service and our employees have awareness of it, we want it exposed and we want it investigated, and we also want our valuable employees protected in that process. We are putting forth a bill that supports employees to make legitimate disclosures of wrongdoing in the public service and ensures their protection from reprisal. There are several specific sections of the bill that provide guidance in the making of these disclosures.

Mr. Speaker, the definition of wrongdoing, as I stated previously, is very important and must be considered in the making of a disclosure. An employee may disclose information related to a wrongdoing, despite the fact that another act or regulation may prohibit or restrict the release of that information, with the exception of information that would disclose the deliberations of Cabinet or a Cabinet committee and information that is protected due to solicitor-client privilege. These two types of records are protected in common law and legislative provisions, and widely protected by governments. These records are also protected in whistle-blower legislation in all other jurisdictions in the country, as well as by the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on the role of the Office of the Citizens' Representative. Members of the public service can request advice from the Office of the Citizens' Representative in deciding whether or not to come forward with a disclosure of wrongdoing. The Office of the Citizens' Representative will be responsible for investigating disclosures received under the act.

The purpose of an investigation by the Citizens' Representative is to bring the matter to the attention of the head of the department or public body and to recommend corrective measures,

unless of course, Mr. Speaker, that person is implicated in the wrongdoing. The investigation in that case, the minister would be the correct person. These investigations will be conducted as informally and as expeditiously as possible.

There are circumstances where the Citizens' Representative is not required to investigate. This includes situations where he or she determines that the matter would be more appropriately dealt with through another procedure or act where he or she deems that the disclosure is frivolous, vexatious, or not made in good faith.

The Citizens' Representative may refer a matter to the Auditor General if he or she thinks it is more appropriately investigated under the Auditor General Act. He or she may also refer a matter back to a department or a public body if it is more appropriately resolved internally.

The Citizens' Representative is required: to prepare an annual report and to table it in this House outlining the number of inquiries received under this act; the number of disclosures; and the number acted upon; and the number not acted upon; the number of investigations undertaken; the number of recommendations made; and whether departments and public bodies have complied with the recommendations; whether there are any systemic problems that contribute to the issues; and any recommendations for improvement that should be considered.

Mr. Speaker, the Citizens' Representative will also have authority to publish special reports where he or she deems it to be in the public interest and consistent with the scope of his or her functions and duties outlined in this act. This includes the publishing of a report related to an investigation of wrongdoing under this act.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to focus on a critical component of this bill, protecting our employees from reprisal. As exemplified in the title, Public Interest Disclosure and Whistle-blower Protection Act, whistle-blower protection is clearly a significant aspect of this legislation. It states that no reprisal shall be taken against an employee who has in good faith sought advice about making a disclosure, made a disclosure, or co-operated with an investigation under this act.

A reprisal includes action such as disciplinary measures, demotion, or termination of employment, an action that results in an adverse effect on working conditions, or a threat to take any of these actions. An employee who feels they have suffered reprisals as a result of making a disclosure in good faith will have recourse to the Labour Relations Board. A person who takes a reprisal against an employee or directs that one be taken is subject to appropriate disciplinary action, including a fine of up to \$10,000, termination, and other penalties that are provided by law.

The Labour Relations Board has powers required to deal with these complaints under the Labour Relations Act, including undertaking investigations, holding hearings, and gathering evidence. Mr. Speaker, if the board determines that another avenue is available for dealing with the complaint, the board may defer consideration of the complaint until the outcome of another proceeding. Where the board finds reprisal was made contrary to this act, the board may make various orders including reinstatement, a complainant to return to work, pay compensation, pay costs, cease activity regarding the reprisal, or otherwise rectify the situation.

Mr. Speaker, another provision that I wish to highlight deals with offences under this act. A person who makes a false or misleading statement, willfully obstructs the Office of the Citizens' Representative, or destroys, falsifies, or conceals a document is guilty of an offence and subject to a fine of not more than \$10,000.

While I focused on the provisions that allow employees to make disclosures about wrongdoings in the public service and the protections that will be afforded to those, it is also important for public service employees to know about their responsibilities under this act. Employees are required to make disclosures in good faith. If an employee makes a disclosure of wrongdoing, where the disclosure is frivolous, factitious, or in bad faith, that employee will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action which may include termination of employment and/or other penalties that are provided by law. It is vital that employees become aware and knowledgeable of

the entire act, its intent, its purpose, and their roles and responsibilities.

The House stands recessed until 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have highlighted the key aspects of this new legislation and I would like to indicate as well that my office, the Office of Public Engagement, will hold administrative responsibility for this act and any subsequent orders or regulations that come under it. We will work closely with the Office of the Citizens' Representative to ensure that awareness sessions and informational materials are made available to all employees of the public service who are covered by this act.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping there will be support in this House for this bill given that many hon. members on both sides have been advocating for this legislation for some time.

I will conclude my remarks at this time in this debate. I really look forward to closing second reading at the appropriate time. I feel this is an important piece of legislation and a positive step forward, not only for our public service but for all of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I will move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, with leave of the House that we take a supper break and return at 7:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved by the Government House Leader and seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation that we take leave and return at 7:00 o'clock.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Contra minded?

Carried.