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Speaker: Honourable Wade Verge, MHA

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The House resumed at 7:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 3, section (b), the Concurrence Motion on the Social Services Committee.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in.

The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure once again to stand and present the concurrence for the Social Services Committee. Just for the people who are watching, we are doing Estimates. Estimates basically are done in individual meetings in three different sectors. Tonight we are presenting the Estimates and the report from the Social Services Committee.

Mr. Speaker, the Social Services Committee is the largest Committee in government in terms of the number of departments and agencies that we represent. We heard Estimates for Child, Youth and Family Services; Education and Early Childhood Development; Health and Community Services; Justice and Public Safety; Seniors, Wellness and Social Development; Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs; the Labour Relations Agency; and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, basically, to give the people at home some idea what happens, there is a big blue book and each government department has their budget for the year in the big blue book. We go line by line. There is a lot of interesting discussion that takes place in Estimates. It is the opportunity for the Opposition members in particular to speak directly and ask questions of

the minister, not only on line by line items by sometimes as well we get down to policy questions and all the rest. Sometimes it is a very frank and open discussion.

I must say, I have chaired the Social Services Committee now – I think this is my fourth year –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: I must say that some of the discussion was the most open and frank discussion that I have experienced in the four years that I have been chairing the Social Services Committee.

Mr. Speaker, the social sector is also the largest piece of our Budget. Those various agencies and departments that I spoke of earlier take up some 56 per cent – 56 per cent of the overall Budget of the Province is taken up in the Social Services Committee. A major portion of that is taken up in just two departments. The Department of Health takes up approximately 36 per cent of the overall Budget of the Province, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development takes up just over 11 per cent.

The two of them combined, Mr. Speaker, make up 40 per cent of the provincial Budget. That figure, in the four years that I have been here in this House, is fairly consistent. Health and Education take up close to 45 per cent to 50 per cent of the overall Budget of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the various members on our Committee: the hon. Member for Baie Verte – Springdale; the hon. Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair; the hon. Member for Bonavista South; the hon. Member for Port au Port; the hon. Member for Humber East; and the hon. Member for St. John's Centre. As well, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not thank my colleague, the hon. the Member for Bonavista North. There were a couple of sessions that I needed to step out of and he subbed in for me, and I want to thank him publicly this evening.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Mr. Speaker, my colleague, my friend over there in Trinity – Bay

de Verde wants me to mention him. We have some family connections, so I will.

As well, one of the things that I saw this year for the first time – I do not think in the four years that I have been here I actually saw this occur before. This year, for the first time, I saw multiple ministers of this government commit to passing over their Budget notes, unedited, uncensored, as they would say. The Budget notes that came – I know multiple ministers were more than willing to give their Estimates. Whether or not the Member for The Straits – White Bay North believes that is open engagement and accountability and all the rest, I have never seen it before I would say to the hon. member.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: What is not open and what is not accountable is the fact that the Office of Public Engagement did not have their Estimates as scheduled under the Social Services Committee.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, it is the first time in the four years that I have been chairing this

Committee that I have seen multiple ministers turn over their Estimate books and their briefing books to Opposition quite freely and quite willingly, and some actually after Estimates ended. The co-operation and the willingness of ministers to respond to the questions of the Opposition during Estimates this year was very different.

AN HON. MEMBER: Very noble.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: It was very noble. Yes, noble is the word.

Mr. Speaker, as well, I have to say that the social sector of government is where a lot of individual personal issues come out. You can call them heartfelt issues because there are many individual issues that are in health, that are in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, that are in education, and that are in Child, Youth and Family Services, issues that get to the core and get to our heart. Tough decisions are hard to do.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have to say is that on both sides of this House, there is a willingness to address those heartfelt issues. There are some difficult issues. I know the Acting Minister of Education stood here this afternoon and spoke very passionately about the issues and challenges that are out there.

Are we going to solve all those issues? No, because today we solve all the issues, tomorrow there will be new issues. That can be said for each individual department that we had in social services this year.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing – and I know the Member for St. John's Centre, one of her passions, for the four years that she has been here, is affordable housing for citizens all across this Province, and she has been a great advocate. She has been a great advocate, and I tip my hat to her for being a great advocate.

Mr. Speaker, we all know there are challenges in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, but I think all members would agree that we are getting through some of those challenges. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing have invested to assist many of these individuals as we have gone forward.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about the REEP, the \$5,000 grant that allows seniors and people who are a little older to stay in their homes, be able to stay in their homes and be independent longer. I saw directly in my district the benefit that those grants have provided. Those grants are essential to allow older residents of our Province to live independently longer. They do some great things. They fix roofs, they fix ceilings, they insulate homes, and they put in new heaters. In some cases, maybe a ramp, through a home modification program for those with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, it is very valuable. Our home modification program allows individuals with disabilities to modify their home so they can stay in their home. A lot of that is access: access to their home in general, access to their washrooms, access to their bedrooms. A lot of good things happen through the home modification program.

Education, there was a very healthy debate in education. One of the highlights of the education budget is the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Are there going to be challenges in that area? Yes, there are going to be challenges in that area. When we are implementing full-day kindergarten, there are going to be challenges. Some of our facilities are going to have to have modifications. There was discussion at great length, I would say to the House, on full-day kindergarten and some of the modifications that have to be made.

As well, Mr. Speaker, staffing was another issue, but in the Budget this year government has committed 142.5 positions for full-day kindergarten when it comes into effect in 2016. Once again, education was varied and there was an intense debate. If anybody was watching earlier this afternoon, the Acting Minister of Education talked about inclusion and all those things. I am not going to repeat that tonight because the acting minister did a wonderful job.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we went to Health and Community Services. Health and Community Services, as I said earlier, 35.8 percent of our Budget is taken up in Health and Community Services. Mr. Speaker, it was probably the most open discussion I have had in Estimates in four years between Opposition members and the minister.

Again, long-term care was certainly a factor, Mr. Speaker, and government's proposal to go into a private-public partnership to develop 360 long-term care beds. I know the hon. Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi has had some concerns over that and she expressed those concerns in Estimates. I thought the Minister of Health and Community Services responded in a very positive way.

Mr. Speaker, we have issues. We need to free up more acute care beds and we have a plan. We are going to put 360 beds in long-term care through a public-private partnership. That does not mean health care will decline. In actual fact, we have regulations and rules, and the health care standards will be the same as if they were in a publicly-funded facility. The minister has said that many times in this House, that the standards and regulations that are required now would be the same in this public-private partnership.

We also talked about mental health, and the concern for mental health. There are many issues in and around mental health in this Province, and we know we have challenges. Once again, they are challenges we all must face on a day-to-day basis. There are a lot of people out there, and mental health has been another issue that all sides, I say, Mr. Speaker, are very concerned about. Once again, in our discussions there was a clear direction and a willingness on behalf of the minister to work with Opposition members to improve mental health for all people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, wait times is another area. Yes, we have areas where our wait times are very good, but every day members opposite get up and say but what about this? What about this area, or what about that area? That is fair; Mr. Speaker, but you cannot do it all at once. I say to all hon. members, we cannot do it all at once. Again, we are working our way through it.

Emergency room wait times was a very – I do not know if I should say a hot topic, but it was discussed. Mr. Speaker, there is a plan in place to improve emergency room wait times.

In the area of Child, Youth and Family Services, a very, very serious department with a lot of passionate individuals, social workers, nurses, all of these people. These social workers work

in a difficult environment every day, but they have such passion. There are many challenges, Mr. Speaker. We have many challenges.

Only today in Question Period we were talking about the age, nineteen to twenty-one, and getting out of custody. Mr. Speaker, these are challenges we have been facing and we have been working through. I would suggest to all members opposite, that since the incorporation of Child, Youth and Family Services things have gotten a little bit better. Do we have a ways to go?

I look at the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains and I know there are special challenges in Labrador. I know the member has been advocating with the minister for things. I know we have been doing work in Labrador, partnering with our Aboriginal peoples and all the rest to improve Child, Youth and Family Services in that part of our Province. I commend all parties for working together and the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs as well.

Mr. Speaker, as well, then we move on to Seniors, Wellness and Social Development. This is an area where I have a little bit of experience. This is my old background. I come from the recreation and sport field and the area of seniors. I know the minister sitting here in front of me tonight, we had a great discussion around our seniors and the care and the needs of seniors, and some of the things that we implemented in this Budget to assist our seniors.

I know there are challenges out there. The Opposition has pointed them out every day, Mr. Speaker, about the challenges that seniors face. They are on fixed incomes. I faced it as a mayor of a municipality. One of the discussions we always had in council was the fact that 40 per cent of our people were on fixed incomes. Raising mil rates and raising taxes was very, very difficult because they have a limited budget and limited amounts of money.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked with our seniors and we have developed programs to assist our seniors and get them through some of these things. I know the Opposition has talked about the 2 per cent HST increase and that is a challenge. Yes, but we also increased our

income tax levels to offset some of that. Does it offset all of it? No, but it offsets most I would say to you.

Then we get into Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs – and I know my time is winding down here this evening, but I want to try to get through each individual department. We get into Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs. Mr. Speaker, being a former municipal leader, being involved for over fourteen years on that level and being involved in my own communities for probably twenty years before that, there are challenges for all our municipal governments.

Mr. Speaker, the new agreement with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador to share a gas tax and share a sales tax is going to make it a little bit easier. It is going to take time. It is not the end of the road. It is a work in progress. This will never end. We are always going to have to keep improving.

I hear the hon. Member for Bay of Islands talking: Well, it is a beginning. Yes, it is a beginning. It is not the beginning and end. It is a beginning. It is a starting point, and we have done a pretty good job in Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs of working with our municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, do our municipalities stills need infrastructure support? Yes, they do. We have boil-order advisories and we need to get rid of those boil-order advisories. We need to work with our municipalities. Mr. Speaker, our 90-10, 80-20, 70-30 cost-sharing arrangements have made it a lot easier for all municipalities in this Province to access capital works programs to improve their municipal infrastructure. Communities in my district, whether they are the local service districts in Makinsons or the community of Spaniard's Bay or the Town of Bay Roberts, they have all benefited from infrastructure in the area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Mr. Speaker, there are challenges. There are challenges in every department, but the conversation was open and frank and there were good questions asked.

There was some digging down as well, I would say to hon. members.

As we move along, I want to talk just a little bit about Justice and Public Safety. Yes, there are still challenges. There are challenges in our Justice and Public Safety system, but we are working our way through those as well and working towards solutions. There were discussions around the penitentiary. We know we have one of the oldest penitentiaries, probably not only in Canada, but in North America, I would attest. Yes, it needs to be replaced and we are working our way towards that.

There has been a lot of discussion in the last four years over the domestic violence court, and we have reinstituted the domestic violence court. It is going to be Province wide. That is the plan. I know there is money also allocated to do a study in Labrador and see how we can make it work in Labrador as well. Those issues were discussed in Justice and Public Safety and they got good attention, I would say to you.

Mr. Speaker, as we go forward, we know we have huge responsibilities. We have talked about a lot of these responsibilities tonight. I have just touched on some of the highlights through all the various departments and the Estimates I have had.

As I said earlier tonight, there is much to be done. The job will never be finished. Whether it is our government or some other government, there will always be work to do, there will always be challenges to face, but we have to take them head-on. Sometimes we are going to face those challenges in good economic times, and sometimes we are going to face them in challenging economic times. Whatever the time is, we have to face those challenges.

Mr. Speaker, in the final few seconds that I have, that takes partnerships as well. That takes partnerships and working with committees, working with community groups and working with our Aboriginal people – all these people have a vital role – and working with our youth. We had a great conversation here today about the Premier's Youth Advisory Committee. There is lots of work to be done, the challenges never end, but we are working towards it and

there were some great conversations in the Social Services Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege for me to stand again here in my place and have a few more words to say about Budget 2015, which is misguided in so many ways, as I have said already. It is deeply saddening to see that government that raised the hopes of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, raised their hopes so high, has fallen so far down on the job of providing for the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, there are many seniors who live in the District of St. John's North, many senior citizens who live in my district and I am sure lots of seniors who live in the districts of my colleagues –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: Yes, I know that particular senior, Mr. Speaker. He retired.

The seniors who live in my district, many of them worked in the public service, they worked in health care, they worked in transportation, they worked in education, and they worked in a variety of different public service roles over the years. Many of them came in from Placentia Bay, Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay, and around the Island years ago to help build this city and to help build this Province.

I am sure there are lots of them watching TV tonight, watching the broadcast from the House of Assembly in Kelly's Brook Apartments, or Wigmor Manor, or other areas of the District of St. John's North, and of course your own districts across the way. Unlike previous generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, this government is now asking our senior citizens to shoulder more of the burden

than past generations. Whereas, past generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have had much more support from either their own cohorts or others who are working and so on.

Now this government is asking seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador to shoulder more of the responsibility for themselves than we have ever seen before. We may have seen it before, but that would have been the dark years before we joined Confederation with Canada, I say, Mr. Speaker. We have not seen anything like this since pre-Confederation years. The extent to which we are expecting senior citizens in Newfoundland and Labrador to pay their own freight without assistance from others in the workforce and those who have the levers of power across the way, it is absolutely unbelievable.

There was just recently a study from the OECD, an international institution – you cannot make this stuff up; they did not make it up – that more and more of our seniors are living in poverty than ever before. Ever before they recorded and compared statistics across countries and nations in the OECD, more of our seniors are living in poverty.

The people who built Newfoundland and Labrador, the people who taught our kids, the people who built our roads, who put up the light poles, who strung the power lines across this Island and up through Labrador, the people who cared for our kids, who cared for our sick, who borne our children, those are the people who are now having to bear the burden of this government's mistakes, missteps, and missed opportunities, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: It is absolutely sad. Those people who are more responsible for our prosperity today than anyone over there, than anyone in this House of Assembly, those people who are responsible for any prosperity that we have enjoyed in my lifetime, those are the people that we are now expecting to shoulder the burden of this government's missteps, mistakes, and misspending over its course of government.

Now government wants more from them, Mr. Speaker. This government wants more from our senior citizens. In the last election, do you know what this government wanted? Do you know what this crowd over here wanted? Do you know what the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador wanted?

AN HON. MEMBER: What did they want?

MR. KIRBY: They wanted their vote. That is what this crowd wanted. They wanted their vote and it was promises, promises, Mr. Speaker. I wish I could show this up but I know I am not allowed to use props. I will read from this as little as I possibly can, but the previous – I will table it like the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune did earlier this evening.

This is a story from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the CBC. I did not make this up. You cannot make this stuff up. This stuff writes itself. You crowd wrote this yourself, because it was in your platform. This is what the Progressive Conservative – I will not say her name, the former Premier promised on your behalf. Many of you were on the bus with her going around the Province, visiting senior citizens homes, promising this, that, and something else.

She said, nearly \$100 million of new money – \$100 million. No, people cannot fathom a larger number than that as far as I am concerned, except what they have squandered, wasted, and spent over the last number of years that they have been in power. She "... promised nearly \$100 million in new money for a seniors' strategy while campaigning during the Newfoundland and Labrador election Tuesday." This is October 4, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, the election day was on October 11. So, this is in the dying days. They were looking at the polls. They were like, oh, things are not going to work out quite as well as it did before under Danny Williams, so we are going to trot out this \$100 million seniors' strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KIRBY: I will get to the details now in a second, I say to the members over there. I will get to the details.

They saw that things were not going their way. They were going to lose a few seats. We will have to trot something out, so they did. They said, “Our goal is that individuals and families who need long-term care and community support services have the ability to access quality services that meet their needs in the best way possible” – on and on and on and on.

Over the next four years, new funding totalling – you would have to have a leap of faith based on the last four years we have been here, I tell you, to support this. “... new funding totalling nearly \$100 million will be used for the implementation of our Close to Home strategy with measures that promote health and wellness ...” on and on. All sorts of stuff promised in here.

Here is a good one, “... the PCs are promising to commission a Collective Memory Project in which seniors are invited to record and archive the stories of their youth.” This will all be shared in the archives of Memorial University. In addition to taking care of all of seniors’ problems and issues and short-term care and long-term care et cetera, they were going to have this collective memory.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, the only time that was ever put into print is when it was put in their platform, this story, because we have not heard one iota about this since.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Not a thing. Not one word about this since.

This was sort of like putting the dressing and gravy on the foolishness that they were getting on with during the last campaign. In fear of losing two handfuls of seats, they decided to try and bribe senior citizens in this Province into voting for them yet again, on false promises that were never ever, ever fulfilled. I say that is very sad, Mr. Speaker, to try and bribe the people who built this Province and ensured that we had some semblance of prosperity in my lifetime, they bribed them into voting for them in the dying days of the campaign and they have not lived up to their promises since.

What did they do? What did they actually do? Because they must have done something

considering they promised a \$100 million strategy for seniors – \$100 million. They promised a \$100 million strategy. What did they do? Well, \$100 million. You have about a \$500 million, I would say.

The Family Caregivers Program, do you remember that? Do you remember the Family Caregivers? We all know it makes more sense for seniors to continue to live in their own homes rather than being in health care facilities, in emergency, in beds in hospitals when they actually need a completely different form of care. It makes absolutely no sense to them. It makes absolutely no sense to government. It makes absolutely no sense to our economy to waste money on putting people where they should not be, and they are not getting the appropriate sort of care.

We know that a lot of seniors would rather be in their own homes. They would rather be there rather than being in a hospital or long-term care, or personal care or what have you. We know that.

This crowd over here, the Progressive Conservative government promised them they were bringing in this family care. It started to turn people back towards them. People were saying during the election campaign, they were saying that is a good idea. Are you crowd going to do the same thing? And it was a good idea. This was a good idea.

What did they do with it? Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, after they were elected they did nothing with it. They did not do one thing with it at all. It sat there, and the Opposition parties questioned and questioned and questioned and asked, where is this family caregiver strategy they had promised as part of the \$100 million promise that they made to seniors during the campaign?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KIRBY: Look, I know members are yelling over there because they do not like to hear it. I know you do not like to hear it, but it is the truth. If I am not telling it like it is, Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Member for Terra Nova to stand up and tell me what is wrong with what I am saying.

Do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They brought in a pilot project for this. I am sure it is under study over there somewhere. When we get to the next election, like I told you the last time I stood up, they will take the Blue Book – this is green, but imagine it is blue. They will take the Blue Book and they will put a new cover on it and they will say here, vote for us. It is the same platform as last time, but vote for us anyways because we will do it this time, trust us – trust us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Then there is the whole issue of pensioners. Right now, even Stephen Harper has woken up out of his long slumber on the Canada Pension Plan and is even talking about needed changes to the Canada Pension Plan. It was Kathleen Wynne, the Liberal Premier of Ontario who took leadership on this issue and made promises during – and she is actually following through. Not like this crowd with their \$100 million strategy they basically spent nothing of, or very little. I would say less than 10 per cent. They took leadership on it.

Even Stephen Harper, in his sort of – even as nasty and as mean as he is, he is even thinking now about handing a few shekels over to seniors and helping them out with their monthly costs. We hear from pensioners all the time about claw backs. They worked hard all their lives for their pensions and all of a sudden they are getting it taken back from them by government. We hear that all the time.

Recently, this government came out and said, oh, wait a minute now. We overpaid seniors' pensions over – I do not know – years and years and years, tens of thousands of dollars in some cases, and now they are going to claw that back from these seniors. Seniors are just basically scraping along.

This government cannot even collect speeding tickets and parking tickets. There are people out there who have racked up \$10,000, \$20,000, and \$30,000 worth of traffic violations. The government cannot even come to an agreement with the federal government to garnish their wages, or their taxes, or their GST, nothing like that, but they will certainly go out to seniors and take the money back from them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Absolutely, no question whatsoever. They will take that money back from seniors –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services on a point of order.

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic the member who works two full-time jobs and pays into two pensions – public service – that he would be up talking about seniors pensions. The irony is –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

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

MR. KIRBY: Maybe the Premier will let the minister stand up tomorrow and ask some of the questions he is asking, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Then on top of all of this mess – so there is no leadership on this side when it comes to reforming the Canada Pension Plan, no leadership whatsoever. Even Stephen Harper is taking leadership on this, and they are mute. The best we can come up with is what he just said. Good luck to seniors in this Province if that is all we have to depend on is cheap shots from that member over there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask members to quieten down a little bit.
I ask you for your co-operation, please.

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are used to the ministerial behaviour of the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services. He has had to apologize here in the House of Assembly for accusing the Member for Bay of Islands of taking bribes. He has talked about how the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was giving out bribes in paper bags. He recently called members here bigots. We are waiting (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the member to refrain from debate that is provocative.

