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Speaker: Honourable Wade Verge, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I apologize for the – there seems to be a relatively high temperature in the room today, but if you keep your debate calm you will find things much better.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will be hearing members' statements from the Members representing the Districts of St. John's North, Labrador West, Burgeo – La Poile, Humber Valley, Exploits, and Bonavista South.

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand today to recognize the excellent volunteer spirit in the Larkhall Academy school community.

This volunteer spirit was on full display at Larkhall on May 9 when parents and teachers pitched in to put off the school's annual spring fair. Larkhall's annual spring fair is the school's main fundraiser for the year. It is also a wonderful event which brings the school community all together.

This year's spring fair featured ever-popular games like fish pond, ball games, bean-bag toss, and others. There was a cafe serving a variety of refreshments from coffee and tea to barbequed hotdogs and hamburgers. There was a silent auction and a variety of ticket sales for items donated by parents, teachers, and local businesses. There was also a bake sale with a variety of items to choose from.

This year's spring fair earned over \$12,000 to support school programs. This success was due to the many volunteer hours contributed by committee members including: Krista Molloy, Paula Allured, Michelle Coady, Michael Taylor, Tracey Spurrell, Michelle Culleton, Debbie Collins, Ruby Mullett, and Gordon and Jeannie Stokes.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating the Larkhall Academy

community and thanking their spring fair volunteers.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Mr. Speaker, last Friday I was both honoured and humbled to participate in an evening of celebration with great food and friends. The Knights of Columbus Reverend Whelan Council in Labrador City in Labrador West celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in Labrador City.

Over the past fifty years the Knights have unselfishly been providing services to the community helping the less fortunate as well as those impacted by disastrous issues. This group of Christian soldiers performs and support these projects and services with only the well-being of the recipient in mind.

During the evening celebrations there were some significant awards presented: Richard Pittman received a recognition pin for his fifty years of service with the association; Pat Carroll, along with his wife Clara and their family, were recognized as the family of the year for the dedicated service to the community through the association; George Power, with his wife alongside him, Kathleen, received two very prestigious awards, Knight of the Year from the Rev. Whelan Council after forty-five years of service, and also the Knight of the Year within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask all hon. members to please join me in congratulating the Knights of Columbus of Labrador City on their golden anniversary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise to recognize and commend Ernie Meade of Fox Roost, Clifford Lillington of Margaree, and Roland Sheaves of Port aux Basques on their rescue of Mr. Clyde Chant and Mr. John Caines.

This past Monday, June 1, while travelling on Route 470, Mr. Chant and Mr. Caines' truck went off the road and became partially submerged underwater. Their vehicle was spotted by a school bus driver who flagged down Mr. Meade and Mr. Lillington driving by. They were later joined by Mr. Sheaves.

They could see the two men hanging onto the tailgate of the truck. Mr. Chant was able to make it to shore; however, Mr. Caines could not swim, so Mr. Meade waded in to get him. He said the water was so cold that he got weak. At that point Sheaves and Lillington also came into the water; the three formed a human chain, and got Mr. Caines ashore.

Both men were taken to the LeGrow Health Centre as a precaution, but they are now doing well at home in Burnt Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in commending Mr. Meade, Mr. Lillington, and Mr. Sheaves on their heroic and brave actions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber Valley.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to commend the Elwood High Envirothon Team of Deer Lake on their tremendous success at the Envirothon in Nova Scotia just last month. The Envirothon program fosters team building and critical thinking around issues related to our natural environment.

Not only did Elwood finish first overall, but they placed first in urban and community forests, and in wildlife. Elwood also placed second in aquatic ecology, and soils and land use. The team will move to compete at the National Envirothon Competition at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. This event is recognized at North America's largest high

school environmental education competition, and will take place from July 27 to August 2 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Elwood Envirothon team members Emily Finlay, Alexis Locke, Kyle Hiscock, Rachael Paddock, and Daniel Williams, along with their team advisors: Mr. Oral Roberts, and Ms Dionne Snow. We wish them all the best as they represent our Province at this prestigious competition this summer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, Shane Pope is one of this year's graduates of Botwood Collegiate. He is a goal-driven leader who confidently motivates others. I feel honoured to be able to list some of his achievements:

President of the Botwood Student Council; board member of the national, provincial, and local Boys and Girls Clubs; board member of the Community Advisory Committee; Fusion 2015 National Youth Forum, organizer and host; Member of the Premier's Youth Advisory Committee; Newfoundland and Labrador Student Volunteer Award; Future Shop Generation Scholarship; French Merit Award; Frank and Flossie Antle Memorial Scholarship; the Harrison McCain Scholarship, valued at \$16,000; honour roll since Grade 7.

Mr. Speaker, Shane Pope is an individual of character, integrity, perseverance, and dedication. He has a positive attitude, quietly taking care of business, and no doubt will be one to watch for in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating this inspirational young adult on his achievements and wish him much success in the future.

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.