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Then we come to the whole issue of housing. We hear from seniors all the time on this. There are very few subsidies available to help seniors pay for housing when it comes to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. They are not increasing that. They are not providing any assistance. They think somehow that the cost of living in St. John's is the same as it is out in rural Newfoundland; it is not. They will not allow people to transfer housing subsidies from one unit to another. There are not enough accessible housing units for seniors for rentals, and a lot of them are renting and they are not living in their own homes. A lot of people are moving out.

There are all sorts of horror stories and we hear from it all of the time. There is no question about that. In terms of long-term care, government recently built a long-term care facility here in St. John's. They knew for years that they were building it because they were building it. They cannot adequately staff that place because they are incompetent over there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: – like the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services is incompetent. He has demonstrated it here once again. The Corner Brook hospital, they said that they were going to –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Further speakers?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Further speakers?

The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNET: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to get up this evening to speak and make some comments with respect to the Concurrence Motion on the Estimates of the Social Services Committee. The previous speaker, the Member for St. John's North –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CORNET: It was pretty hilarious, Mr. Speaker, to hear the comments from the hon. member and how –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: I ask for the co-operation of the Member for St. John's North. I will warn you for the last time.

The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

MR. CORNET: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to take some time this evening to make some comments with respect to the Concurrence Motion on the Estimates of the Social Services Committee. The Social Services Committee reviewed the Estimates of the Departments of Child, Youth and Family Services; Education and Early Childhood Development; Health and Community Services; Justice and Public Safety; Labour Relations; Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs; Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation; and, Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at *Budget 2015: Balancing Choices for a Promising Future* and we look at the expenditures of government for the people of the Province, 55.8 per cent of total expenditure in this sector, the social sector, in the departments that I previously mentioned –

MR. MITCHELMORE: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CORNET: – which were reviewed during the Estimates Committee time –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite listed off all the committees, but for the record he did not name the Office of Public Engagement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is having trouble hearing the point of order.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Sure. The member opposite listed all of the Committees that were listed in the Estimates, but the Office of Public Engagement was not listed. So I just want that clear for the record that was not debated in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

MR. CORNET: Mr. Speaker, just to clear the record, the Office of Public Engagement was to be debated, the Estimates to be reviewed at the time we reviewed Health and Community Services. If the hon. member showed up on time with his Committee members, we would have debated the Office of Public Engagement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Again, I ask all members for their co-operation.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is making a statement about my attendance and I had shown up at the Committee meeting, and I ask for him to withdraw this remark.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

MR. CORNET: Mr. Speaker, I will not withdraw; I will not make apologies as to why he was late either.

Mr. Speaker, to further stress the expenditures, the total Budget for 2015-2016 is \$8,262,952,000 and of that, the social sector will spend \$4,608,764,000. This money is directly invested into the programs of these departments that offer and provide the social safety nets that are being asked by the people of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, the Estimates Committee work was more than just debating and reviewing the numbers for each department. Each minister and their staff were open to discussing policy

and programs of their departments, and they were asked many questions to that regard.

This process – an important process as we go through the budgetary exercise – gives an opportunity to know the budgets of each department and we get a great in-depth overview of the various programs and services offered within those sectors.

Mr. Speaker, I will go through the departments briefly that we reviewed at Estimates Committee meetings held shortly after Budget 2015 that was brought down. We had a fifteen-day window of opportunity to review all the Estimates of every department within government.

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services is responsible for the planning and development of policies, standards and programs, as well as service delivery, to help ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. The legislative framework which governs the provision of service for children, youth and families in this Province includes: Children and Youth Care and Protection Act; Youth Criminal Justice Act; and the Young Persons Offences Act.

Program funding summary for the fiscal year 2015-2016 for this department – this is gross expenditure – through executive and support services, service delivery and direct client services, total program estimates for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services is estimated at \$141,805,100.

Some of the things, Mr. Speaker, that the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services are budgeting this year: \$475,000 will allow for the creation of six new front-line positions in Labrador in 2015-2016. On a provincial level, the addition of the new positions will allow the provincial government to meet the organizational commitment of a 1 to 20 ratio for workers to caseload for the first time since the multi-year plan was announced in Budget 2012.

The provincial government also continues to revitalize the child protection system in the Province through supporting out-of-home care options for children and youth. The Foster a

Future campaign will be maintained in 2015-2016 through an investment of \$150,000.

Mr. Speaker, our 10-Year Child Care Strategy, since 2003 our government has increased the number of regulated child care spaces by 70 per cent; 4,609 spaces in 2003 compared to 7,815 spaces as of June 2014. As well, a progressive new piece of legislation, Adoption Act, 2013, that focuses on the safety and well-being of children involved in the adoption process was introduced and passed in the House during the fall of 2013.

We also reviewed the Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The mandate of this department is that the department is responsible for developing and administering a provincial system of education, which encourages all students to achieve their potential development. It administers early learning opportunities for pre-school children and provides for regulated child care programs and supports to family resource centres. The primary, elementary, and secondary school system has programs that are sufficiently flexible to support the needs and capabilities of all children. The department is also responsible for the provision of library and information services in the Province.

Mr. Speaker, estimated program funding for this year through Budget 2015 for that department is allocated at \$921,545,800. This will include Information Management and Special Projects; Teaching Services; School Board Operations; Learning Resources Distribution Centre; School Supplies; School Services; Curriculum Development; Language Programs; Student Support Services; Supports for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students; Student Testing and Evaluation; Professional Development; Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation; Early Childhood Learning; Child Care Services; Family Resource Programs; and the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board. Also, new construction and alterations and renovations to existing school facilities.

Our Committee also looked at the Department of Health and Community Services whose department's budget was approved at \$2,924,916,600. The Department of Health and Community Services is responsible for the

overall direction of the Province's health and community services system which provides services and programs aimed at the prevention of disease and the restoration and maintenance of health and well-being.

These goals are supported by the various programs of the department which include funding for the operation of hospitals, health care centres, and long-term care facilities and the provision of medical care, public health, and other community services.

The priorities of our government in health and community services, as highlighted in the Budget brought down April 30, are long-term care and community support services; mental health and addictions; mental wellness; renewed focus on primary health care; to advance the Strategy to Reduce Emergency Department Wait Times; the Provincial Home Support Program; new drug therapies; health care facilities new construction, repairs and renovations; PET scanner for the Health Sciences Centre.

This department also allocates money to the Memorial University Faculty of Medicine, Physicians' Services, regional health authorities, Population Health, Dental Services, and Provincial Drug Programs.

Mr. Speaker, we also looked at the Department of Justice and Public Safety. With a budget of \$212,038,500 Justice and Public Safety provides legal service to government and is primarily responsible for the protection of residents of the Province in respect of their persons and property. This objective is met by providing legal advice to all departments of government, providing for police protection, the prosecution of accused persons, the administration of the courts and operation of the Province's correctional systems, services to victims of crime, protection of human rights, and Legal Aid services.

Drafting of legislation for the House of Assembly by the Office of the Legislative Counsel is also provided. In addition, the department is responsible for the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division, the Support Enforcement Program, the Family Justice Services Division, Fines and Administration, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Fire and Emergency Services – NL is responsible for co-ordinating overall provincial efforts in the areas of fire and emergency services. The agency works in partnership with other public, private, and volunteer sector organizations to develop and maintain a fire and emergency management system in Newfoundland and Labrador to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from fires and other major emergency disasters.

Some of the initiatives, Mr. Speaker, announced in Budget 2015 is the continuation of the Foster and Future campaign, the creation of the Premier's Advisory Council on Crime and Community Safety, proper resourcing the provincial police forces, improved access to civil and family justice, increased the tariff rate to private practice lawyers for the provision of Legal Aid services, promotion of safety on our highways, new domestic violence court with extended outreach, conferencing units to be installed or replaced within the court system – and that is just to name a few initiatives.

Labour Relations is responsible providing programs and services aimed at fostering a positive employment relations climate. The Standing Fish Price Setting Panel was established to facilitate collective bargaining in the fishing industry. The Labour Relations Board is an independent quasi-judicial body which mediates and adjudicates a wide range of disputes under various statutes. Total budget for 2015-2016 is estimated to be \$3,216,000.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we also review the Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs. The Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, or MIGA, has a budget projected at \$203,319,300. Its mandate is to support the financial stability and viability of municipalities and the effective delivery of municipal services. It assists municipalities in meeting infrastructure needs and provides financial and administrative tools to support sound municipal governance.

The department is responsible for the management of provincial Crown lands, maintaining the Crown Lands Registry, and providing maps and air photo services. The department leads the formulation of government's intergovernmental policies and

strategies, and monitors and co-ordinates interdepartmental initiatives to ensure their consistent application.

Mr. Speaker, over the years the District of Port au Port has received funding from the department for numerous projects. Some of the projects I will highlight this evening: waterline replacement in Mainland, about \$1.2 million; upgrades to the water supply system in the community of Piccadilly head, about \$87,000; water system extension in Cape St. George, \$1.2 million; phase two of that same project, \$860,000; decommissioning of the former waste site in Kippens, \$59,000; communication systems for the fire department in Lourdes, about \$25,000.

Municipal building upgrades in Lourdes, \$684,000; water system upgrades in the Town of Port au Port East, about \$121,000; water supply improvements in the Town of Port au Port West-Aguathuna-Felix Cove, \$109,000; roads upgrades in the Town of Stephenville, \$461,000; upgrades to Hillview Avenue about \$600,000 – \$593,000 in fact; water and sewer upgrades on Pleasant Avenue in Stephenville, \$591,000; Lourdes chlorine booster station, the Town of Lourdes, \$295,000. Mr. Speaker, improvements to rural Newfoundland and Labrador I say.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation is a Crown corporation whose mandate is to develop and administer housing assistance policy and programs for the benefit of low- to moderate-income households throughout the Province. It is estimated that the budget for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation for 2015-2016 is at \$34,518,400. Some of their initiatives through Budget 2015 are the continuation of the Home Modification Program, the Residential Energy Efficiency Program, and a five year continuation of the Affordable Housing agreement which is cost shared.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we reviewed the budgetary Estimates of the newly created Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development. The Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development's mandate is to lead a comprehensive and dynamic approach to supporting and promoting social well-being. This is fulfilled through a focus on policy,

planning, and programs for seniors and aging, adult protection, health promotion, wellness, recreation and sport, and government-wide strategies to alleviate and reduce poverty, promote equity of opportunity, and enhance the inclusion of all persons, including those with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the department works horizontally in recognition that the solutions lie beyond a single department and involve multiple sectors and multiple departments. The total budget for 2015-2016 in the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development is estimated to be at around \$22,310,000.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, a lot of money in the social sector. When we look at the total budget for 2015-2016, a budget that we are presenting to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, over \$8 billion, something that we can be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Concurrence Motion of the Estimates of the Social Services Committee this evening. I look forward to other debates. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, as we saw in the Estimates, every Estimates Committee there was unanimous support for each department. I am sure we will get that at Budget time as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to stand in my place and speak to Concurrence under the Social Services Committee. It is hard to know, when you only have twenty minutes, what to talk about. There are so many important things out there, and there are a lot of sad stories that we could talk about in the House of Assembly, there is no doubt about that.

We talked about many times here, all of the millions and millions of dollars of wastage and it

really saddens you – millions and millions, perhaps billions, I do not know. When you hear sad stories of families struggling, Mr. Speaker, that is when it really saddens you.

I want to talk about the failed family caregiver program; the family caregiver program that in my mind and in the mind of many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians was set up to fail by this government.

First, I am going to talk about a young family, a mother who called me. One month shy of their son's tenth birthday he was hit by a vehicle and left a quadriplegic; one month shy of his tenth birthday. That was sixteen years ago. Since that time, Mr. Speaker, that mother has fought and fought and fought for services.

Here is what is sad: she gets seventy hours of home care for that boy. I think in sixteen years she has had one weekend away from him. She gets seventy hours of home care. Now, because she lives in a fairly rural area, she is at risk of losing that home care. Meanwhile, the mother had to go out to have an income for the family and go to work, and she cares for an eighty-year-old man. She is going down the road to care for an eighty-year-old man and two home care workers are coming in to care for her son who is in a wheelchair. She cannot get paid to care for her son.

She said to me many times, who is going to care for my son like I would? There is something wrong with the system, Mr. Speaker, when I am standing here and I am telling stories to you like that. The reason I am sharing it is because she said to me in recent days, I have been fighting for twenty-one years but the fight is going out of me. I believe when someone says that to you, as Members of the House of Assembly, as people who are elected to serve the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, then it becomes our job to make sure their stories are heard. I hope the Minister of Health is listening to this story tonight.

Mr. Speaker, we were excited when the family caregiver program was announced. We were very excited.

MR. KENT: (Inaudible).

MS DEMPSTER: Does the Minister of Health want to get up and share something with the House of Assembly or does he just want to babble? I am talking about a very important issue here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health, on a point of order.

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to talk to the member about any case. She has not spoken to me. She has not sent me a piece of correspondence on it. She would just rather play politics in this House, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: (Inaudible) you know that I would not play politics with this, and yes, I will speak to the minister after. I imagine he is very familiar.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk about the family caregiver program; a pilot project, \$8.2 million on March 24, 2014. We were all happy with the announcement. Finally, at long last, two years after waiting, an \$8.2 million program. Twelve months after through an ATIPPA, my colleague from Burgeo – La Poile did some work on this, and one year after what did we find out? Only 10 per cent of the funds for that program had been used – only 10 per cent. Three families in Labrador qualified. Three families, and only twenty families on the West Coast. It is very, very sad, Mr. Speaker.

The family caregiver program was supposed to provide increased choice and flexibility for those in need of Income Support, families like the ones I alluded to tonight. That is what the family caregiver program was supposed to do; yet, only 10 per cent of the allotted budget one year after had been allocated. Why, Mr. Speaker? Why was that? Why was only 10 per cent of the budget used? I will tell you why.

Because the eligibility requirements have been so prohibitive that rather than helpful to families, it had been prohibitive rather than helpful to families who need it, Mr. Speaker.

Not so long ago we heard the Health Minister referring to the so-called success of the program, but at the same time he had to admit that while the program was intended for 250 families, only 100 families had been helped – only 100 families. In fact, of the \$8.2 million that this government announced under the family caregiver program, only \$755,000 was spent a year after the program was launched.

These are the kind of sad things that are going on, Mr. Speaker. These are the kind of things that the public need to be made aware of, not when a press release goes out and you see an \$8.2 million program and it is wonderful – people who have been struggling, family issues, some like I just alluded to, waiting for help and they do not qualify at all because of the stringent criteria.

The Health Minister stood and he talked about there being no wait-list. Well, I want to tell the people who are watching tonight the fact that there is no wait-list certainly had nothing to do with the success or the efficiency of the program. It is important that people know that, Mr. Speaker. It is important that they know it is because of the eligibility criteria being just too strict that families were being eliminated – eliminated – without even a chance to qualify.

I have situations in my district for nearly two years since I have been elected – I am thinking of one particular family in a small community in the Labrador Straits. We have written letters, so the minister cannot stand and say that he is not familiar. We have had letters back saying no, they were not eligible. The same thing – this young woman in the Labrador Straits can have somebody come in and provide care for her daughter, but she cannot get paid herself.

I believe that the failed family caregiver program is another example of a lack of management and direction, which continues to be shown by this government. I have only mentioned two stories because I want to move on to another topic that is very important as well, but we waited for the program. We

waited, we got excited, yet every time I am in my district and get calls from around the Province – the first story was not from my district; it was actually from the district of a member on the opposite side of the House, a member of the government. They are reaching out to me because they feel they have not been able to get any help. I believe that once again this is an example of a government not listening to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to health care and home support concerns for their loved ones. The family caregiver is just another example of that, Mr. Speaker.

There are many examples, Mr. Speaker, that I could give on the family caregiver program, but I want to use a little of my time to talk about teaching while I am speaking under the Social Services Committee. It was not so long ago after the Budget came down – I do not know if it was right before the Budget came down or right after, we heard about the 77.5 units that were being cut.

We do not know how many teachers that is: seventy-seven units. I have said many times in the House – the Member for Burin has heard me say many times that I think education is the most important thing, the most important thing in Newfoundland and Labrador because I believe that everywhere – when we look across the way over to the Health Sciences, where would we be without education if our people were not educated? I think we are going down a very bad road when we are trying to grow our population, when we have all these strategies that are years behind that we want to implement, if we are going to start chopping away at our education, we are going down a wrong road.

One of the things that is happening that I am hearing loud and clear from small schools, in my district especially, in the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair it seems that – and it was evident; it is no surprise to us – that the 77.5 units being cut is going to have a disproportionate impact on small schools, a disproportionate impact on small schools, taking the heart out of rural schools. That is what those cuts are doing. We have many examples, Mr. Speaker, and I am just going to give a couple.

I have talked to teachers – I just travelled throughout the district and attended seven graduations. While I was at the different schools in the district for those seven grads, some teachers were very sad, very discouraged. Some were infuriated. Some said we are going to fight to have those positions reinstated. I said: Good for you. I think somebody once said a quote that our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable what we are asking some of these teachers in small schools to do where the education of our students is clearly being sacrificed. It was suggested in some of the schools that Grades 5 through 9 be put together in one classroom. I had a teacher to say to me it is so inappropriate. When you think of the age gap between a Grade 5 student and a Grade 9 student, it is so inappropriate.

It is unbelievable when you consider the age and the maturity ranges in this group of students – the teachers felt that it was outrageous. Not only for the students when you think about the difference in the maturity level but to expect a teacher to prepare for all of these different curriculums, let alone to teach them simultaneously. It is tough on the administration. They are doing the best they can.

What really sadness me, I have to go back again to the wastage. When we hear of the wastage every single day, Bill 29, lots of examples – Muskrat Falls, I mentioned it many times here and people said to me we were burning 23,000 litres of fuel just to heat the place the winter and spent the winter shovelling. When I think about if they had managed that massive project a little better, we would not be cutting the heart out of rural schools, Mr. Speaker, in Newfoundland and Labrador if we had not had that mismanagement.

What is happening also is we are forcing students to complete courses through CDLI. Inappropriately, we are forcing – I have a daughter who just finished her first year of university. She was self-motivated; she did well with CDLI. CDLI is not intended for every student. It is not intended to be abused this way. It was a wonderful thing, Mr. Speaker, when they came up with CDLI and high school

students in rural were able to do their chemistry and their physics. I have a child who went through that system, but it is not suitable for every student. We are losing students.

Mr. Speaker, we are cutting these seventy-seven units but if we look at the bigger picture, we do not know what the cost is actually going to be, especially when we think about the students who are going to fall through the cracks.

Mr. Speaker, a number of my colleagues and I went down yesterday and we listened to a panel, Choices for Youth. There were very touching stories; young girls on that panel who had been in and out of sixteen homes. Somewhere along the road of their life, things went wrong. That is why it is so important for us to support our children from a young age, for us to ensure that our children's education is not compromised, because we have to build a solid foundation in order to give them that right start in life.

I think also we are talking about cuts, cuts, cuts impacting the students but asking the teachers to stretch themselves to make up with all of the different courses. Then we still expect them to provide extracurricular activities while stretched to the limit. Most of us here who went through the school system and liked the various sports, we know how valuable and how important that was in our lives.

When I went to school we had to get on our snowmobile and we had to go Port Hope Simpson and Mary's Harbour only by Ski-Doo for a sports meet. We played ball hockey, we lived for it, and we loved the challenge of seeing who was going to bring home the trophy. I have to say we did pretty good the number of times that I went.

We are asking teachers, despite all of these cuts, to continue with the extracurricular sports teams and after school sports. These things are vital, Mr. Speaker, but something has to go.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the government, I would encourage the minister – and I believe he already committed to me today, and I appreciate that. Mr. Speaker, he did ask his officials to go back and look at some of these positions because sometimes decisions are made and you cut right across the board, but most here

will agree that one size does not fit all. When we have schools that are only going down in enrolment by one or two students and we are cutting a unit for one or two students, Mr. Speaker, it is important that we go back and we look at that.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, that I have been hearing from teachers as I have travelled throughout my district is about –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, when teaching units have been reallocated, it had always happened in the fall. I remember, Mr. Speaker, I think I served for fifteen years on the school council in my community. So I am very familiar with a lot of what I am talking about. If units are going to be reinstated, when they are reallocated in the fall that is a great disruption to the students.

The classes have to be reorganized. The teachers have to be reorganized. So one of the things I would ask the minister to consider this year, something different, is when you are looking at reinstating teaching units I would ask that they be done prior to the school year in September. It is very important that if you are going to look at reinstating some units, Mr. Speaker, that it be done before September.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, when I look at Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, the teachers in those small communities and when I look across Labrador we are very proud of our teachers. Time and time again those teachers have risen to the challenge. It is not easy when you are in a small community.

I petitioned many times on broadband. Some of these teachers, professionals come into small areas and they want to be able to continue to further their education and work on their master's. We do not have the infrastructure in place for them even to do that; yet, here we are now, we are asking teachers to take on more.

We have a number of schools now because of the cuts, we are going to have classrooms that are empty. We are going to have skilled trades'

rooms that are empty, Mr. Speaker. We will all agree here that not every student learns the same way, but we have students – because of these seventy-seven units that they are cutting – who learn best with hands-on learning. For those students, sadly, there will be no skilled trades room open, Mr. Speaker, just because of the cuts.

Mr. Speaker, I think the message that I want – my time is winding down. I just want to say the message I am hearing from the teachers in my district is that they will not sit idly by. They will not sit idly by while students suffer the consequences of choices made by this government that have bungled and badly, badly mismanaged, despite \$25 billion in oil money since they took government; more money than we have ever had in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now what we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is we are cutting. We are cutting at the heart of rural. We are cutting, we are disadvantaging our students. We are not preparing them to come in here and to go to university and to go to college. Cuts like this, Mr. Speaker, rest assured, will have far-reaching negative impacts on children's lives and on our education system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS DEMPSTER: I am happy, Mr. Speaker, that I have had a chance to stand to mention the teaching. It is sad when money has been mismanaged, when there has been a lot of wastage. It is sad that people have to suffer. It is sad that we are going to see a tax increase. It is sad that this government is going to reach deep into the pockets of the people with the lowest income in our Province, seniors who are already choosing between buying their pills or turning up their heat. Now we are going to put the taxes back on their hydro bill. Now we are going to put a 2 per cent HST increase on.

Mr. Speaker, taxing back to prosperity is not the way you govern. It is bad governance and people are outraged about it. We hear it everywhere we go.

We just saw this Budget brought down that brought in 261 fee increases, Mr. Speaker – 261 fee increases.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask members for their co-operation.

The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, 261 fee increases on an average family who is just daily living, running out and putting their children in swimming lessons, buying their moose licence, renewing their motor vehicle registration, and at the end of the day taking their kids for a milkshake on the way home. Mr. Speaker, that adds up to an extremely high amount. Then, at the end of the month, they pay their hydro bill.

People on Income Support; we have heard about the rebate but they are still front ending that cost. They are still front ending because they have to pay that extra tax increase every single day and the rebate only comes in October. It is very, very sad, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy once again – I see my time has gone – to stand in my place and speak on behalf of the residents in the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair. I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to taking my place and speaking again on this Budget.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise tonight in the House of Assembly to support Concurrence of the Social Services Committee. I participated in that Committee and I must say, I have learned somewhat listening to what went on in the different sectors of the Social Services Committee. There were actually eight different departments that we had

meetings on, meetings sometimes in the mornings and sometimes late in the evenings. I must say it was a great experience.

I am delighted to be able to stand in this House here again tonight and speak. Every time I get up and speak I like to show my gratitude towards the great people of the District of Bonavista South who actually gave me the opportunity to be able to speak in the House of Assembly on their behalf and on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Health and Community Services is a large department. Approximately \$2.9 billion is the estimate that will be put forward in Budget 2015. That is a major, major investment. In part of that investment, major infrastructure will be put in place; \$133.8 million in special projects in Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LITTLE: Through that particular program, 360 extra long-term care beds will be put into the system of Health and Community Services around communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. This will certainly free up acute care beds.

This is a problem that when you go out into your districts, all over Newfoundland and Labrador, you hear people who are concerned about getting access to acute care beds. By having a plan in health care and putting forward a plan to create another 360 extra long-term care beds, it shows that we, as a government, have a vision. We do have a plan. We do have a balanced approach here, Mr. Speaker. It is all about making special choices –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): Order, please!

MR. LITTLE: – different choices for all the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. We, as a government, will continually govern and show that we do have a balanced approach when we move forward in relation to sectors such as Health and Community Services.

As part of the provincial government's focus on health and wellness in the Budget, Budget 2015, it includes an investment of nearly \$3 billion. That is a substantial amount of funding investment. Through Budget 2015, we provide funding for strategic health care investments, including \$700 million for long-term care and community support services including home support and personal care homes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I know there is much conversation on both sides of the House going back and forth. I am going to ask hon. members if they want to continue their conversations, to take it to a corner or go outside the House so we can listen to the hon. member.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista South.

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly appreciate the protection you just gave me. It is quite noisy here tonight. This is an evening session of the House of Assembly and I guess it happens from time to time. Every speaker who rises to their feet, on either side of the House of Assembly, feels that we have been elected on behalf of the constituents in our district and we have strong convictions about what should be done.

We, as a government, here on this side of the House realize there are many challenges that we face on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker, challenges that we definitely work through. No matter what government is in power and what programs you put out there in the future, there always will be some challenges.

I, for one, certainly support the fiscal realities of what we are faced with in the House of Assembly. This government recognizes that, in particular, this past year we faced a challenge in relation to the economic reality around the world. We had to come up with a Budget 2015 and a five-year plan leading into the future that I can stand on my feet and definitely say it is a plan that will work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador headed into the future.

So we do have a plan. This government has plan. We rolled out that plan in Budget 2015. If you listen to the speakers on this side of the House, you will see some of the positive announcements and investments that we have made as a government. They definitely will be rolled out in 2015.

In relation to home support, there are people in my district who avail of that particular service. They realize the importance of having personal care attendants actually come to their home. I hear a major number of good comments in relation to people who receive home care services in their own homes.

In my district, in the town that I live in, basically there is a private personal care home, and there is a public nursing home as well in the Town of Bonavista. Actually there are two private personal care homes in the municipality of Trinity Bay North, Mr. Speaker. We need that in our society, different levels of care as people become older and need different services at different stages in their life.

This government has proven that we invest and we will continue to invest in programs that are important to our senior citizens, Mr. Speaker. Some of the senior citizens I have talked to like at 50 Plus Clubs – and I go to the Christmas senior citizens party at the Lions Club, and I have many, many discussions. Actually I had an event the past weekend in Lethbridge and area, a fiftieth anniversary. I have talked to a number of senior citizens at that event. They actually commended this government on some of the programs that we continue to roll out on a regular basis.

It is not all the statement of I am sad. The statement comes across that some of those people are the most vulnerable, in some cases, in our society definitely support what this government is doing, and they commend the government on a regular basis when I talk to them. Can we do everything for everyone on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker? No, that is a fact and that is the honest truth; we cannot. We definitely provide programs that help out our seniors and some of our less fortunate in our society. We will continue to do that on a regular basis.

As I move on to Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, actually there was over \$245 million invested in the 2015 Budget, Mr. Speaker. That particular department is important to municipalities all over Newfoundland and Labrador in each region of the great Province that we live in.

When you look at the different components of the department, you look at the Municipal Capital Works Programs which are very important to municipalities, and depending on the population of the communities, there is a 90-10 arrangement, there is an 80-20 cost-shared arrangement for other municipalities, then there is a 70-30 arrangement in relation to municipal capital works in that particular department – Municipal Capital Works Programs, which provide infrastructure help to municipalities, water improvements, and so forth. Municipal Operating Grants is another part of Municipal Affairs that certainly help out municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador as well.

This year in particular, the new municipal fiscal framework that was put forward in Budget 2015 – the municipalities and the councillors that I have talked to in the District of Bonavista South and listening to some people I have talked to with MNL, they also said this is a milestone we have reached as a Province. What we have done – and I will say we because the municipalities put forward some proposals and through the Department of Municipal Affairs and great workers in the department and the minister who is responsible showed great leadership and rolled out a new fiscal framework that will benefit municipalities for years and years to come, Mr. Speaker. To me, that was a milestone that this government reached. This government deserves to be recognized for playing a big part in coming through on a process of putting that initiative forward over the next few years.

I know for a fact – I talked to some of the smaller municipalities in King's Cove, Keels, Elliston, and Trinity Bay North. From time to time, they face some challenges and some difficulties. Because of a Budget like we delivered this year, there will be funding. Funding that will be put in place through municipal capital works and so forth and funding that municipalities and some of the smaller local service districts can get access to.

That is very important that we continue on that road in the future.

That particular department also is a very important department in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am sure we will continue to roll out programs that will assist municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador, will improve their infrastructure, and will help people on a regular basis who live in the municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

That is a partnership that this government has formed over the years. We have continued to work with the municipalities all over the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. I can say for one that people on this side of the House are very, very delighted to be able to work on behalf of the many municipalities, local service districts, and communities in each and every one of the districts that we serve.

In relation to Education and Early Childhood Development there is close to \$927 million allotted in Budget 2015, Mr. Speaker. Full-day kindergarten – you have to make changes to bring in full-day kindergarten. It takes time to actually do that. There are many parents, students, community groups, and teaching professionals who have commended government in moving in this direction.

Any time you bring in a full-day kindergarten program there have to be changes in staffing and changes to classrooms, Mr. Speaker. There are some challenges there, but this government will work through the challenges with the professional people in the school system. I am sure that most people who have children going to full-day kindergarten certainly appreciates that this government moved forward with this particular program in a positive manner.

In relation to Justice and Public Safety, there was over \$260 million invested in the Social Services Committee and support through Concurrence of the MHAs who attended that particular sector. That is a substantial amount of money as well. Public safety is very important to everyone in our society. We all know the importance of justice and public safety. This department was combined, the new department,

and this government took the initiative to show leadership. At our time in history right now there is a need for a department such as Justice and Public Safety. When you look at a government that looks at new direction and has a vision to move into the future, this is what good governance is all about, and this government shows leadership on a regular basis in relation to providing funding for departments like Justice and Public Safety.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is another important department in the social services sector of the Committee that I was part of. In that particular department, there was \$34.5 million allotted in the Budget of 2015. It is all about, like I said, making choices, balancing choices, and the balanced approach of this government and the way that we look at the different departments and the programs that we continue to provide for sometimes some of our less fortunate, sometimes some of our most vulnerable people – and we provide programs.

I travel through the District of Bonavista South on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker. I have heard time after time that the Home Modification Program, and the Home Repair Program, and the REEP are all great programs. We had challenges this year, and we had fiscal realities that we faced; but this government, the government of today have continued to listen to what the people said about these programs and how important those programs are to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we continually roll out those programs in a time when we are faced with a fiscal reality that there are challenges in relation to what is happening in the world economy and so forth.

We continue to provide programs that assist the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and sometimes these people commend me – like I say, in every community that I go into they talk about the REEP, and they talk about the Home Modification Program, and they talk about the Home Repair Program. It is important that we continue programs like that that help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and sometimes the less fortunate.

Our government will continue to implement programs to assist our senior citizens, Mr. Speaker. We have proven that. This is not just

making a promise; this is reality. We have proven that time after time that we listen to the people. We certainly respect the people, our senior citizens, and we have developed programs to assist our senior citizens who certainly paved the way to give us a great Province that we can enjoy today, a great Province that we call Newfoundland and Labrador that we are all so proud of. Our seniors paved the way, there is no doubt, paved the way to give us the opportunity to be able to continue to stand in this great House of Assembly, speak on their behalf, provide programs on a regular basis to assist all people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This government will continue to listen to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we will continue to work hard on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is something that we signed up for. Every MHA on this side of the House works really hard on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This government, I can say without a doubt, works very hard. It is not an eight-hour job, it is not a twelve-hour job, it is a job that we commit to, and it is a job that we will continue to work hard on behalf of the great people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am very happy to stand this evening and speak about Concurrence, particularly about the Social Services Committee. I find it kind of interesting because not only is this about Concurrence, it is also about convergence. Because the Social Services Committee is about how we ensure that everybody has what they need in order to be able to fully participate in our community, so that they can fully participate in the prosperity of our land, so that they can fully participate and be partners in bringing our Province forward.

Really, Mr. Speaker, that is what it is all about. It is not about the resources that we have. The resources that we have are for the people. I

believe that the Social Services Committee is the heartbeat of our Province because it is about our people. Anything that we do, hopefully, is people centred. We want to take advantage of our resources. We want to take advantage of government services so that it can enhance the lives of the people of our Province.

I am very happy to be able to stand and speak to this, this evening, Mr. Speaker. Also, before I get into any of the details, I would like to thank the staff of the different departments who sat with us, who answered our questions, who it is very clear –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is very clear that it takes really special people to work in some of those departments, trying to figure out how to maximize our resources to enhance people's lives, to make it possible for people to live full lives in Newfoundland and Labrador. I did not go to all of the Estimates of all the different departments under the Social Services Committee because I am not a critic for every single department that is in that Committee. I am a critic for a number of them, plus I am a critic for ones that are outside of that Committee as well.

The Social Services Committee is kind of – if people were watching this on TV tonight as we talk about the Social Services Committee, this is really a reality show. What we are talking about is the reality of people's lives, what people need, what people are able to share, what people are able to give, and what, at times, we do not provide for people, the people who get lost in the gaps in services, the people who fall between the cracks. I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, when we look at our prosperity and when we see what our resources have brought to us as a people, there should not be anybody falling between the cracks.

There is no good reason for any Newfoundlander and Labradorian to fall between the cracks. There is no good reason. There is no excuse that would stand up as to why in this time of our prosperity – even though

as the Minister of Finance has said a number of times now, we are in a recession. With the vast richness we have had and the ways that we could have built support systems in our community, no one should be falling between the cracks. Also, Mr. Speaker, when people fall between the cracks, we know it costs us more money.

I am going to talk a little bit about some of the details of some of the departments that participated in Estimates. I know what some people will say: Well, there she goes again. Where is the money going to come from? You know you have to make choices.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in many of our social services we are spending the money anyways. It is about how we decide to spend that money. It is about having a vision for the future. We know the title of our Budget 2015-2016, government has given it a title of *Balancing Choices for a Promising Future*. We know that budgeting is all about choices.

Mr. Speaker, we heard from Health and Community Services; from Housing – and boy I am going to talk about Housing a lot this evening – Education and Early Childhood Development; Justice, I am going to talk about housing in Justice as well; AES, Advanced Education and Skills, I am going to talk about housing in that as well. The Voluntary and Non-Profit Secretariat and OPE and Youth Engagement, I am going to be talking about housing in there as well. Child, Youth and Family Services, I am going to be talking about housing in that as well.

Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, I am going to be talking about housing in that; Status of Women, I will be talking about housing in that. The issues around people with physical disabilities, I will be talking about housing in that, and also the arts. The arts, I am not so sure it is coming specifically under Social Services Committee, but I am going to talk about it under this anyways, Mr. Speaker. I am going to give myself a little bit of latitude.

Health and Community Services; my colleague, the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi, this is her critic area, but I would just like to touch on a few issues in Health and Community Services. Among them is the whole issue of mental health.

As everyone in the House here knows, the All-Party Committee for Mental Health and Addictions has begun. We have held public hearings in St. John's. We have held public hearings in Corner Brook, as well as public hearings where we heard formal presentations. Then, also we have had open to the public round tables.

We also heard from – for instance, in Corner Brook we heard from Western Health. We heard from psychologists, from doctors, social workers. We have heard from front line workers. Mr. Speaker, almost without exception, in Corner Brook so far and in St. John's so far – because in St. John's we heard from mental health workers at the Waterford, psychiatrists, psychologists, administrators, mental health nurses. Then, we heard again from community groups and from the general public. Almost without exception, people talked about housing. People with chronic or persistent mental illness cannot get well if they do not have housing.

I heard as well, Mr. Speaker, from corrections services, from the assistant superintendent at the correction facility in Stephenville. He too talked about the need for affordable and supportive housing. You have a fellow who has been incarcerated for a few years. He has been working on his addictions issues in prison. He gets out. He has nowhere to live except maybe a horrific boarding house where he is surrounded by people who are using drugs and who are drinking, and it is back to square one.

Mental health is so wrapped up also in housing. We have heard from doctors who say that one of the key social determinants of health is having a safe place to live, a place you can call home, where you feel safe. If you do not have a place where you can feel safe or you can call home, you cannot work, you cannot get better. It is just impossible.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I would like to raise in the area of Health and Community Services, because I heard it in an interesting way yesterday when Choices for Youth had a public forum on youth and homelessness. The youth who spoke, who are community leaders, youth who have been homeless, youth who have had complex needs, addiction needs, mental health

needs, they talked about the need for one-stop shopping.

I think really what they were talking about, Mr. Speaker, is the need for primary care clinics, or primary care centres where you can see a doctor, where you can see a social worker, where you can see a psychologist. Where you can get somebody who can help you if you need to get Income Support, somebody who can help you if you need housing support. This is similar, Mr. Speaker, they do this in Quebec. They are called CLSCs. They are community health clinics, and they are open to the whole community. They have all those services wrapped up in one area because, Mr. Speaker, it is so hard for people to navigate the system.

You can imagine if you have a severe mental illness, and maybe you see a psychiatrist here after waiting at least a year to see your psychiatrist, then you are told you have to call AES for your Income Support, then you have to call Housing for your housing. Then how difficult that is to try and negotiate everything. Then you have to get a letter from your doctor. AES tells you, you have to go back to your doctor and get a letter. Then Housing says you have to go back and get a letter from your doctor.

Mr. Speaker, another thing I think is so important that we did not hear so much about in Health and Community Services is the need for primary health care clinics. They are not just about physical care; it is about wrapping around all the support services. It is about investing in our people so that our people can be well, that they can be productive. So they can be the best that they can possibly be.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of home care – now I heard my colleague for Labrador talk about the failure of the paid family caregivers program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know how important housing is to seniors and how important home care is to seniors, so seniors can stay in their housing. Mr. Speaker,

this Social Services Committee Concurrence is all about social services convergence, where we are bringing all the elements together so they can work together. It saves us money in the long run because then people are well, people are housed. They are not housed precariously. People are getting the types of support services they need so they can stay out of hospital, so they can stay out of jail.

Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker? If we could keep in one year alone ten people out of prison, could you imagine the savings that would be? To keep someone in prison is hundreds of dollars a day. It is not that much to house someone in a safe, affordable place. Maybe the rent is going to be \$800 to \$900 a month. That is different.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, \$800 to \$900 a month to house someone well, compared to someone going to prison because they do not have a safe place to live. They get mixed up in drugs and alcohol again because they cannot work because they do not have a safe place to live. Imagine the savings if we could keep just ten people out of prison a year in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Then in Justice, Mr. Speaker, I was very happy to hear that the rates for legal aid lawyers have increased. I think that is really important so that people have choices, that they have access. In particular, people who have been charged with major crimes like murder, how important it is to have a good representation. I am happy to hear that expands the type of representation that people can have in our justice system, and that is healthy.

It is not only about rights for individuals, but it is also healthy for our justice system. We need to be able to have experienced private lawyers. When they are chosen, we need to ensure they are paid properly so that people can get good representation. Again, that does not just affect the individual who is accused but it affects the justice system.

The Family Violence Intervention Court, how happy was I to hear that that is being reinstated, but, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to be like Charlie Brown and Lucy, I am not ready yet to dance in the streets. I have my dancing shoes beside me and I am ready to be dancing in the

street, once I actually see a reality of the reinstatement of the Family Violence Intervention Court. I know they are calling it the Domestic Violence Court. I am not putting on those dancing shoes and dancing in the street until I actually see a court open.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Justice had said that the women's centres will be providing the empowerment groups for women and children on behalf of the Domestic Violence Court. I have spoken to these women's centres, nobody – and I am hoping the Minister of Justice is listening because this is directed at him. I know, Mr. Speaker, that nobody has contacted any women's centre across Newfoundland and Labrador about providing that service.

I would like to know what that means, Mr. Speaker, because that court cannot be opened up unless those services are in place. Those services are part of what defines what that court is, and there has not been a single conversation with any women's centre across the Province about providing those services. So I do not know what that means. Maybe the Minister of Justice is going to be able to stand up and tell us about that, I am not sure. He has a quizzical look on his face. He probably did not quite hear what I had to say.

Mr. Speaker, as I had said, we know the empowerment programs, the empowerment groups for the Family Violence Intervention Courts are provided, and the minister promised that they were going to be provided by women's centres. I know, Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to every women's centre in the Province, nobody, nobody has spoken to them about providing that service. The court cannot be up and running unless that service is provided.

So, again, I am not putting on my dancing shoes and celebrating yet until – I do not know where it is at. Government has not given us a time frame. Maybe this is one of those empty promises, I do not know. I guess I am going to have to keep pushing, and the women's community across the Province are going to have to keep pushing on that one.

Justice; again, Mr. Speaker, we know that housing is such a crucial part in rehabilitation so

that when people do get out of incarceration they have a safe place to live. Not because you are just like coddling people. This is a social investment. Again, it is far cheaper to house someone adequately than it is to incarcerate them. The research has been done to show that people – our prisons are filled, they are like our new asylums, are filled with people with mental health and addictions issues, and unless they have a safe place to live when they come out of prison, the recidivism rate goes up, the rehabilitation rate goes down. So it is a saving in the long run.

Now, the voluntary and non-profit sector. Mr. Speaker, we know they are taking on the lion's share of the housing crisis that we face right now in our Province. Because we do face a housing crisis. Psychiatrists are telling us that, doctors are telling us that, mayors are telling us that.

Mr. Speaker, last month, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities were talking about the housing crisis that we are facing right now. Our own mayors in Newfoundland and Labrador in the past year used those words. So, our voluntary non-profit organizations are trying to address the housing crisis that we face. They do that by participating in the Affordable Housing Initiative.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, it sure is getting loud in here.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

So it is our voluntary and non-profit organizations who are applying for the Affordable Housing Initiative, which is a joint program on behalf of the Province and the federal government to provide –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I am asking for protection here.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask all hon. members to have a little bit of patience here, please.

Thank you.

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

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

I only have a minute left, so I am going to just move on and say that the voluntary and non-profit sector are doing the lion's share of trying to address the affordable housing situation and the housing crisis that we have in our Province.

As well, Mr. Speaker, Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, we know that one of the fundamental building blocks for seniors for their health and well-being is having a safe, affordable place to live. I have heard of stories, for instance, of one man in Labrador who is going to a personal care home because he cannot afford rent. He does not need a personal care home but government will pay for him to be in a personal care home.

Mr. Speaker, how many seniors have I visited where they sit down, and on the back of an envelope they try to budget, and the biggest, biggest block for them is the price of housing, the price of rent. They try to figure out how they can buy food, how they can pay heat and light, because of the high rents that they are paying. Imagine, and we all know it. It is happening across the Province, seniors trying to budget on the back of an envelope without enough money to live on.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a privilege and an honour for me to stand in this House of Assembly to represent

the people of the District of Baie Verte – Springdale. It is always an honour and a privilege to speak on their behalf, and by extension to speak on behalf of the whole Province, the entire Province.

Just for the people at home in case they missed it. For their information we are debating the concurrence on the Social Sector Committee. We have already dispensed of the business of the Resource Committee and the Estimates on the Government Services Committee.

Right now, we are discussing the Estimates on the Social Services Committee. Since you asked, Mr. Speaker, who were the members of this committee, the Chairperson was the Member for Port de Grave, the Member for Port au Port, the Member for Bonavista South, the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, the Member for Humber East, the Member for St. John's Centre, and myself, the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think I will go through or explain the process because I think the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune did a very articulated, very succinctly – the budgetary process and the concurrence process earlier on, so I will not belabour everybody in here today. I will just skip that process tonight. For everybody out there, this is a night sitting. Again, it is a privilege to stand and speak.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to applaud the Committee members for their diligent work. They had some very thought-provoking questions for the ministers and departments. I really appreciate all the work they have done.

I certainly want to thank each minister of each department and their officials for the stellar work they have done and their dedication. Coming in here and displaying and exhibiting a lot of patience. Well, actually they are on the hot seat. The minister and officials, and their department officials are on the hot seat in the morning 9:00 o'clock to 12:00, or in the afternoon or at night, I should say, from 6:00 p.m. to about 9:00 o'clock, thereabouts, roughly.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing wrong with that because the minister and department officials, and also the government, I suppose, are held

accountable for what transpired in the previous year, and our projections or Estimates in the upcoming Budget year. So, that process is very essential and very educational to have. It educates everybody here. It gives everybody some accountability, especially as a government, because the members opposite can ask all kinds of questions: Why did this happen? Why the line item here increased, or why is there a decrease? They get their answers, Mr. Speaker. So I think overall it is a very good process indeed.

Again, I will just mention briefly, what are the departments that make up the Social Sector. We have Child, Youth and Family Services; Seniors, Wellness and Social Development; Justice and Public Safety; Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation; Education and Early Childhood Development; Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Labour Relations Agency; and we have Health and Community Services.

Now, you combine all that – I said that rather fast, Mr. Speaker, but you combine all these departments, it makes together over \$4.6 billion in expenditures, and roughly it makes up or comprises about 55.8 per cent of expenditures. That is a large portion of the expenditures of the Budget that the Social Sector eats up. It is a very important sector, and I believe it is the biggest sector indeed.

What I will do now is zero in on a few departments, but before I do, I want to talk about – since this is Tourism Week, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words about tourism in general. From a global point of view, we all know that tourism is a trillion-dollar industry, and tourists spend roughly \$3 billion a day. That translates into \$2 million per minute, globally speaking, and roughly provides about one job in eleven worldwide, Mr. Speaker. That is on a global scale. That is how important tourism actually is. Then we narrow that down.

Provincially speaking, Mr. Speaker, the tourism industry generates, as we all know, \$1.1 billion per year. I think we are on target. By 2020, it should be up around, between \$1.5 billion and \$1.6 billion per year. Basically, that supplies over 8 per cent of the total jobs in this Province right now.

That is something to be encouraged about. That is very positive, Mr. Speaker. We have certainly grown the tourism industry right around this Province of ours, I am sure. That is very encouraging. I take hats off and give kudos to the tourism department, the ministers, and former ministers.

I would like to read Rex Avery's remarks about tourism. He rather sums it up in a nutshell. This is what he says, "Thanks to the hard work and collaborative efforts of tourism operators, regional networks and other industry stakeholders, tourism is diversifying the economy, driving investment and creating jobs while strengthening communities and business partnerships." I think that is a very good synopsis of the importance that tourism is to the economy of this Province and to the people's way of life in the Province. I just wanted to share that because Rex Avery, in case you did not know, is the President of Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

Then I want to zero in on a community of mine, King's Point. Of course, the Town of King's Point are so proactive in offering a cluster of products when it comes to tourism. For example, King's Point Pottery. They have a heritage home. They have the Dr. Jon Lien whale pavilion. They have the By the Sea Inn & Café, where you can go out and have a cup of tea or a cup of coffee any time of the day. You can probably see whales out in the bay there. That is very good.

I have to give credit to their ingenuity and the visionary people of King's Point for their risk taking in trying to develop a cluster of products so when people come in my area, especially in King's Point, they will have a good experience there. Of course they can all travel down to Rattling Brook as well and visit Dulcie Toms and her store there, Mr. Speaker. If you enter that store it is like you are going into probably the 1950s or 1960s. She loves to chat. She loves to meet people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker asks for all members' co-operation. It is a long night, I understand and all the rest, but I ask for all members' co-operation.

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Kudos for tourism and the tourism operators. I would like for all the tourism operators out there to know that this government, and every MHA in here, how we appreciate all that you do in contributing to the economy of the Province.

Another very important topic, Mr. Speaker, is cancer. Cancer is a galvanizing disease. It has no respect of persons. You could be a mom, a dad; you could be a child. No matter if you are rich, if you are middle class, it hits all of us. Families and friends, all of us, in this House of Assembly here, every MHA is touched some way by that disease called cancer.

About two in five Canadians develop cancer in their lifetime. We know that one in four Canadians will pass away due to this dreaded and awful disease. The Canadian Cancer Society estimates there will be 3,500 new cancer diagnoses and 1,510 cancer deaths in Newfoundland and Labrador in this year, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, that is a stark reality and sort of grips our hearts and probably puts, in some ways, fear in our hearts; but, as a government, we know that cancer prevention and treatment is a key priority to us. Since 2004, we have invested approximately \$184 million to combat the dreaded disease called cancer and try to help people out. This government will continue to implement and monitor priority actions under this Cancer Control Policy Framework. We always want to encourage people to get early detection, early diagnosis so that we can have a better result, Mr. Speaker.

We have supported and expanded the three provincial cancer screening programs for cancer – cervical and colon cancer out there. We are preparing to introduce a PET scanner into the Province's cancer care system. We have added new cancer treatment medications to the drug program. We are offering a cancer patient navigator program to improve navigation

through the health care system. These are some of the initiatives, as a government, we have taken to combat that dreaded disease called cancer that grips all of our hearts.

I want to acknowledge the supports out there from the community, from all kinds of agencies, from families, friends, you name it, Mr. Speaker. When somebody has a fundraiser or some initiative, the people all around you, they galvanize and they support each other. That is very, very impressive, Mr. Speaker. It touches all of our hearts.

There is hope. I have seen a lot of people with yellow T-shirts when I have travelled around in my district and around the Province, gone to relays and seen these yellow T-shirts. It is just an inspiration to all of us in seeing those very brave people trying to fight that dreaded disease with a very, very positive attitude, and I commend them for their bravery, Mr. Speaker.

I think we all have a responsibility, not only as a government but as a people, as a person, as an individual. I guess the backdrop of these stark statistics: I have to take responsibility, try to live a healthy lifestyle, and try to eat right so that I can hopefully fight that dreaded disease called cancer.

That is a little bit on cancer, Mr. Speaker. Again, another topic we could dwell on is municipalities. Like I said earlier, it makes up 3 per cent of the expenditure. It is a fairly big department. Budget 2015 is very good to municipalities. We kept the MOGs. The cost-shared ratios, 90-10, were very important. The new sustainability partnership that we developed, over \$46 million over three years, that is awesome.

I talked to all kinds of mayors out there and councillors. They have talked to me and said they felt that they got their support, not only from MNL but from us as a government as well. Mayors and councillors out there are very proud that we forged that relationship and came up with a new fiscal framework that will sort of help them help their communities to be sustainable.

Fire and Emergency Services – I am going quickly because my time is running very, very

quickly. The Association of Fire Services President Vince MacKenzie was very happy with the Budget. To serve 5,900 volunteers in the firefighters, I am very, very encouraged to see that this Budget 2015 still kept the funding in Fire and Emergency Services intact. Fire and Emergency Services, I am sure, are certainly pleased because they provide an outstanding service.

Let me get into the seniors, Mr. Speaker, which is dear to my heart. I believe I can look back when I was eighteen, nineteen years old attending MUN and me and my buddy used to do down to the Escasoni home here and he took his guitar and I tried to sing – imagine that now. I cannot play, but I do not think I can sing either. We went down and tried to cheer the hearts of seniors. Do you know what? When I left, I was the one who was cheered up. I thought we would go down and sing a few songs and play the guitar and create a smile on the faces of seniors but when we left, we were the ones who were cheered up as well.

My wife, for thirty years or so, worked in the long-term care facility in Springdale. We have a passion and a love for seniors. I know we all do here because I do not think anybody has a monopoly on loving the seniors. Everybody shares that same respect.

In Baie Verte there is a group organized – I commend the Town of Baie Verte; I commend the group in Middle Arm. Middle Arm, Smith's Harbour, and Burlington – I commend all the mayors there, and Gerald Burke, especially. It was his vision. He got everybody to embrace that idea, and all three communities came together and formed a 50 Plus – it is called the 50 Plus Encouragement Club, and President Gerald Burke is doing a fantastic job, along with representatives from these three communities. I have to give a shout out to them as well. They are doing an awesome job in engaging seniors in their communities.

Then there is a group in La Scie, and of course, Springdale – I live in Springdale; I am very familiar with Life Unlimited for Older Adults. They are just an outstanding group of leaders in the community. They are all seniors, they volunteer, they are engaged, and they are leaders in their community. Wherever you go you see

seniors – all over the Province. It is not only in my district, or in Springdale; I am just saying that now because I am more familiar with it because I live in Springdale.

Life Unlimited for Older Adults – we gave them a home. When I was the Mayor of Springdale at the time, they came in and shared their vision with us and we said we will help you out. You take downstairs, we will give you a phone, and we will give you all kinds of supports – and that is their home: the lower level of the town hall.

Mr. Speaker, if you get a chance to go out, you can visit them, and they do an awesome job in including seniors and engaging seniors right across the whole area – awesome job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Again, hats off to that group, Life Unlimited for Older Adults in Springdale – and all groups right across this great Province of ours. I do not know how many groups, but I am saying there are hundreds of groups across this Province. This group in particular in Springdale offer educational, social activities, recreational activities, and they have a care to ride program now that will engage seniors to go grocery shopping, to be involved in social activities, or they travel somewhere to take a trip or go down and get their appointment to see a doctor, or whatever. They are engaged. It is a tremendous program.

So, I have to say a great big shout out to that particular group in Springdale and right across the great Province of ours. How we have invested in seniors – I do not have enough time now, Mr. Speaker, to go into some of our investing in healthy, age-friendly inclusive communities that this Province has seen through this government.

In my opinion, there is no other government that has done so much for seniors as this government has done, Mr. Speaker. There are holes and gaps in some, sure there is. I am not naïve, we are not naïve. We do not pretend we are the panacea for a group of seniors and we have all the answers, but I will tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker, this government has offered so many wide-ranging programs out there, it would boggle your mind if you had to list them all and

the investments we have made. It is astounding, Mr. Speaker.

Just listen to this, “Approximately \$180 million for the Provincial Home Support Program, representing an increase of over \$6 million from last year’s program that provided support to about 9,000 seniors.” That is awesome.

“\$8.8 million under the Provincial Home Repair Program to assist households with lower incomes make repairs to their homes. Historically, nearly 86 per cent of applicants are seniors.” That is awesome.

“\$5.4 million to create new affordable housing units through the Investment in Affordable Housing Program, of which approximately 60 per cent will serve seniors.” Now, is that forgetting seniors? Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

To top it all off, Mr. Speaker, this Premier, we created a brand new department called Seniors, Wellness and Social Development. We have a minister there who is vivacious and energetic, and his heart and soul is in this department. I see it on his face, I see it. He is everywhere. He is supporting these seniors. His heart is in it, Mr. Speaker.

This government, “\$2.6 million to implement new drug therapies in the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program ...” and I can go on, “\$400,000 for the age-friendly transportation services.” Seniors, are they forgotten? Absolutely not.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by saying: seniors, we love you. We do not have a monopoly on love but I tell you one thing, seniors are loved and respected in this Province.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member’s time has expired.

MR. POLLARD: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Any reference I make tonight will be from the first report of the Auditor General that I ever read, which was of the year ending March 31, 2011. Why this is important is because this covers, first of all, and I think maybe the most important part, is this discusses the infrastructure strategy that the government never had where billions and billions of dollars went.

The Auditor General report said: In the 2004 Speech from Throne, Government announced that it "...will develop a comprehensive infrastructure strategy to guide investments in public infrastructure in a manner that promotes growth." This was the very first Speech from the Throne with this government.

The 2006 Speech from the Throne elaborated further by saying, "Existing infrastructure, including roads and public buildings, has been eroding throughout Newfoundland and Labrador for decades. Addressing the wide assortment of costly needs responsibly over time requires expert information and careful fiscal balancing." Does that sound familiar? Careful fiscal balancing, I think we are hearing that again this year. This was 2004, and this is 2015.

The Speech from the Throne goes on to say, "For this reason, My Government initiated a comprehensive infrastructure strategy to evaluate the needs and identify ways and means of meeting them." This was in 2004.

The Auditor General goes on to say that, "In its Budget for the year ended 31 March 2007 Government indicated that its Infrastructure Strategy was valued at \$2 billion" That was the value on the infrastructure strategy in 2007 after four years of this government, \$2 billion.

In 2011, "... Government indicated that its Infrastructure Strategy was valued at \$5 billion." If we are talking about \$20 million or \$25 million of oil royalties and mineral royalties that this government has burned through, you look at the infrastructure strategy that the Auditor General was trying to find in 2011.

The Auditor General goes on to explain for most of us who might not fully comprehend what is infrastructure. Infrastructure means things such as roads, bridges, ferries, aircraft, buildings, vehicles, major software programs, and any

other categories of tangible capital expenses. The Auditor General – based on the government having said for a seven-year period from 2004 to 2011 that it was really keen on infrastructure rebuild and properly planning infrastructure expenditures – decided, well, maybe we should have a look at the infrastructure strategy.

The Auditor General made a request for this 2011 Auditor General's report, for a copy of the infrastructure strategy, only to be told by the former Deputy Minister of Transportation and Works that there was no formal document infrastructure strategy. We know there is \$5 billion gone on a strategy and the strategy does not exist. The person who says the strategy does not exist was the former Minister of Transportation and Works. The former deputy minister was the Chair of the infrastructure committee established by government. This is the person who was the Chair of the committee that was established in 2004.

What did the committee actually do? Well, the Auditor General found that, yes, there had been an infrastructure working group and they had prepared a draft report dated November 2004, but apparently nothing else. The draft report in 2004 highlighted five key areas, and those key areas – this is by the government's own infrastructure working group that was supposed to provide an infrastructure strategy which was never ever put in writing. Does that sound familiar? Never ever put in writing.

They said, "the Province's current approach to infrastructure asset management does not provide decision makers with an appreciation of the significance of the approval of a particular level of funding." In other words, that means that the infrastructure strategy does not give enough information for an appreciation of, how much does all of this cost? Well, this was a fairly new government, so maybe they could be let off the hook early on.

The second point was the "responsibility for the planning, acquisition, and maintenance of infrastructure is not centralized but is spread out among numerous Government departments and Crown agencies" Mr. Speaker, wouldn't it make sense across a government, across a major corporation, or any large organization, that if you are dealing with significant capital

expenditures, if you are dealing with large amounts of money, that you would have some consistency and there would be some form of central planning? Not in this government.

The committee that prepared a draft report also said, “the planning processes used amongst the various departments and Crown agencies were not consistent” Not only are they spread out, they are inconsistent as among themselves. That means that what one department would do, another department might do differently, or another department might not do at all.

This brings to mind of, for example, how many vehicles does the Province own? We do not know how many. We saw in Question Period some months ago when the critic was asking questions on how many of this and how many of that, and who owns them, and why are you buying diesel for gas-operated vehicles, all the things that are coming forward.

The fourth area was, “a planned and dedicated approach over the long term, with an increased and multi-year funding commitment was necessary” In 2004, the working group that was supposed to put together an infrastructure strategy made this recommendation.

The final one in the draft report was that, “an appropriate asset management system should involve consideration of the asset value” How much is it worth? What is the life cycle cost? How much will it cost you to have this asset over the life of it, whether it is a building, or whether it is a piece of computer equipment or whatever it is. What is the long-term affordability, presumably, as compared to other choices?

What about risk management and assessment? Performance management, how well it will perform, “... operational plans, and integration of technical and financial plans.” So these were five indications of shortcomings, proposals, and recommendations in what the working group said should be in an infrastructure strategy.

Well, since the Auditor General could not find an infrastructure strategy, could not find anything in writing whatsoever, he decided let’s look and see where government is actually spending the money. So in that year for the

2010-2011 Budget, the Auditor General looked at the top five big-spending departments, the ones with the highest budgets, and those were: Transportation and Works, Health and Community Services, Education, Municipal Affairs, and Justice.

He said: Well, maybe if we gather up what they are doing in these five departments, we will be able to put together some sense of where the money is going. Maybe this will serve in the place of a strategy because there seems to be no strategy. Officials from the Office of the Auditor General met with officials from the five departments to obtain a preliminary understanding of the processes for this infrastructure spending. The almost immediate conclusion was: While we did receive some preliminary information, it soon became apparent we would not be receiving all the information required to complete our review.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government that brags about bringing the Auditor General into the House of Assembly, opens up the doors for the Auditor General; yet on something which they wanted to call an infrastructure strategy and said that by 2011 \$5 billion had gone into the infrastructure strategy, there was no infrastructure strategy and the five biggest budget departments started to refuse to give the Auditor General the basic information that the AG needed in order to perform his job.

Now, on July 5, 2011, the Deputy Minister of Health and Community Services informed the Auditor General, “With respect to your inquiry regarding what documentation is available for repairs and renovations, capital equipment and major infrastructure projects, there would be various documentation available for each category” To paraphrase, he comes back and says: As I previously indicated to you, the disclosure of this information would reveal Cabinet confidences, which is protected from disclosure under section 18 of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Does that sound familiar to anybody? Well, Mr. Speaker, this is before Bill 29. This is in 2011. That was July 2011, and that was from Health and Community Services.

On September 30, 2011, a similar letter comes from the Deputy Minister of Justice that says, "... it is the Department's position that all documentation either obtained or generated by Departmental officials, supporting assessments and rankings of proposed infrastructure projects whether forwarded to Budget Division/Cabinet Secretariat or not, ultimately informs Cabinet deliberations and decisions" Based on section 18, we are not going to give that to you either.

You have Health and Community Services and you have Justice both relying on the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act to refuse to provide information. This is the year before Bill 29 was enacted. This is before Bill 29. This is what this government was doing.

The Auditor General in his 2011 report said, "My view is that I am entitled to unrestricted access to the information required to conduct my work." He says, "The requirement to provide my Office with unrestricted access comes from section 17 of the Auditor General Act"

He also goes on further to say, "The position taken by the departments is of significant concern, not only for this particular review" Mr. Speaker, it must be remembered that this is the Auditor General's report on \$5 billion worth of infrastructure spending from 2004 to 2011. The AG says it is precedent setting in the nature of the refusal, and in my opinion the position is not in keeping with the purposes of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, as outlined in section 3(1), which states that the purposes of this act are to make public bodies more accountable to the public and to protect personal privacy.

Mr. Speaker, doesn't that sound very familiar with what the people paid \$1 million for the Wells commission to come back and tell us in order for the government to fix up Bill 29 and basically repeal Bill 29, that had they simply listened to the Auditor General in 2011, not only would they not have gone ahead with Bill 29, they would have loosened up the shroud that they have over government information?

The Auditor General goes on to reference the Province's Information and Privacy Commissioner who has issued reports that says

he "has found that the exemption claimed by Government may not apply or may be too broad." This was the state of not only secrecy in government up to 2011, it also showed how government treated public spending of huge sums of money, which means that they simply spend as they wish, they pretend that they have an infrastructure strategy. They have no infrastructure strategy. Mr. Speaker, \$5 billion gone and we do not know where.

Mr. Speaker, if you would continue on – there are so many areas that really startled me in looking at some of the programs and the failure to collect money. Today, we are hearing about, in Question Period, fines not collected, and various areas of waste mismanagement. One program in this AG report, it is called the Growing Forward program, and in a Growing Forward program it is cost-shared program between the feds and the Province. The AG noted that in this particular year, for the year ending March 31, 2011, the department was short \$465,046, less than the amount that the feds would have given them if they had simply applied for the money.

We were awash in money at the time, so much so that this government could just ignore nearly \$500,000 and not bother to send the feds the bill. We wonder why are in the fiscal mess that we are in today? Well, we are in this fiscal mess today because we have not been good stewards, we have not been careful with the finances of the public, and now we have the biggest Budget we have had in our history and we are about to jack up sales tax by another further 2 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the next huge area that the Auditor General referred to – and I simply will not have time to go into it in this session, but that is in letting buildings run down. This government has quite flagrantly allowed buildings to run down so they got worse and worse and worse, instead of spending the money to maintain the buildings. They are in such a state of disrepair right now; the cost has increased and increased and increased.

I see, Mr. Speaker, my time is up and by agreement, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Cross): The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, and Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I rise this evening I am just kind of thinking what people at home are doing right now. If I were home, I imagine I would be finished up watching one of the series – I would be getting ready to watch *The National*. I guess the people have a choice tonight because I assume – is this live?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. JACKMAN: This is live, so I imagine many people are foregoing their Netflix series tonight to watch the House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I imagine that they are. At 9:41 in the evening, I am about to address and speak for a few minutes on the Social Services Committee.

I listened this evening to one of the speakers opposite who referenced that we are almost at a time prior to Confederation. I think he is going back to maybe the 1930s. For anybody in this House to get up and make a statement like that, it has to make you wonder.

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

MR. JACKMAN: Here we go.

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I think the record will clearly show my point was that we are at a point in time where we are expecting a similar amount from our seniors as we were prior to Confederation. That was my point.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the minister.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, if that is what the gentleman – and I will refer to him as a gentleman – referenced, just think about that

comment that member just made. He is saying that the seniors of today are living in the same kind of situation that seniors lived in this Province in the 1930s, 1940s. That, to me, is unbelievable. It is unbelievable. I do not care how many people are listening tonight; I take exception to that. I think it is totally embarrassing that we have a member who would rise in this House and make that kind of commentary.

Mr. Speaker, we are here concluding debate around the Social Services Committee. There is one thing that somebody said to me at one point in my career in politics. Somebody said one of the easiest jobs you can have in government is to be in Opposition, and I will explain why. You come in and you can get up each day, you can criticize what government is doing, because what your role is, you are trying to, I suppose, put this government out and come in –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. JACKMAN: I hear the member over there, one of the newest members, heckling. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I have been amazed at that, too.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that you do not have to govern. You do not have to make decisions. It is one thing that we on this side have to do; we have got to make decisions. Sometimes there are difficult decisions to be made. We all recognize where we are now in a financial downturn because of oil. I can tell you one thing. If there is one thing that I have seen in my twelve years in government – and I think the Province as a whole – is we have looked at ourselves in a different light. I think there was a point in our history where if we went to Upper Canada, we did not hold ourselves up here.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have come to a new place now where we have people who are travelling across this country and across this globe working and we say that, we, the people of this Province, place second fiddle to no one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: We take second seat to no one because we have found a different place in our Province.

I have a number of things I want to speak about tonight. Yesterday, we attended a session ending homelessness. There was myself, the Minister of CYFS, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, and there were three or four people from the Opposition and the Third Party.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak because it was public knowledge. They had a panel set up and they had three young women who had spoken there. After it was over, I did not know whether I should go up and shake their hand and congratulate them on the role that they played or not because I stood in awe of what they did.

Three young women sat in front of probably about 100 or so people and they answered questions. I think for the first part of it they were expecting some of the questions and they had sort of prepared answers. As we got further into the panel, Mr. Speaker, they were put into a situation where they had to speak off the cuff.

One young lady told her story about her mother dying at four years of age and that she and her brother were put into foster care. In her short life from four to sixteen, she had been in fourteen or sixteen foster homes. She told about her situation. Another young girl told about her situation in dealing with drugs.

Mr. Speaker, we as Members of the House of Assembly, the general public, and the larger community, were there sitting and listening to these three young people. What people like Sheldon Pollett and Bruce Pearce asked of us as elected members of the House, and what they asked of the larger community is one thing – and it was a very simple thing that they asked us. They asked that all of us pool our efforts to end youth homelessness – a simple request, but a very monumental task. They said no single entity, organization, government department, can end this issue. We all have to work together.

I can speak to the notes that I have here as to what we need to do, but it comes down to us all making a commitment. One of the things that Sheldon Pollett has raised, and some people across departments have raised, is what happens to a youth when they leave that age of sixteen up until they are about twenty-four, the reason they

do that – if we can intervene before those ages of twenty-four, we have the possibility of turning people's lives around.

Mr. Speaker, I have said in this House and in my resumé that we fostered as a family for a number of years. One of the things that I have always said to people who are considering going into fostering, it is not a Pollyanna story. It is not a Disneyland story. The children who come to you in foster care come with challenges. They have had circumstances in their lives that are totally beyond their control, but they are placed into situations. The onus is upon us. It is upon me as minister, it is upon us as parliamentarians, and it is up the larger community that we have to do our part.

As I sat yesterday listening to these three young ladies, I kept thinking I have grandchildren – somebody asked me how many. I am trying to figure out how many boys and girls we have. I think we have eight girls. I am just thinking that a circumstance can happen to us any time. A circumstance can happen to us any time that a child can find themselves in a very difficult situation.

As I looked at those three young women and thinking that it could be one of my granddaughters up there, I kept thinking that we, as a people of our Province, that these are our children. They are our children and we have to do the utmost that we can to see that they are taken care of. The earlier we intervene, the better their chances of rectifying their situation and the better chance we have of ending homelessness. We can have no choice, Mr. Speaker. I simply said to him we have no choice.

Myself and the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services and the Premier were chatting about this as to what we need to do as a government. I do not know if any of those young ladies are listening tonight or if Sheldon Pollett is listening or if Bruce Pearce is listening, but I can assure them that as minister I am going to do whatever I can to make sure that we do the best for those youth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: I am certain that everybody else in this House of Assembly would want to do the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak to a few issues as it comes to seniors. We have established a new department, as was said here tonight. A large component of that Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development is around the seniors' component of it.

I have used this word several times in interviews and in-call shows or something like that. I have used the word dignity. The reason that I use it is because we need to show the utmost of respect to our seniors. Somebody said earlier that you were getting up to speak on it because you are getting close on being one yourself. Well, age is a perception. So you may not think that way all the time, but the aches in the shoulders and the aches in the arm makes me realize that yes, I am getting there.

When I sit and I think about my grandparents, my mother, my aunt, my uncle, some of the people who live in my community who served on their church groups or served to lead the council – I think about the gentleman who lived across the road from me. He was ninety-two when he died; he only passed away a couple of years ago. He established the first council in Baine Harbour. This was back in about 1965.

The reason I use the word “dignity” and I will add to that word “respect” is that these were the ones who set up those communities. Mr. Speaker, talking about aquaculture, I remember about the second year I went there, he was experimenting with a project where he had this cage and they put some salmon out in them out in the harbour. They did not last that long, but I keep thinking whenever I hear someone talking about aquaculture, these were the fellows who were the pioneers. They tried something. The thing about it was that they did not fear trying. They tried.

Mr. Speaker, these are the ones who led, like I said, our church groups, our community councils, our fire departments, all of these things, and they deserve our respect and they deserve to be treated with dignity. Are we living in the perfect world? No, Mr. Speaker. My colleague for the Isles of Notre Dame spoke

about it today. We can do and do and do, but there will always be challenges. The onus is on us, though, to face those challenges and to come up with the best possible solutions. The minute we find the solution there will be another challenge, but that is part of growth, that is part of making advances, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for St. John's – where?

AN HON. MEMBER: North.

MR. JACKMAN: No, not St. John's North. For the love of God, no, not St. John's North.

From St. John's Centre, I believe – Mr. Speaker, the Member from St. John's Centre often comes over and visits me when Question Period is over. She will have an issue around housing or some seniors' issue. Any member in this House who gives me an issue to look at, I am going to see what I can do to resolve it.

I will say our officials who work in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, or our officials in the department, I do not find these are people who want to put up stumbling blocks; but sometimes if we can do something to aid a process along, as minister, I am going to do it.

Mr. Speaker, issues around Newfoundland and Labrador Housing – and we often find that people find themselves in very difficult, challenging situations. Again, the onus is on us as members, me as minister, to work with whomever it is in this House of Assembly to try and resolve that situation for that particular individual.

Mr. Speaker, I am bothered from time to time when I sit and listen to a member who would say we are reverting to the 1930s or 1940s times. Look at some of the things that we have instituted on behalf of seniors – I have here programs that I can list off to you. I can list off to you programs: the Provincial Home Support Program, the low-income seniors' tax benefit – people can say it is not much, but I can guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, I know a lot of seniors who, come October, look very much to receiving \$1,059. In fact, there are some 45,000 seniors who will receive that benefit.

The Provincial Home Repair Program – I do not know if it is used as much in the urban centres, St. John's, Corner Brook, but I can guarantee you there is no MHA here who lives in rural Newfoundland who does not know about the Provincial Home Repair Program. I am willing to bet you that every MHA has gone to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and have advocated on behalf of their constituent for home repair dollars.

Age-friendly transportation –

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

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order, the hon. the Member for St. John's North.

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, these programs the minister is listing off are for seniors who live in poverty. I do not know why he is so happy we have so many seniors living in poverty in this Province.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I cannot respond to it. The only thing I can do is to shake my head. That is the only thing I can do.

We have programs out there supporting age-friendly transportation. We have a pilot project going on in five areas of our Province that is aimed at treating one of the issues that most seniors face: financing, housing, and the third one is isolation. I had not realized the impact of isolation on seniors until I went to a session, sat down, and listened to a number of them. They talked about the long evenings in the winter when they were not able to get out.

Mr. Speaker, we have invested in age-friendly transportation in rural and urban areas. We have

partnered with the Red Cross. We have partnered with Metrobus. Over in Bay St. George we are doing one, one we are doing in Springdale, and another that we are doing in Clarenville. It is a pilot for two years because we want to see how it is that we can engage and get seniors out in the community more.

Another one all of us have looked at is the seniors wellness grants. I have said this before; I do not think I have seen any group that can do as much with \$1,000 as a group of seniors can. We see where they have availed of these grants. They have invested in 50 Plus Clubs. They have invested in other things that draw the senior community together.

The good thing that we are seeing now with the 50 Plus Clubs is we are getting those people who are at fifty, fifty-two, fifty-three years of age and we are getting them to partner in a 50 Plus Club with people who are eighty and ninety years of age. What they are doing is they are getting these people out in the community.

I was so pleased to see it happening in one of the rural areas of my district, whereby I went to an event and there were about ninety people there. They were from fifty-one up to ninety-two, or something of that age. What they have done is they have all joined efforts and they are getting people out so that seniors do not continue to face the isolation and that challenge that they have from time to time, Mr. Speaker.

It is amazing, twenty minutes has gone. Mr. Speaker, the only thing I can end with is that the Social Services Committee, made up of – and I did not even get into the Newfoundland Housing very much. Mr. Speaker, it is that social part of our government. It is what I probably call the heart. It is the heart of government, because it is where we pour out what we need to do to support people from every sector, whether that be our disability community, whether that is our seniors or whatever, we do that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the minister his time has expired.

MR. JACKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I am happy to stand and speak to concurrence. Unfortunately, I do not have a full twenty minute slot but I am going to use the best of what is there and get an opportunity.

This is my first time speaking to concurrence in this particular Budget. I have been watching, listening to everybody, hearing what everybody had to say over the last number of days. What I have here is a number of observations that I would like to make and point out over what I have seen here. I guess that has to do with just the Budget and the various parts of the Social Services Committee.

One of them is, and I will just bring this up very quickly, this was education. I have heard it on a number of occasions here. It relates to the Minister of Transportation when we talk about schools and money invested in schools over the last number of years. On two separate occasions the minister stood and referenced the amount invested in Liberal districts, specifically the amount invested in Liberal districts. Now, I am not sure why it was done. Was it to make out like we were the only crowd that was getting money for schools?

It was never a point of listing what was invested on the other side. I asked on a number of occasions for the minister to table it or answer the questions, and to his credit he did. I have it here. It is a big lot of paper here. What I found out, actually, was that there have been investments, obviously in both sides, but when you look at it there is a heck of a lot here invested in the PC districts as well.

Now, the reason I say that is obviously there is investment everywhere when it comes to investing in education, I cannot doubt that. I guess I am questioning why the minister would stand up and make a show, be disingenuous, and act like there is some kind of benevolence when it comes to giving us money for education, but none over there. The fact is there was plenty over there. In fact, some of that money that is

over here was done while there were PCs in those districts.

The other thing I will point out is that I am glad to see the investment in the schools. The unfortunate part – and I have to say this – is we are actually getting schools that are getting built, and before the shovel hits the ground they are too small. I am happy to see an investment in education.

We know there has been investment in education, but we know there have also been issues when it comes to designing these and listening to the school boards, when it comes to making sure they are big enough so that the kids are not doing their gym class in the cafeteria and eating their lunch in the classroom, things like that. I actually spoke to a parent at a restaurant the other day who was mentioning their kid is starting school and that the older kid – this is what they are dealing with already right here.

That is just one observation I wanted to make. The second one I wanted to make, I actually want to talk about the Health Estimates that we did. I have always said, credit where credit is due. I will give the Minister of Health credit because we did the Health Estimates. We sat down for three hours. I have had ministers in the past, and I tell you what, it was like stonewall. They did not want to talk. They went out of their way to be difficult, no doubt.

I will give the minister credit, and I told him that. This is on the record in Hansard. He answered every question that I asked, every single question. To that I give credit. I did not always like the answers, but that is how it goes. He did answer the questions that we asked in Health.

I will say, though, I am disappointed at what has gone on lately because Health is the biggest expenditure in this Budget. It is the biggest one. Obviously that would mean we need the most time to cover that particular area. For whatever reason – and I do not blame this on the minister. I blame it on somebody who sets the schedule. They saw fit to put the Office of Public Engagement in with Health. So we are supposed to get both done within three hours.

The irony is in the fact that the Office of Public Engagement was closed for Estimates. We could not ask the questions. That may not be the minister's fault. I know the Member for Port au Port stood up and said something about showing up on time. What I would say is we were here on time, but you cannot get both lots done at the same time.

I think if the minister was given an opportunity, he would love to sit here and answer the questions. I do not know why somebody in this government did not give him the opportunity. He answered my questions; I have already given that credit. When it comes to the Office of Public Engagement, the door is closed. I point that out.

I also have to reference – and going back to the minister, he did a fine job. He answered a lot of questions. In fact, some of the best ones – and I have to point this out, I never had a chance during Question Period. I asked another question for the third year running on the denture program. The minister admitted this year they went back, and you could get the upper set and the lower set in the same year.

I actually said, and this is in Hansard, yes, yes. I said, why did you do that? He said, it was the right thing to do. It did not make sense not to do it. He actually said – and I have to give the Member for St. John's Centre credit. He said, we did this based on what you guys were saying. You guys were questioning this. We did it. It was the right move.

The question I have to the previous Ministers of Health, which include the Premier, and there is another one sitting behind who was the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health. They stood there and criticized us for questioning, giving the wisdom of giving people dentures one half at a time. I say, why were they so wrong? Why were they so stubborn?

This minister got it right, but the Premier saw fit that seniors should have one half of their dentures at a time per year. I say that is a shame. That is shameful for the current Premier. He could not get that right, but thank God the Minister of Health got it right.

Again, I want to move forward because that is just one part. I am going to get a chance during the main motion. I will get another chance to speak to the whole process. I will get an opportunity to speak to the whole process, so I just want to point out some more observations.

One of them, I have to go to the speaker before me, who I think is a fine gentleman. I certainly think he speaks passionately, but I take offence to one of the statements he made. He said it was embarrassing for one of our members to refer to something as pre-Confederation. I think he obviously took it out of context. I do not think he listened to what was said.

What I think is embarrassing is that one of our members today asked a serious question on the College of the North Atlantic and asked about how come students there get their acceptance letters later than others. It was embarrassing that the minister was not allowed to answer it, and that the Premier stood up and made an absolute mess of it, an absolute mess of the question. In fact, defended it by saying you want them to do more marketing but you criticized us for marketing, and he could not see the difference.

You cannot see the difference in spending \$53,000, telling people how great you are and how great this Budget is, even though those ads are misleading. Because they forget the HST raise that is coming which is going to ding every one of those seniors come the winter, I guarantee you. Every one of those seniors are going to get dinged.

I find it embarrassing when we ask serious questions on the College of the North Atlantic, on tourism, on small business, and on Child, Youth and Family Services, of which the Premier was minister, and he stood up today, put on the big show in front of everybody and made an absolute mockery of it. He messed up every question because he could not get an answer right.

The Member for St. Barbe asked, four times, a simple question. It is unfortunate because the Minister of CYFS, I am sure he likely knew the answer. I am sure he likely wanted the chance to get up and give the answer to the question so we would not have to waste four opportunities to do it, but no, the Premier had to answer. The

Premier was formerly the Minister of CYFS. He should have known it, but he did not.

The question I have is we are asking serious questions and obviously some of what we say they are listening to, as evidenced by the Minister of Health changing the ridiculous denture program that the Premier endorsed just last year when he was the Minister of Health. Obviously they are listening. It is unfortunate during Question Period when we ask serious questions about hotels burning down and how we should be probably doing inspections, and the Premier stands up and says well, if we see an issue give us a shout. Give us a shout if you see a problem.

I think that is embarrassing when the Premier does not see fit to let people give proper answers to proper questions that we are asking, and he has to stand up and put a show on and make a mess of it. That is all it is; it is an absolute mess. That is what I find embarrassing.

I guess it is a lot like this Budget. When we hear some of the stuff that we hear, how great things are, things are not so great. I would like to see the ads probably be a little bit better and a little bit more honest, but I guess at this point we will not be seeing that any time soon.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, Report of Social Services Estimates Committee, carried.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is great to have another opportunity to speak on the Budget, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to speaking about some of the issues that impact directly on my district. I also want to speak on some of the issues that I have responsibility for as critic for agriculture and post-secondary education. I also want to make some general comments, if I have time, about some things that are in the Budget and the overall general direction that this government is taking, Mr. Speaker.

We are back on the main motion again. We have gone through a number of debates in this House. We have talked about the Estimates. We have done the Estimates Committees. We have done the Concurrence debate where we go through the various Resource Committees and the departments covered by them. So we have done that and now we are back to the main motion again, the Budget.

One of the things that I want to talk about is something that impacts on my district a lot. I presented a number of petitions about health care in this House. I want to take a few minutes right off the top to talk about this topic because it is a very important issue for the people of my district, especially those who live in the Heatherton, Highlands, and St. George's area.

It was interesting to listen to the last speaker on the other side speak about respect for seniors, the importance of seniors and what government is doing for seniors. Well, if you ask the seniors in the Heatherton and Highlands area who have not had a doctor for about a year-and-a-half, I think that speaks for itself. They have not had a doctor in a year-and-a-half. If you talk to the seniors in St. George's, they have not had a

doctor for about half a year. It is a serious issue that no one seems to be ready to address – no one seems to be addressing it.

It is a serious problem. When you talk about respecting seniors, the evidence is certainly not there at the clinic in Jeffrey's and the clinic in St. George's. Seniors – some of them well up in their eighties and nineties and one lady I know over 100 – have had to travel long distances to see a doctor. To get prescriptions filled people have had to travel all day, stay in a waiting room all day, and have not been able to see a doctor. It causes serious problems when people do not have a doctor in their community. That is one aspect of health care that is a very serious issue in the district, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I asked some questions in the House about the College of the North Atlantic, some of the programs at the college and the fact that they are not being promoted as good as they could be, Mr. Speaker. These are concerns that people who work at the college have raised with me. Some of them are in relation to the movement of programs from the Stephenville campus to the St. John's campus.

People are telling me that they have concerns about the way programs at the college are being promoted. Instructors are left to promote their programs through social media themselves. There does not seem to be any sort of plan as a way to let the young people know in the ways that they look at the media in terms of social media and things like that. Programs are not being promoted in a way that young people would see them.

Another issue that has come to me is the fact that people who have applied to the College of the North Atlantic and other institutions – they often apply to multiple institutions – often get letters of acceptance from other institutions long before they receive their acceptance from the College of the North Atlantic, Mr. Speaker. Naturally, they are concerned if they are going to get accepted so they often go to another college, a private college or a college outside the Province.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. REID: Someone is saying it is the staff at the college, Mr. Speaker. It is the staff at the college who is bringing these concerns to me.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. REID: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, when I raise these questions the reaction that I got to the serious questions that I was asking – it is interesting that the Premier's reaction was not to say okay, this could be a problem. This could be a serious problem. His reaction was to try to score some political points by trying to find an inconsistency in it. It is sort of disturbing that they would not take these concerns seriously.

Another issue that I raised during the Budget Estimates was the idea of healthy foods in schools, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to hear the Member for Exploits talk about the Little Green Thumbs program and the Rooting for Health program. It is a very important program. It is a very successful program. It is something that this government is doing and doing right.

I was pleased to see the minister talk about that, Mr. Speaker. I am also concerned that the lack of locally grown vegetables, locally grown food, available in school cafeterias.

We have seen an example of a private school in this Province that received some media attention because they were serving healthy foods in their schools. So I would like the minister responsible for agriculture to think about: How can we do the same thing in our public school system. What has to happen to make healthy, locally grown foods, available in our public school system? I do not think that is happening now. I think we have a long way to go, but I do not see any action being taken to make that happen.

I guess this issue was sort of emphasised recently when a pediatrician at the Janeway spoke out saying that more children are now suffering from illnesses associated with overweight and obesity. So it is obviously a serious problem that needs to be addressed and action should be taken, Mr. Speaker.

I think, as well, in terms of other public institutions where government has involvement, in terms of hospitals and places like this, are there ways that we can promote locally grown food in these institutions? I think these are things that we can do, that government can do, to help the agricultural industry because I think it is important that we build critical mass in the agriculture industry. By promoting healthy foods in schools is one way we can do that.

I think there are a lot of possibilities in the agricultural industry in this Province. I talked to a lot of farmers in my district and they see numerous opportunities; but when we look at how well we are doing, especially in areas like vegetable production or meat production, we still have a long way to go. Only a fraction of the food that we eat in this Province is locally produced. So we have to find ways to create a critical mass, the economies of scale, in the production of local foods and healthy foods.

Those are some areas in terms of agriculture that I think we need to be working on. Mr. Speaker, I think the issues of healthy foods, agriculture, and health generally – we often look at health care rather than health or wellness, so I think these issues are really linked, are part of an overall approach that we need to be taking in terms of health care and how we live.

Another thing I want to talk a little bit about is post-secondary education, Mr. Speaker. I think there is a lot of research – if you look at a lot of jurisdictions around the world that are wealthy, that are healthy, that are progressing, you see that investments in education is an area that really pays off. It is interesting some of the things that this government is doing in the Budget this year in relation to post-secondary education.

If you look at what is happening at MUN, if you look at the taking off of the tuition freeze, it is somewhat ironic that this government, when they were freezing the tuition, they were taking credit for it; but, as soon as the tuition freeze was taken off, they did not have anything to do with, that was MUN's responsibility.

It was a Liberal government that implemented the tuition freeze. It was a Liberal government that started it. It was a good policy because it is

important to have affordable education in a society. One of the things about education and investing in education is the importance of equality of opportunity. That is one of the basic principles of Liberalism, that people have equality of opportunity. If you work hard, you can get ahead, Mr. Speaker. So having affordable education in a society is a very important aspect of that.

I fear with the move that this government is taking that we are moving away from that sort of affordable education. We are moving to a situation like we have in some places in the US where quality education is out of range for the average person, or a person from a lower economic situation. I fear the direction that this government is going in terms of making education less affordable and making it more costly, Mr. Speaker. I am very concerned about that. Also, I am very concerned about the way that it happened.

I met with the Canadian Federation of Students before the Budget came down. They were concerned then, Mr. Speaker. The reason they were concerned is because there was a lack of consultation with the government. Government usually had been talking to them before the Budget, but this time government was not talking to them very much. It was a serious problem and they realized it.

The fact that government was not having the same level of dialogue with them shows the lack of respect, really, that government has for student leaders. Some of these student leaders, when I met with them, were suggesting possible solutions to the problem, Mr. Speaker. It is important to keep up the dialogue.

I am surprised that this government did not have any consultation with students because if you look at the way they implemented the increases to big game licences and the fees for outfitters, small-business people in this Province, it was shocking. The critics on our side for tourism and rural development have spoken out against these drastic increases and the impact that they will have in rural areas of the Province, and the impact that they will have on small-business people, Mr. Speaker.

Before my time is up, I certainly want to talk about the SERT Centre of the Marine Institute which is part of Memorial University. It is a place in Stephenville where people can go to get firefighting training for aircraft, for emergency rescue, and for marine services as well. I am pleased to hear from the minister that the centre will not be closing. I am also concerned that some of the contractual employees – about a quarter of the employees at the centre are losing their jobs, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about that.

I am also concerned that government does not seem to be taking any action or any direct involvement in terms of looking for ways to make this centre work, looking for win-win situations where they can help these people keep their jobs, Mr. Speaker. I think if government were to work with volunteer fire departments and the Department of Municipal Affairs, there are ways they could help this centre and help them continue to employ some of these very qualified people, which may be lost to the area because the government is not working in a way to find solutions to this problem.

I want to talk about another issue in the district as well, and that is the situation with roads. I had a private member's resolution a little while ago about waste and mismanagement. I think the situation with roads and road maintenance is a good example of waste and mismanagement and how trying to save money in the short term, in terms of repairs, can often lead to major problems and major expenditures in the long run.

There are a number of roads in my district that because of the lack of summer maintenance in the area, little problems become big problems. For example, in Flat Bay last summer there was a little bit of erosion of the road, which could have been repaired fairly quickly if it had been addressed in a timely manner. Several months went by and before you knew it, the road was half gone. The road was only repaired as it came time for the school to open and the school bus driver and the people who own the school buses were saying: We are not going to drive past that road; it is just too dangerous. It was only then that the road was repaired.

There are many other situations like that throughout the district where small problems have been allowed to become big problems, Mr. Speaker. It is a case of being penny wise and pound foolish. They are spending a lot of money in the long run looking after problems that could have been dealt with a little bit quicker.

I only have a minute-and-a-half left, but I want to talk about this idea of the Generations Fund that was put forward in the Budget. It is a good idea, it is a good concept, but I was disappointed that there were no details on how to do it. I am sort of disappointed that it is sort of twelve years late.

AN HON. MEMBER: Five years out.

MR. REID: Yes, by the time it actually happens, maybe it will be seventeen years too late, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: That is if it is on time.

MR. REID: Yes, that is if it is on time. That is if it ever happens. We may have some changes before that time.

Mr. Speaker, it is rather discouraging that we have all of this revenue come in from natural resources, one-time revenue – non-renewable resources. The countries that have managed their oil wealth successfully, Alaska, Norway, places like that, have had these funds and they have had plans to manage the wealth that the natural resources generate. It is rather disappointing that we do not have a plan yet. We just have an idea thrown out there because it seems to be popular, without any layout of how it is actually going to be implemented.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

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

MR. KING: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, that was my fault.

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

I am very happy to stand and speak for the final time to the Budget. Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about the good people of St. John's Centre because there are many stories from the people of St. John's Centre who are the epitome of how the Budget affects their lives.

I think it is very interesting to hear from the Minister Responsible for Seniors, Wellness and Social Development who says it is much more difficult to be in government because you have to govern and you have to make difficult decisions. I believe he has a point there, Mr. Speaker, because in our particular Legislature, it is government often who makes their decisions on their own without any consultation from those of us who also have been elected by the people in their districts, which points to the need for a better committee structure so that when decisions are made, when legislation comes to the House, particularly as it affects the lives of the people in our districts, we are able to have input into that. We are able to help iron out some of the bugs. We are able to offer our insight from the lives of the people in our districts, which would hopefully then make for much better legislation and perhaps even in the budgetary process.

He does have my empathy when he talks about how difficult it is for them to govern all on their own and to make decisions all on their own, when there are a number of us here on this side of the House who are very willing to help in that process. One would think, particularly in these very difficult economic times, that government would welcome that opportunity. Mr. Speaker, that is how most Legislatures work in the Commonwealth all over the world, committee structures where there is that input. So I do say to the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, we are here to help him, if only this government would take advantage of that opportunity.

Opportunities are also what I would like to speak about here, Mr. Speaker. I have been speaking about housing a lot. I also feel so very honoured to be part of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. When I presented my private member's motion back in January calling for an all-party committee on mental health and addictions, it was passed unanimously, one of the absolutely rare occasions in this House of Assembly.

I feel again so honoured to be part of that process. To be able to go out into the community to hear from our public sector workers, to hear from people who are experts in their field, to hear from people with lived experience, to hear from people in the non-profit sector who are working on these issues, and to hear not only about the gaps and challenges but to hear about potential solutions.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about some of the gaps that they may have identified. I would also like to talk about some of the potential solutions. What I would also like to do is invite every single Member of this House of Assembly, when possible, to attend some of these public consultations for the all-party mental health Committee. Those members who are part of the Committee from government side, from Opposition, from my party, we are learning a lot. I think of how often I have stood in this House and talked about the need for affordable housing and supportive housing. Sometimes I can see members yawning or saying: Oh my God, there she goes again. For the MHAs who have actually attended some of these public consultations, they have all talked about how much they have learned. It is an honour to be able to hear from people in the community in a very organized way about the needs for mental health and addictions.

One of the issues raised is the need for housing, for affordable safe housing and for supportive housing. What does that mean for us? Because I say it over and over again and then we are hearing it, without exception, almost exclusively from everyone who speaks to us: What does it mean for us as legislators to talk about the need for affordable housing and to talk about the need for supportive housing and the challenge that puts before us?

It means spending money, but it is money that we are already spending. Because by not spending that money, by not coming up with creative alternatives to people going to hospitals, to people going to prisons, to people being incarcerated, then we are spending far more money in reacting to problems than we would if we took a preventative and a proactive stance.

In Corner Brook, the Mayor of Corner Brook and his council has come up with an innovative, an absolutely brilliant way of dealing with the housing crisis and the housing crunch in his community. What he has done – he knows because of the drop in oil prices, we have seen a reduction in the number of jobs in that industry, but the other thing that the Mayor of Corner Brook is dealing with is that a number of his constituents have been out in the Alberta oil fields for work and have been making good money, and they have lost jobs as well. So his concern is – they still have a housing crisis, but also he is concerned about the reduction in the number of new housing builds.

So what he has done to stimulate the growth of housing builds in his community is that he has a brilliant program where he and his council have decided for new homes being built in this year, there will be no fee for building permits, and also there will be no municipal taxes for a full year after a house is built. They will still pay water taxes and sewer taxes, but the new homeowners will not be required to pay municipal taxes for the first year. With not charging for building permits and then no municipal taxes, that can save a new homeowner up to \$3,000 in that one year. That is a creative approach to a problem that is facing Corner Brook right now.

He also feels that by building these new homes, it will also ease the pressure on the existing housing market. Mr. Speaker, it is a program that is a win-win for the municipality because these homeowners will be paying municipal taxes after the first year. They will be paying them for years and years and years. It is a win situation for new homeowners who may be a little bit economically challenged, and it is also a solution for people who are in the housing market maybe for rentals or who are not going to build a brand new house. By the addition of

these new houses into the market, it eases the pressure on the market.

The solution to the housing crisis, the solution to homelessness is housing. There is no other solution. The only way to approach the problem of housing is to provide housing. The only way not to be homeless is to have a home. Mr. Speaker, we have to look at other ways.

Again, when the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development said how hard it is to be government, to govern and to make the really hard decisions, I am offering that if they were to, for instance, have an all-party committee on housing to look at the housing crisis, there are many of us here in the House who would try and help government to come up with some of these creative solutions.

Another creative solution to housing would be – I have called for this in the past two weeks, Mr. Speaker. I have asked the Premier to call a halt, to call a freeze, on the sale of all assets of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. So no more sale of land that is owned by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, no more sale of units that are owned by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and no more sale of any public buildings or land that is owned by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Halting the sale of any assets, Mr. Speaker, until government actually has a full-scale, comprehensive housing policy and plan – they do not have that right now. They have never had one. I have called for that in the past three-and-a-half years asking for a specific housing policy. There is some sort of plan and strategy around social housing, but there is not an overall housing policy.

Mr. Speaker, if government does a thorough consultation and an analysis of the housing needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and then looks at the assets that it has and to see how they can use some of those assets to help alleviate the housing crisis that we have – in the same way that the Mayor of Corner Brook, that Mayor Pender has done. The Province also has to step up and do its part. I believe that there are some really creative solutions that could come of it.

We have schools that have been closed down, some of which continue to be owned by churches, but also some that are owned by the Province. When we look across the country, particularly in BC, they have done some really creative housing initiatives, particularly for people with complex needs, by renovating old hotels, by renovating old buildings, and making them affordable and supportive housing projects. We can do that. I believe that we can do that. There is an appetite, there is a willingness, and there is a commitment from the non-profit voluntary sector to be at the table to participate in that.

We know also that many municipalities across the Province are willing to step up to look at how they can also participate in those kinds of projects. So the provincial government can take a leadership role, Mr. Speaker, and look at those assets and see if there is a way that they can be used to help address the housing crisis that we face. All these things are so interconnected.

We also have perhaps some of the highest levels of poverty here in the country. I have brought this document to the House a number of times; it is called Newfoundland and Labrador's Vital Signs. It is a Province-wide checkup of the quality of life in Newfoundland and Labrador communities for 2014. They tell us some interesting things.

One of the things they look at is different aspects of people's lives in our Province. They look at housing. They look at income gaps. They look at the arts. They look at the business sector and the resource sector and how it fares. They have experts from all over the Province who have contributed to this document.

For those of my colleagues who have not had a chance to take a look at it, I highly recommend it. It gives us sort of a thumbnail sketch of what is happening in the Province and what is impacting people's lives, what is preventing people from being able to live fully and participate in our communities, but also what is helping people to do that.

One of the things they looked at is the proportion of people who are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. Mr. Speaker, CMHC, housing advocates,

governments, and mortgage brokers, everybody knows that people should not be spending more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter.

In Canada, 18.5 per cent of people spend more than 30 per cent on their shelter, but in Newfoundland and Labrador 39.3 per cent are spending more than 30 per cent. That is almost 40 per cent of our people who are renters spend more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter. That is high. That is really, really high.

If you have people who are low-income earners, that means they – I was speaking with a young couple. He is working full time. They have a baby. She is working part time. She wants more work than that, but it is very hard for her to find. They are just scraping by. They are not even scraping by. They are way back on their municipal taxes because shelter is so expensive, couple that with the cost of childcare and the cost of a car payment – for the most part, most people have to have cars, particularly if they have children and if they work, because our public transit system is not very strong here in the Province.

So they are having a really hard time. No matter how hard they work, they cannot get ahead. They cannot save for their own retirement. They cannot save for education for their child. They are just living hand to mouth. We know there are so many people in that situation.

Again, a little bit earlier this evening I talked about seniors. It is so interesting how many seniors I have sat down with and where they take out their OAS cheque and their GIS cheque, they take it out of their envelope to show me what they make a month. They make about \$1,000, \$1,100 a month. Then what they do is show me the back of the envelope because every month what they do is look at the statement of what their income will be and then they write down on the back of the envelope what their expenses are for that month.

So many seniors that I have spoken with – and it is kind of an interesting thing that many of them are doing the same thing – the cheque comes out of the envelope, eventually they sit down and then write down their expenses, and many of them, if they are renting, their income does not meet their expenses. How many of them talked

about well, I owe money this month on my cable bill that I cannot pay or I cannot pay off my heat and light bill, or I cannot buy good food. Mr. Speaker, that is the reality of people's lives.

We know that housing is one of the social deterrents that can push people into poverty. It is my hope – and I know that everybody in this House, every single person in this House wants to make sure that every person in Newfoundland and Labrador is safely and adequately housed because we know if they are housed well that people can get on with work, that people can get on with school, that people can get on with their lives.

Mr. Speaker, it was an honour and very eye opening to attend the housing and homelessness forum that Choices for Youth called on this week. Many of us from this House of Assembly were there. One of the things that Sheldon Pollett – who is the Executive Director of Choices for Youth and has done an incredible job – said the biggest barrier to government and agencies doing the work that needs to be done about the housing crisis is that people think, government, politicians, and policy makers think it is too hard, it is just too hard, the problem is too big, we cannot take a chunk out of it, they just tinker a little bit with it but that it is just too hard.

What Sheldon said was it is hard, but it is not as hard as what we expect our youth to do, and our youth who live with so little money who are homeless. It is also so hard on seniors. The hard problem that we must face is not as hard as the problem that people on low income like seniors, like young working families, must face in order to house themselves. What they face is much harder than the problem that we all have to work on together.

Mr. Speaker, I know that together we can solve this problem because others in Canada have.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: We have what it takes in order to do that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very happy to have a final opportunity to speak to the main motion here of the Budget which is stated about a balanced approach. In my view this is a real failure by the current government. It reflects Tory economics and PC math.

If you look at and you read the Budget, the first thing the Finance Minister has early up in the Budget is a culture of cost management. If we look back over the history of the current government they have been anything but. We have a bigger Budget, more spending, increased spending again this year, and a bigger deficit. The biggest deficit in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador brought to you by this government.

One specific Blue Book promise that this government campaigned on and said they would do is that we are going to control the rate of spending by capping it: "Each year, in choosing Budget initiatives, we will establish a ceiling for new spending growth and make our choices accordingly." The 2011 PC platform never acted upon. We know that the former Finance Minister Jerome Kennedy has stated that these promises are not really promises; these are things that we put in. That an interview in *The Telegram* that was done based on that.

If we keep going and we look at what was promised – or I do not know, whatever was in that document, because they did not live up to their commitments then. We see that going forward in Budget 2015 they are certainly not living up to those commitments of trying to at least curb some of the spending, cutting out some of the waste, and showing how they could better manage the economy to create jobs and to create better value.

I will go forward because the next thing in the document talks about how government is going to save money by merging and amalgamating aspects of the four regional health authorities and the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information. Well the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information is a very interesting entity that was reviewed by the Auditor General years ago now. It was found out that their salaries by this Crown corporation are way out of whack with the public sector. This entity, which has about sixty staff and has a small budget of a few million dollars, compared their operations to Memorial University President and CEO, compared it to the CEO of Eastern Health, which has millions if not billions of dollars in terms of their budget and their expenditures over the same time period, and the employees and the responsibilities that they have, compared their salaries to be very comparable. Gave themselves 100-plus per cent increase.

Despite the Minister of Health and Community Services saying we have to rein this in and directing them to do so, they did not act upon that. It has been years later and we have not seen where their salaries have come in line with the public sector. This is another area of where there is waste and –

AN HON. MEMBER: Who was the minister?

MR. MITCHELMORE: The minister at the time was the Minister of Finance today – all for the record.

So if we look at that and we look at how that is going to save money, I would like for the current Minister of Health and Community Services to table where they have found and where they have done their review to show that there will be cost savings. They have listed and said there is going to be 180 to 230 jobs lost in this whole process.

We looked at, with the school board – this is the government that amalgamated the four school boards and said that it would save money. Yet, all the documentation shows that there was no savings. This is the same government that has amalgamated the school board, kept those school board trustees that are appointees now of government, because certainly, based on their

constitution, they have been there too long. Their terms have lapsed.

If we look at what needs to happen, there needs to be an election called, but this government does not like to call elections. They do not care about the dates and the constitutions and things like that. No, no they will just allow these entities to continue operating in a undemocratic fashion, where we really do need to see – I do not think, when they did this, they even thought: Well, how are we going to run a provincial school board election? How much is that going to cost to allow people from all over the Province to be able to vote? Before we had it set up in certain ways and regions and whatnot. Now, if we have elections and certain people are running from this region or that region, they do not have a plan. They have no idea. That is a clear example of how the Minister of Education decided to make this move and the savings just are not there.

I am working through the Budget, slowing working through. The next thing it says is long-range infrastructure plan. Okay, that sounds nice; but as the Member for St. Barbe talked about and highlighted, the Auditor General again slammed this government saying: Where is the \$5 billion infrastructure strategy that you said you had? Went to go information, could not get the information. Actually, it was withheld in many cases. They could not get the information and the Auditor General at the time – I believe it was Wayne Loveys – had clearly stated that the documentation was not there. It did not add up. Again, PC math.

It is certainly something that the Official Opposition, our leader, and Liberals have been calling for is more long-term planning, multi-year planning, and multi-year budgeting. It is the right approach to actually deal with and plan for the long term. It is a responsible, prudent, and a good way to manage, unlike this government.

We talk about Strategic Deficit Reduction Plan – that is what the Minister of Finance has in his Budget here, that there is going to be some sort of strategic deficit, a reduction plan. Well, let's just look; right here on Appendix III, Newfoundland and Labrador Public Sector Debt, 2011 to 2015 – this is when the current

government was elected, or re-elected back to power – \$7.3 billion in Total Public Sector Debt at the time; 2015 – this is the preliminary numbers but they are quite high, quite alarming – Total Public Sector Debt: \$12.2 billion.

In just the four short years that they have been here, since they have been re-elected, they have gone from \$7.3 billion to \$12.2 billion. If you look at the math numbers and you look at their own document that is almost \$5 billion in public sector debt just in the term.

The Budget document then says over the next four years, we have to borrow \$4.85 billion. That is almost \$10 billion you are talking about really increasing total public sector debt. Where is the Minister of Finance in his Budget in prudent, fiscal, cultivating cost management showing responsibility here when you are talking about borrowing that much more? It is quite alarming of where those numbers are going to be based on the fact that the population numbers are not going up. We are not encouraging people to move here. We are encouraging high-income earners or commuters to file taxes elsewhere because you are increasing the tax on the wealthy, on those who are commuting, who are paying significant amounts of money.

There are other things you are doing to encourage people to go away because you have put the HST up – hiking that, putting the tax back on home heating. There are so many things in this Budget. I would not get enough time, if I could stand on my feet and filibuster through this, to be able to talk about every fee increase.

There are over 261 fee increases that is taking money out of people's pockets. These are things that go from drivers' licence plate fees increased. You talk about things like people who have cabins, well those fees have doubled if they are leased land; Crown land applications; moose licence fees for residents – and for non-residents, that is a ding to the outfitting industry in a big way. It is quite significant. Everything seems to be gone up in the approach of this government.

I do not know how you can tax your way back to prosperity, but this is what the current PC

economics and their ideology is all about. It is about taxing their way back to prosperity. Liberal ideology does not believe that. The Leader of the Official Opposition said that we should not institute this HST increase because the economy is at a fragile state. When it comes to what happened in other jurisdictions, we have seen a lot of things happen when it comes to the impact on the economy: more job losses; we have seen more businesses roll back.

Under the leadership of the PC government right now, under the current Premier, when he took office, business confidence was at an all-time high across the country. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we were leading the way – the day before he took office. Now where are we? We are down in sixth place. We are almost tied with Quebec there to be at seventh place. That is not a record when it comes to being a job creator, when it comes to growing the economy, and this Budget does nothing to take us in that direction.

There is hardly any talk about jobs in this particular Budget.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) cutting.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Except for the jobs that are being cut, the teaching units that are being eliminated, jobs that are being lost – it is quite phenomenal.

When we talk about jobs, I would be remiss if I did not bring up the forestry jobs because I have asked time and time again for them in the House of Assembly. I look forward to the meeting now – not when the minister stood up and said I had a meeting. The meeting was scheduled after the fact – after I stated that was not the fact, that the meeting was not scheduled. It was requested, but it was not scheduled.

The forestry jobs, where was it in Budget 2011 when this government took office? Well, I will tell you. In 2011, in The Economy document, the GDP for 2009 in Budget 2011 states agriculture was valued at \$62.7 million, and forestry and logging was \$105.1 million. My math gives me a total of \$167.8 million. Employment – the 2010 employment numbers in that same document states that there is 1,700 person years in agriculture, but there is only 900 person years in forestry and logging. It actually

breaks down the numbers – 2,600 person years; and agriculture, forestry, and logging accounts for 1.4 per cent total employment. That was in 2011 Budget.

If we fast-forward to the Budget today – and I had to break those numbers down separately because the Budget today lists agriculture, forestry, and logging all together. So, 2011 it was \$167.8 million for the total amount – that is PC math, I guess. Trying to put things together or not really being clear, open, and transparent – but I will get to that, Deputy Premier.

The agriculture, forestry, and logging was \$176.9 million. From 2011 to 2015 we see an increase of \$9.1 million. In four years, the industry for agrifoods, forestry – it is quite alarming to see that value placed in government documents, that it is not increasing at a level where it should be. This is where the jobs should be coming from, in such a renewable sector. Where were the jobs – 2,200 person-years? So we lost 600 person years in agriculture, forestry, and logging; but take note, remember that the majority of those jobs were in agriculture, 1,700 person-years in the 2011 Budget documents.

So, the majority of jobs, when we look at it, the minister and his staff are going to have a lot of explaining to do when it comes to clarifying how we can now today give 5,500 jobs when we have seen a major mill close, when we see sawmills close, we see people get out of the industry, go work elsewhere in trucking or working on the Muskrat Falls Project, or elsewhere. They are working in Alberta, they are working elsewhere, and they are paying taxes or they move their families elsewhere, making communities and municipalities less viable when we have less people. That is not a plan in how moving forward, if you are not creating jobs, you are failing.

Now, when you look at no details on those jobs and no job plan, it is a real significant problem. So when we look at that, we look at the money that has been expended, and we look at the debt and the borrowing where it is going to be, and somehow government miraculously thinks that in 2019-2020 that there is going to be a half billion, another \$400 million in increased retail sales and all of these things with a smaller

population and all of the other indicators going in the wrong direction, it makes no sense. I am going to have to ask the department, the statistics agency, to clarify some of those numbers and I look forward to a briefing on that matter.

When we look at those numbers and we look at the jobs that will be lost and the people who are actually looking for jobs because today Nalcor stated that over 30,000 people have applied to work at the Muskrat Falls Project, but there are only a little over 3,000 jobs. That means that there are 27,000 people who are not able to get work at that particular site. Once that project is done, then those 3,000 jobs are gone. Where are the people going to work – not only those 3,000 people but the other 27,000 people who are looking for work?

We have not seen the Population Growth Strategy – we have seen a lot of failings by this government. One of the things that they try and tout is their openness and transparency – it is in the Budget here – yet blocking public library board minutes does nothing to instill confidence for the Newfoundland and Labrador public library board association. I will file a new ATIPP to try and get that information.

Cancelling the Office of Public Engagement Estimates, deeming them to be voted on and now saying well, we will give a brief time in debate in the Estimates for Executive Council to go back – we will re-write the rules as we go along; we will make it up as we go along. We have seen that before. We have seen it with the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information. We have seen it with how we are going to do the school board elections, how we are going to save money, how we are going to make sure that we have the election on time. We have heard it all before, but people are really losing faith in this government.

The Open Government Initiative – they are saying we are going to have an Open Government Initiative by 2021. No focus, useless and dated data that is on that website, quite significantly – if they had a real caring for this when they launched it, they would have had a plan. Rather, we had a Steve Jobs's approach to sell it at a public event that cost thousands of

dollars. It is meaningless if people do not get the information that they need.

If you look at a site like DataBC, DataBC and other jurisdictions have been very serious about open data and open information where they have mandated departments, Crown agencies, and all entities to make available three new documents that were not publicly available previously, whether it be a report – and we all know government has enough reports that are collecting dust on shelves. Do you know what? They are willing to spend taxpayer money on selling and promoting their bad Budget for political, partisan purposes, rather than use money to try and sell education at the College of the North Atlantic and the vital programs to try and educate the population in a way for jobs and opportunities that we would have here at home or to be able to export opportunity for those people. I think there is a real serious problem there.

There are several other areas that I would like to get into about my own district and areas when it comes to the lack of infrastructure and telecommunication, poor road conditions that exist, the lack of advocating for things on this side when it comes to the federal government living up to its promises around search and rescue, like Coast Guard radio, when it comes to environmental matters like the *Manolis L*.

It is a matter of time before a catastrophic oil leak will happen. Right now, we have chronic leaks that are taking place that are already having negative impacts; but if a catastrophic leak would take place, well then the commercial fishing industry is shut down. That has implications for members from the Northern Peninsula to the Notre Dame Bay region, affecting many districts, many people's lives. We are seeing a very weak stance from the other side when it comes to where they stand on this particular issue and what they are able to do to get the federal government to live up to a commitment of removing that oil.

We really do need to see greater action. We need to see vision, but I do not think it is going to be this Budget or this government that is going to be able to deliver on those. They have surely had enough time. Their track record proves it, right from the beginning: the amount

of debt that is being piled up and piled up; the failure to live up to commitments that have been in campaign promises; the flip-flopping back and forth on things; the cutting of programs, whether it be the Family Violence Intervention Court, whether it be cutting the dental program, whether it be Bill 29 and saying: Oops, we made a mistake, we are going back – and then making all these infrastructure commitments like the Waterford, like courthouses, major pieces – a Corner Brook hospital that you are not delivering on and then privatizing all kinds of services. This is not what the people signed on for when you made commitment for these major pieces.

We really do need to look at our assets and build strategic entities and centres of excellence and move forward in a positive way. The only way to do that is for everyone in this House of Assembly to vote against Budget 2015.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, anybody who knows me knows if you look at the clock I am not usually up this late, but here goes anyway. The last time I spoke on Budget 2015 I took a little trip down memory lane and went through the Blue Book of 2011. I was left with one page by the time I was done that afternoon. So I just want to conclude on my Blue Book analysis from 2011.

It is page 75 of the Blue Book. It is section 38, page 75, and it is called Accountability. Our Commitment to Accountability, that is one of the headlines; Government That Listens. The very interesting point in the Accountability section of the 2011 Blue Book was Access to Information and Protection of Privacy – Reform. In the fall of 2011, the government is promising reform to Access to Information and Protection of Privacy. That was in the fall of 2011 and

early in the spring of 2012 we got reform to Access to Information legislation in the Province.

That reform was Bill 29. A bill that just twenty-four hours ago, I guess, finally met its maker. We had another little celebration; I think it was the second celebration or the third celebration around Bill 29. Over \$1 million later, Bill 29 is gone and have now the most progressive legislation in the country. Too bad it took three years and \$1.4 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: They should have listened to the Liberals a long time ago.

MR. CROCKER: If they had listened to the Leader of the Liberal Party back in the spring of 2012, they would have understood at that time it was a piece of bad legislation. It was our Leader that left the House of Assembly after the filibuster ended – and it is interesting to remember how the filibuster did end. It ended very much Stephen Harper style. Stephen Harper is known to have used closure in the House of Commons more than any other Prime Minister in history. Back in the spring of 2012, the government stole a page from Stephen Harper's book and brought in closure. I guess it came from when the former Premier was dancing with Prime Minister Harper on the stage at the Sheraton.

Mr. Speaker, we look now at the government and the plan, *Balancing Choices for a Promising future* – it is a five-year plan. It is very interesting. It is a five-year plan and what the plan is doing is fixing the past twelve years. We have been a government for twelve years – sorry, they have been a government for twelve years and now, all of a sudden, they need five years to fix what they did in the last twelve years.

I was in a local gas station here in the city this weekend and I saw the little tree air fresheners called new-car scent which is one of the ones you can buy. Mr. Speaker, when you go out and buy a new car, you get the new-car scent. When your car is twelve years old, the only way to get a new-car scent is to buy the air freshener, but all the air freshener does is cover up the stink. It covers up the previous twelve years. They are looking for the new-car scent – twelve years,

they need the new-car scent. I am not sure, Mr. Speaker, if there is enough little tree air fresheners out there.

Just a little while ago, there was an election in Alberta. The people of that province had enough of the Progressive Conservative government and they quite quickly removed them after forty-two years of power. One of the comments that goes back to that election: This government has grown too old, too entrenched, too entitled, and too arrogant. I can draw similarities, Mr. Speaker, to our own Province when we look at the current government and where we find ourselves today.

One of the things the government always throws back at us as the Opposition is: Where would you save money? What would you do differently? Well, Mr. Speaker, just a few small things – and where I come from, small things are important. Because if you watch your pennies, the dollars will look after themselves. It is a culture of responsibility when it comes to finance. We have schools in this Province with the heat still on. There is a school in my district that has been closed for three years and the bell still rings for every period of the day –

MR. HILLIER: Tell us about people setting their watches. Tell us that that.

MR. CROCKER: People can set their watches by it, yes. I say to the member, that is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, we look back no further than this past September – I guess it was September when the new Premier came in and brought his air freshener with him and he appointed the Minister of Justice and Public Safety. He went outside of elected officials – we had a number of by-elections in the fall, lots of opportunities for the minister to run, but the minister was not interested in running. After pressure from the Opposition throughout the fall and certain moves the government had to make to try and restrain some of the cost, the minister was let go. There was a cost associated, for certain, for an unelected minister. There were business cards: the Minister Responsible for Public Safety and Justice – not elected.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, school board office space is one that I find very interesting. Earlier

tonight, one of the members on our side talked about the unelected school board that has been there now for way too long. The interesting thing I find about the English school board in the Province is their office space. Let's think about it. Where is the most expensive office space in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador? I bet you it is on Water Street. Not only is it on Water Street, it is probably in Atlantic Place.

Mr. Speaker, that is where the English School District offices are to: Atlantic Place on Water Street. I do not know –

MR. REID: (Inaudible).

MR. CROCKER: Exactly, I say to the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East, there is an empty school in my district actually that they can certainly use. We would be happy enough to have the economic development in Heart's Delight-Islington if they moved the school board offices to the empty school building. Mr. Speaker, more waste.

Just a few weeks ago, we stood in the House and we entered a private member's resolution calling for the elimination of salaries for parliamentary assistants and parliamentary secretaries. We are the only Province in Atlantic Canada that pays our parliamentary secretaries and our parliamentary assistants. If the government was serious about saving money, they would eliminate the pay for parliamentary secretaries and parliamentary assistants – a commitment that this party has made to do if we form a government.

Mr. Speaker, I spent six years driving back and forth to the city every day. Of those six years, 2,200 or 2,300 days, I drove by the moose warning system out by Gushue's. The only thing permanent about the moose warning system by Gushue's was the out of order sign. That was another \$1 million of taxpayers' money, gone, wasted.

Back last spring, Mr. Speaker, I remember being here, working here in this building, when we had a leadership race that was on –

AN HON. MEMBER: It was off.

MR. CROCKER: It was on and it was off.

We had a contractor, a private business, in this Province get off with their insurance policy. In a matter of six or seven hours, their bonds were returned to them. No difference, Mr. Speaker, than this week we see the government is paying an insurance policy on an asset that if the asset were destroyed by fire tonight, nine chances out of ten we are not getting any money because our insurance or our lien is on a smaller piece of the asset. Again, I think it was \$85,000 last year for insurance and \$65,000 this year.

Mr. Speaker, we saw a Winter Ready campaign by Nalcor. I think it was \$400,000 of taxpayers' money for Winter Ready –

MR. HILLIER: To tell us they were ready.

MR. CROCKER: To tell us that they were ready.

The ironic part of that, I recall the morning that it was proven that we were not ready, I was in Gander along with members of the Opposition – we were out to a FFAW rally about LIFO. That morning it was quickly proven that we were not ready, so \$400,000 later we are not ready – interesting, Mr. Speaker.

I am just going to read some headlines here, if everybody would indulge me for a few minutes, while I have some time left: "Government pays \$53K for ads to promote budget." It is interesting; it reminds me of the federal Conservative Party. They have spent tens and tens of millions of dollars promoting themselves in self-serving ads because nowhere in the ads – and I have heard these ads on local radio stations – is there any reference to the 2 per cent hike in HST – missed.

One of the biggest components of the Budget, almost a \$200 million tax grab, and there is no reference in the ads. Nowhere in the ads does it say –

MR. FLYNN: What about borrowing the billion dollars?

MR. CROCKER: No, not in the ads – the borrowing the billion dollars is not in the ads. The ads are sort of selective. It is selective ads.

Marketing at Nalcor – the equivalent of twelve government departments. Sure Nalcor is somewhat separated from government but –

MR. HILLIER: Where are they getting the money?

MR. CROCKER: Exactly, I say to the Member for CBS; where do they get their money at? Who is lending the money to Nalcor? It is collectively all of our money. The interesting part of it about is the government is saying well we are going to recoup all that money by 2025. Great, we are going to recoup it all; but if we were not just throwing some money away on ads and stuff, maybe we would get it back by 2024. We could save money and get it back a year earlier. That would be one year earlier that we would have money going back into the Treasury from Nalcor.

We just do not have to spend it because we have it. That seems to be this government's attitude: spend because we have it. We all see this in people I guess, or in the population – some people have issues with money management. Spend it because we have it

A rainy-day fund – the government decides now after twelve years in government, five more years of deficit, \$14 billion, almost \$15 billion net debt by the time we get to 2021 that we are going to put away a rainy-day fund. So we are going to be almost \$15 million in debt –

MR. HILLIER: Billion.

MR. CROCKER: Billion, did I say million? Oh I am sorry, billion. We are almost going to be \$15 billion in debt and government now is going to do a rainy-day fund.

MR. HILLIER: The Member for Lab West would be embarrassed (inaudible).

MR. CROCKER: Yes, he should know about millions and billions.

Ironically, Mr. Speaker, I heard the member today for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune get up and everything is rosy in her district. Well, look no further than the list of the worst roads in Atlantic Canada: Route 480, the Burgeo Highway.

MS PERRY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Cross): The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, on a point of order.

MS PERRY: He is referring to ancient facts now, Mr. Speaker. Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune has received thirty-three kilometres of paving in that section of road (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, for a government that likes looking back, the ancient facts was actually on May 6, 2015 at 4:00 p.m. So if that is ancient, I am pretty old. That is less than a month ago, I say to the member.

MS PERRY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, on a point of order.

MS PERRY: The money was approved in 2014.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

MR. CROCKER: There are opportunities for members opposite to speak on the Budget, so I would appreciate that she give me my time.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in Question Period, I asked a question of the Premier about small business confidence in this Province. The Premier got up – eighteen months of consecutive job losses, 18,000 jobs lost year over year, and the Premier's response was this: "Mr. Speaker, we are working very hard to sustain the very strong economy that we have built in Newfoundland and Labrador." That is the Premier's words, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said "the very strong economy."

Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe when the Premier gets an opportunity, he can look at his own Budget document and he does not have to go

very far, not far at all in his own Budget document. He can go right here of the glossy – this glossy we have here, I guess, are the highlights of the Premier's own Budget, page 7, in our very strong economy.

I do not think we have a very strong economy when we have real GDP in this year down 0.3 per cent; Newfoundland and Labrador Employment down 1.5 per cent. The unemployment rate is the only thing going up this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. CROCKER: The only thing going up is the unemployment rate –

AN HON. MEMBER: The HST.

MR. CROCKER: Also the HST, and the debt.

Capital Investment is flat; Consumer Price Index is flat. Mr. Speaker, we can look to the expectations – no growth in the economy, unemployment is up, household income is expected to increase by 0.2 per cent; but while household income increases by 0.2 per cent, taxes will increase by 2 per cent.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. CROCKER: Yes, inflation will wipe all of that out and we will have a 2 per cent tax increase. That tax increase is going to hurt the most vulnerable in our society: our low income and our seniors. The government gets up and talks about how in October we are going to give them back \$300 in a tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, a \$300 tax credit in October sounds wonderful. What about in February when seniors – when my grandmother has to buy a tank of oil and that is gone up 2 per cent? That \$300 in October is not going to help her. What is it going to do for a low-income family in September when they need to buy sneakers and clothes for their children to go back to school? That \$300 in October is not going to help them then.

AN HON. MEMBER: Wait until January and it is 10 per cent.

MR. CROCKER: Yes, wait until January and it is 10 per cent on your light bill, Mr. Speaker. Just imagine.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. CROCKER: Exactly, even when it comes to health and wellness, the swimming pool rates in this Province are up to a level where we are seeing swim clubs saying we cannot survive. We cannot do this. We cannot have meets this year. It is amazing, Mr. Speaker.

You also look at the other factors, like they always get up and say: What are the Liberals going to do? Well, we have had a lot of say about policy. They have not been listening. Well, I should not say they have not been listening because they have been listening because they listened on full-day kindergarten. They listened to that. They brought in full-day kindergarten after the Member for Virginia Waters and the Member for St. John's North spoke about full-day kindergarten for years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: They talked years about full-day kindergarten. All of a sudden, there is a by-election and the bulb comes on: I think we will do full-day kindergarten. It is time to do full-day kindergarten.

We were promised a seniors' advocate, that is a policy commitment; a mental health strategy; a youth entrepreneur retention program; a business investment tax credit; MHA pension reform. Now, who heard about MHA pension reform?

The first I heard of MHA pension reform was last June in Gander when the Leader of the Official Opposition announced a policy on MHA pension reform. Now, all of a sudden, the government has adopted that policy, and congratulations to them. There are others they should give us a call about and maybe we can help them out with those too, like parliamentary secretary and parliamentary assistant pay.

They talk over there day in and day out about fundraising, fundraising this and fundraising

that. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is the Leader of our Party that is committed to campaign finance reform. They committed to it twelve years ago –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: They committed twelve years ago. Ironically, it is not mentioned in the five-year plan. I guess it is a seventeen-year commitment, so maybe in the 2019 post campaign, Mr. Speaker.

A Premier's forum on municipalities, another commitment from our party and our leader; the feasibility study on a fixed link to Labrador – I can go on all night, Mr. Speaker, but my time is running out and I would love to have some more, if they would like to give me some leave, but I will conclude on my critic's role and where we are in this Province when it comes to small business.

We have the lowest business confidence we have had in years. When the Premier took over in September we were the highest in the country; today, we are tied for number seven. We have 13 per cent of businesses in this Province saying they are going to hire in the peak of hiring season this spring.

Mr. Speaker, this government has missed the boat. At the end of the day, I do not think that little tree, new-car smell air freshener is going to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly an honour to speak to the Budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. EDMUNDS: I listened while there were a lot of questions asked over this session of the House sitting. The questions where there were no answers, where the members across the way

did not know the answers, they would always talk about how they are committed to the region and that they are still committed to the region. So I would like to talk about commitment – some of the commitments that this government has made over the last twelve years if I can go back that far, but maybe I do not even have to go that far because I only have twenty minutes.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the Muskrat Falls Project and its announcement. I heard government and I also heard Nalcor say that there will be no environmental impacts downstream. Government said it, I remember the former minister stood up and said it, and we hear officials from Nalcor say it.

The mercury level in Lake Melville is at a moderately high level, and that is from a project upstream. Actually, I think it is 340 kilometres away that rose the mercury levels in Lake Melville. This project, being on the doorstep of Lake Melville, there will be no environmental impacts. There were groups that had concern over this, Mr. Speaker. The reason why – and I mentioned this many times – the reason why is the 2,500 fathoms of subsistence fishing gear that goes out in Lake Melville every summer; enough to span the lake, I think, six times, to do some comparisons.

There was a concern that the mercury level would reach 0.05 parts per million, I think was the level. The former Minister of Environment and Conservation, my colleague, the Member for Harbour Main, stood up and said: When we reach that point, health Labrador guidelines will kick in. Certainly, we do not want to see that happen. We would not want to see that happen.

It is thankful that the Aboriginal groups have actually taken upon themselves to do some baseline studies. Samples are being collected during the summer months. I think Nalcor and this government had a small change of heart, Mr. Speaker, because they have gone out since and I think they have started taking hair samples from individuals who volunteered. So I do not know if they are contradicting their own statement or if there really is a concern and they are going to try and monitor it. So it is good to see activity.

Again, where was the commitment to the subsistence fishermen who put their fishing gear out in Lake Melville? Where is the commitment to these people?

Still on Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker, I heard many members talk across the way about the thousands and thousands of jobs that would come with the Muskrat Falls Project, and there were. My hon. colleague, the Member for The Straits – White Bay North, talked about 3,000 jobs. Now, there were also 27,000 more who applied, as he just stated.

Let's talk about where the project is, Mr. Speaker. It is in Labrador. It is in my colleague, the Member for Lake Melville's district. The reason why this project is going ahead is because there was an Agreement-in-Principle with the Innu Nation, the New Dawn Agreement, and that there would be a priority of how jobs were allocated. This priority was designed through the government, through Nalcor, and through the Aboriginal groups. Mr. Speaker, that priority said the Innu Nation, Labrador, Newfoundland, and the rest of Canada. What we are still seeing is that Nalcor, which is a Crown Corporation, has abandoned its own guidelines, its own policy.

I am sure the members across the way, the Member for Lake Melville, the Member for Lab West – I know my colleague, the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, has a stack of people who are looking for jobs in Muskrat Falls who are from Labrador. Well, these people looked at the priority in which jobs were allocated. They looked at it and they said: Oh look, we have a chance. We come to find out that is not true. Again, where is the commitment? Where is the commitment that you talk about?

Just to go on a little farther, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the first shipment of ore into Long Harbour. It reached a milestone; it is part of our history. This took a long time. I think it was three or four years overdue; I stand to be corrected. Over the course of the delays in the Long Harbour project, there were allowances for ore from Anaktalak Bay or as we so commonly know it, Voisey's Bay, that went on to Sudbury. The latest shipment – I think it was 93,000 tonnes – government allowed Vale to ship to

Sudbury because the plant was not ready in exchange for \$230 million that government would (inaudible) –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. EDMUNDS: – and to keep the mine working, yes. We do not disagree with that, but let's talk about commitment. This agreement was a little bit late, but it got done. It got done in a few years.

We talk about another agreement that took a little bit longer; it took thirty-five years. If that agreement had not been signed, there would be no ore going into Long Harbour today. It took thirty-five years. It was eventually done. They took a fast track. There were three signatories on that agreement, on the Land Claims Agreement; and there were signatories on the Vale agreement.

We talk about commitment and we talk about consultation, and the agreement clearly stated that government to government there must be a duty to consult. The Nunatsiavut Government, I think they got a fax the night before; this was this government's idea of consultation. I think being told take us to court, you are going to lose anyway – this is not my definition of consultation.

When you talk about commitment, you look at what the government commits to, you cannot make commitments and then totally ignore them. A commitment can be interpreted as a signature. It could be interpreted as an agreement. Like I said earlier, these are not agreements of circumstance. You cannot apply them when you feel fit. These are signed, binding, legal agreements. What we have seen, Mr. Speaker, is that they have walked away from them. It leads to breakdown in communications. It clearly defines a definition of arrogance in some cases. It is not something that the people of this Province should have to live with when they look at a government.

I would like to stay on commitments, Mr. Speaker; it seems like there is a theme here. Let's talk about the new vessels in our Province. I love it that this Province, this government, has gone halfway through its replacement strategy for new vessels. I say half way because I

listened intently when the minister made their announcements of new vessels – they are \$25 million more than maybe they should be, for some of them, but they are here.

I remember when the RFPs went out, the former minister of works, services, the Member for Labrador West said: It is a complicated process. I have talked about this before, but he also said, very clearly: We are not touching infrastructure, not up your way. We are not touching infrastructure. We are not going there. This is what he told us. He said: We will give you the vessels.

Mr. Speaker, Fogo Island is waiting for the *MV Veteran* to come across from where it is being built. I watched longingly as the government made the announcement about a new wharf and new infrastructure. They announced it in the Budget. Just last week, I think Change Islands is getting new wharf work and new infrastructure – Rencontre East; sorry, Mr. Speaker. That is the place that is getting it.

I do not doubt for a second that these areas need upgrades. We have a very lucrative tourism industry that stretches from St. John's right up to Nain – up past Nain, up into the Torngat Mountains National Park. To be told by this government no, you are not getting any infrastructure, then they turned around and said you are not getting any boats was not what I call fair around our Province.

We had an RFP that went out. It was a complicated process. I watched as they laid the keel for the *MV Veteran* and the *MV Legionnaire*. Then I watched his government take the RFPs for Northern Labrador and Southern Labrador, The Straits, completely off the table. They disappeared. We call them missing RFPs.

There is obviously no intent in the near future to look at it. As a matter of fact, one of the stall tactics, I think they are revamping the Labrador travel advisory committee that already have submitted thirty-five recommendations to this government. I guess if you could take the recommendations off the shelf and blow the dust of them, you might see some valid recommendations. This government chose not to implement a single one of them.

Mr. Speaker, every time I asked about the Northern Strategic Plan, I am being told that it is being worked on. This is what they define as commitment. To me, when you are looking at guidelines, or agreements – let's take one of the companies that bid on the contract, which again, to me, was another violation of the Land Claims Agreement.

When it comes to the Request for Proposals for industry in Nunatsiavut, the Land Claims Agreement clearly states that if an Aboriginal company submits a proposal that is acceptable, they shall get a look in. Mr. Speaker, it also states that if the bid is a qualified a bid, not only shall they be looked at, they shall get the contract. It is stated right there. The company shall get the contract. It is not the company may, or the company could; it says the company shall.

What did this government do, Mr. Speaker? They told this company, an Aboriginal company, that your bid is no longer being entertained. You are taken off the list. You are taken off the short list. The whole list was three proposals long, Mr. Speaker. They removed them.

This is what you call commitment? Mr. Speaker, there is definitely room for improvement.

MS DEMPSTER: Lip service.

MR. EDMUNDS: Yes, pure lip service, Mr. Speaker, and now there is not even an RFP. Now we have nothing to look forward to.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, this government certainly has to look back at its record when it comes to commitment in some areas of the Province. We applaud any forward movement in any other areas of the Province, but I feel that every area of this Province should be entitled to the same commitment and not a level of commitment that is between one and ten – it is ten in some areas of the Province and zero in some others of the Province. They have a commitment to all of this Province. They cannot decide who they can pick and choose, Mr. Speaker, like they are doing, because it shows – and the people of this Province will make that decision in the very near future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand on my feet once again and speak to the Budget. I guess this is our final opportunity. I just want to start off to briefly talk, in a general sense, of where we are coming to with this year's Budget. I can remember standing in the House of Assembly back in 2013 – actually no, last year, 2014. At that time I can remember standing and talking about the \$1 billion shopping spree, and it was because government was going to borrow \$1 billion in 2013 for the Budget.

As it turned out, we ended up borrowing \$1 billion and then, as we got through the year, we were predicting a \$650 million deficit. So that is really \$1.65 billion. Then, of course, when the price of oil went down and production went down we ended up with over \$1 billion deficit.

I have heard members opposite talk about the fact that they believe that none of this could be foreseen, nobody knew this was coming, but I think it is important to point out that when oil was actually, I think, \$105 a barrel, at that time we were still predicting a \$650 million deficit. The fact that oil tanked, the prices tanked, just made the situation worse than what it actually would have been; but to simply say it was because of oil, because it was that unforeseen drop – I agree and we all agree it was an unforeseen drop. We all agree with that. To suggest that was the total cause of this certainly is not true. It made it worse, but it was not the cause. As I said, we would have been \$650 million in the red even if it had stayed at \$105 a barrel.

I think it is important to sort of look at it starting from that premise. Of course, in this year's Budget we are going to borrow \$2 billion – instead of \$1 billion, now we are going to borrow \$2 billion. We are seeing in the Budget documentation that there is going to be another \$2.65 billion again over the next couple of years. We are basically going to be into about an

additional \$5 billion. That is based on the fact that we can trust the numbers because we cannot seem to get the numbers necessarily right from one year to the next, or even on a quarterly basis, but predicting out the next two or three years an additional \$2.65 billion is very concerning, to say the least.

At the same time that we have incurred these deficits, at the same time that we are borrowing all of this money – and it is being predicted that oil prices, certainly at some point in time, is going to stabilize and rise, but it certainly is not going to happen this year. I think the government is projecting it will be a couple of years out. Not just for oil prices to rise, but for production to go up because we have two issues here.

We have the price of oil that has gone down, but in addition to that we have the actual oil that we are extracting from the offshore that has gone down – the production – because Hibernia has sort of peaked and is gone the other way and so on. We know there are other projects on the horizon that are going to be coming to fruition, God willing, in the next couple of years. When production numbers go up again and hopefully prices stabilize and rise again, we will have money at that point in time. We certainly hope so – although there are certainly no guarantees that that is going to happen.

In the meantime, at the same time that all this is occurring, our spending has not changed at all. As a matter of fact, it has gone up. It has not gone up a lot. I think it is a couple per cent. I do not have the exact number in front of me. I think it is up by 2 per cent or 3 per cent, whatever the case might be. Much of that is probably attributed to the fact that employees have collective agreements, their wages have gone up, and other things have gone up. That is reasonable. I understand that, but the fact of the matter is the spending has not ceased in any way at all.

We know a couple of years ago, when we ran into tough financial times even then, the government at the time, we know there were a number of layoffs and so on that occurred. We know there was a lot of spending that was cut in a lot of areas. I know there was spending that was cut in some of the areas, like roads' budgets

went down, fire and emergency services went down, and so on.

I understand roads are important, absolutely. I totally get it. When Mount Pearl receives its share of multi-year capital, I am the first one to say I am glad that we got that money. I am sure every member feels the same way. Every one of them does. Of course they want to have roads done in their districts. I understand, in terms of fire and emergency services, we all understand the role that fire departments play throughout our Province. We understand the need for those fire departments to have the proper equipment and the trucks and whatever they need; but it is interesting that at a time when oil prices are down, production is down and we are borrowing \$2 billion, we actually reinstated the spending levels in those areas back to where they were, if not even slightly increased. We are actually spending as much or more money than what we did a couple of years ago even though we are in this same financial circumstance. Why would that be? I do not know. That is up to the government, obviously, to answer.

Some people might speculate it is because we are into an election year and so on. That could be a reason why we want to make sure we get as much pavement pumped out the door as we can, and a fire truck in every community. We are certainly seeing lots of announcements. I am not suggesting that they do not need that equipment and so on, but it is interesting that in the year when we are facing these deficits and restraints and so on, that this spending is occurring and it is actually increasing.

It is also interesting that last year – because we were just starting to get into this financial mess that we are in – that the Premier, the current Premier, froze discretionary spending. Now here we are into a new Budget, a few months later, borrowing \$2 billion, projecting to have to borrow a lot more, and all of a sudden the discretionary spending freeze is off. Now, all of a sudden, we can spend, spend, and spend.

Those things just seem to contradict themselves. I guess that is the only point that I am making, Mr. Speaker, that those things seem to contract themselves. I guess it will be up to people to try to understand why that would be and people can

speculate and so on. It does contradict itself, and it is important to point it out.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just speak for a few minutes about seniors. I think that is a very important area we should all be speaking about. I have heard a number of members on our side and I heard a number of members on the other side talk about seniors. I am sure we all want to do what we can for seniors. We all have moms and dads and grandparents and so on – and, God willing, knock on wood, we are going to be seniors ourselves, if we are lucky. Not everybody gets to be a senior; the alternative is not such a great one. Not everyone gets to be a senior, but the majority, on average, of us will be seniors someday. What we are doing now is going to impact us all. It is important that we do all that we can for seniors, recognizing the times that we are in.

I just want to say that simply renaming a department to the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, while that might be a nice thing to do – and I am not against it. I am certainly not against naming the department and having seniors put in the name because they are an important part of our society, but simply changing the name on the department is not doing anything to address the issues that seniors face. It is not going to do anything.

We do know that in October 2011 there was a commitment by the government to have a seniors' strategy; \$100 million was budgeted, or was said would go towards a Seniors Strategy. We have not seen that seniors' strategy. Every time we raise the issue around that all we hear about is oh, we care about seniors and so on. I know they do. Like I said, they have moms, dads, grandparents, and some of them are seniors themselves, maybe, or pretty close to it. No offence, but whatever –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: It is all good. I am not going to name members.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) targeted.

MR. LANE: Not targeted at all, I say to the minister, not at all.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about this and we say we are just going to do more for them, I think there needs to be something a little more concrete and we need to actually have a plan. There was supposed to be a strategy and that strategy did not happen. Simply naming a department is not going to help us deal with the issues that seniors are facing.

I have heard many members – I have heard the Member for St. John's Centre on many a times raise issues about seniors. I kind of like the way she does it, because she puts a human face to it. She will say here is Mary's situation, she talks about that, and I think it is a good thing.

I have met a number of Marys myself and I know other members have too, people in similar situations, seniors who are struggling to make ends meet. Whether they are having issues, like you said, around just simply not receiving enough money to live on. Some of them might have worked their whole life and they have a very small pension. Because of the fact that they have a very small pension, it is just enough that they do not qualify for anything.

When we talk about some of these government programs like REEP, the Provincial Home Repair Program, the accessibility grants, and all of those things – they are all wonderful programs. Absolutely, I cannot argue with that. I have actually had seniors in my district who have availed of those programs, and I think they are wonderful programs. I would never suggest that we stop doing it because we need to do it.

There are a lot of seniors because of the fact that they may have worked their whole life and garnered a small pension from their work, they made just enough that they over that threshold that they do not qualify for any of it. A lot of them would say to you: I do not qualify for that. I do not qualify for a drug card – or certainly not the full coverage. Some of them do not qualify at all. I do not qualify necessarily for the Home Heat Rebate, the seniors' benefit, and all that stuff. When you add up all those things, they would say: Do you know what? If I never worked – if I had decided that I am not going to work, I am not going to contribute, and therefore I am not going to pay into a pension of any kind, if I had made that decision, I would have been probably better off than I am today. I am

actually being penalized for having a small pension.

When we see those situations I think it is important that maybe one of the things we have to look at are the thresholds. Not the programs, they are good programs, but maybe the thresholds have to be adjusted to a reasonable rate so that our seniors are not living in poverty.

We do have seniors living in poverty. I was on the phone with a senior only last week and she was crying on the phone. I am not exaggerating for the purposes of the House of Assembly or Hansard. I am very sincere when I say she was crying on the phone because of the struggle she was going through just trying to survive from day to day with housing, food, medication. She actually was just getting over cancer, very ill in health, and having to make choices around do I eat, do I take my medication, do I pay the heat, do I turn it off, do I go to the Village Mall and hang out there all day because I cannot keep the heat on in the house – and I know we have heard these stories and so on. I know all members have heard it.

When we say this, this is absolutely not political, this is not exaggerated, this is not fabricated; this is reality. It is reality. I have seen that reality and I bet you there is not a member across the way or here on this side, in either party, who are not aware of those realities. If they are not, then they have their head buried in the sand because they are out there.

I am not saying that they are everywhere. I am not saying that every senior is in that situation – absolutely not. There are seniors who are doing quite well. There are seniors who perhaps worked their whole life and had a high-paying job with a pension and so on, and they are doing well. Some seniors have three and four, four and five pensions, no doubt about it. Their condo down in Florida, their nice home, they have it all, all the toys; but I am telling you, there is an awful lot of seniors who are not in that situation, and we cannot forget them.

As we have seen prosperity come to this Province through oil and gas – and some people would argue is it prosperity. I think it is prosperity. I am optimistic about it. I think it is a good thing. For some people, the

disadvantaged, the gap has widened. There is a big gap being created and it is growing every day between those who have and those who have not. There is also this group, in addition to the seniors, that fall under that same kind of category, struggling, that I just wanted to speak to as well and they are called the working poor.

I know there are members who know of people like that too; I know them. There is probably a husband and a wife and they are both working at minimum wage jobs or a little bit better than that, they may have a child or whatever, and paying rent and struggling. Sometimes they have to work two jobs just to keep it going, just to keep the food in the refrigerator and keep the lights on.

Those people are struggling as well. We can all get caught up in oil and gas. Oil and gas is a wonderful thing, no doubt about it. We can all get caught up in that and how well we are doing. We can all say we are going to hold our head up as proud Newfoundlanders, we are not playing second fiddle to anybody anymore – I believe in all that stuff. Everybody here believes in all that stuff; I know they do, and it is a good thing. While we have our heads up in the clouds, while many of us are doing well, we cannot forget people amongst us who are not doing so well. We cannot forget them, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to things like these programs, whether it be prescription drugs or these other programs I talked about, I think we need to look at the threshold levels and perhaps they need to be raised. Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that we place everybody in a situation where they are not in poverty, they are not lined up at food banks, and that they can afford the basic necessities in life. As a society, as a Province, we owe that to everybody. Whatever we can do to change that – and I understand where we are financially right now, but it is all about priorities. We have the ability to choose – government does – where it spends money, where its priorities are, and we need to ensure that seniors and low-income families, working families, are made a priority.

I am running out of time there now. I just want to go back to the seniors point again, when I talk about the seniors, the seniors' advocate. I just want to finish off talking about the seniors'

advocate, Mr. Speaker. We called on government and made a motion in this House to have a seniors' advocate. We think that that position is required to help seniors to advocate – to make sure the things that we have been asking for get implemented for seniors. Government would not go there; I do not know why they did not go there, Mr. Speaker. I continue to call upon them to (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Thank you.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, the House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2:00 p.m. being Private Members' Day.

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