Honourable colleagues, I would like to recognize and congratulate the Grade 4, 5, and 6 students, and their teacher Mrs. Aylward, of St. Mark's School in King's Cove for winning \$10,000 with their application to the School Energy Project sponsored by Shell Canada and *Canadian Geographic*.

Throughout the months of February to April of this year, the students were involved in the Energy Diet Challenge. One of the projects within the challenge was to submit an application on ways to improve their school to make it more energy efficient and to reduce waste production. The students developed a plan that consisted of three separate projects: the implementation of a school-wide composting program, the development of a school greenhouse, and the replacement of the cafeteria microwaves with more energy efficient ones.

Once the application was completed, the students developed a video explaining their proposal and then worked on receiving public votes. Once the votes were completed the top five schools from across Canada were judged by a panel of judges and, as a result, the school won the top prize.

Mr. Speaker, members of the House, please join me in congratulating the students and all involved of St. Mark's School in King's Cove.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On June 4, 2014, a tragic event unfolded in Moncton, New Brunswick, which resulted in the deaths of three members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and injuries to two others.

On the one-year anniversary of that tragedy, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to once again offer our condolences to the families, the friends, and the colleagues of the officers who lost their lives on that tragic day.

As well, I would like to offer our support to the two officers who survived.

The officers who paid the ultimate sacrifice on that day were: Constable David Ross, Constable Fabrice George Gevaudan, and Constable Douglas James Larche.

The two officers who were injured, but fortunately survived were: Constable Éric Stéphane J. Dubois, and Constable Marie Darlene Goguen.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to being outstanding police officers, all three constables who died that day were also fathers and husbands. All three were integral members of their communities. All three are greatly missed.

To mark the anniversary of the event in Moncton and to commemorate and acknowledge those officers who died and for the ones who were wounded, staff with our local RCMP B Division have established a memorial display at their headquarters located in St. John's. As well, Assistant Commissioner Tracy Hardy is in New Brunswick today on behalf of her officers from this Province to participate in a number of events.

Mr. Speaker, tragedies such as this reinforce just how dangerous the nature of police work is. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we have hundreds of officers patrolling our communities each day working to make this Province as safe as possible for all of our residents. They do so at great risk, and each day they leave their homes, and there is no guarantee they will return.

Since 1861, twenty police and peace officers in this Province have lost their lives in the line of duty. That is twenty too many. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador supports our police and peace officers and we acknowledge the important work they do in circumstances that are often challenging, unpredictable and dangerous.

Mr. Speaker, our thoughts and prayers are with those who were impacted by the events in Moncton last June, as well as with all police and peace officers who work diligently to ensure that this Province remains one of the greatest places in which to live, to work, and to raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement today. It certainly is a tragic anniversary, not just for the people of New Brunswick but for, indeed, all law enforcement across the country, including right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We also pay tribute today to the three RCMP officers who were killed and the two officers who were wounded in Moncton one year ago. Our thoughts and our prayers are also with their families and their fellow officers. The loss of our men and women in uniform is tragic, no matter when or where it occurs. Police officers put their lives at risk every day to protect others. They put themselves in harm's way so that we can feel safe in our homes and in our communities.

Moncton, like so many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, is a close-knit community. When the tragic was unfolding last year, a Newfoundlander was playing a key role within the RCMP. Assistant Commissioner Roger Brown of the RCMP detachment in Codiak, New Brunswick, is a Newfoundlander. Of course, even in our Province we can relate to the tragedy of such violent incidents.

Our hearts go out today to the people of Moncton who I hope will someday find peace. We must also realize and appreciate the commitment of law enforcement to ensure our safety. I join my colleagues in this House today to honour our men and women of law enforcement as we pay tribute one year later.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, words are not enough to express the extent of sorrow this tragedy has caused for so many. In the name of the officers who have died by serving the people of Moncton, I want to thank all those police and peace officers who give so much to our community.

To ask people to serve our community in this way carries a huge responsibility. As legislators, we must ensure proper resources are in place to not only keep our communities safe, but to keep those men and women doing this work safe as well, including any services they need to help cope with the stress of their very important duties.

As a final note, Mr. Speaker, the Mayor of Moncton asks all Canadians to leave their porch light on tonight in memory of these brave RCMP officers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize June as Stroke Awareness Month in Newfoundland and Labrador and indeed across Canada. During the month, residents throughout the Province are encouraged to learn more about how to prevent heart disease and reduce the risk of stroke.

This week, I joined with representatives of the Newfoundland and Labrador Heart and Stroke Foundation to proclaim Stroke Awareness Month in an effort to promote public awareness about the importance of cardiovascular health and to officially launch the foundation's Stroke Month Campaign.

Mr. Speaker, more Canadians die of heart disease than any other disease. Over 74,000 deaths from heart disease occur every year and one person in Canada has a stroke every ten minutes. Since 2006, we have provided over \$500,000 in funding to the Heart and Stroke Foundation to support their education and awareness efforts. Our government remains focused on stroke prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and community reintegration initiatives, as well as exploring opportunities to further enhance our quality stroke care and services.

Evidence tells us that up to 80 per cent of premature heart disease and stroke is preventable. We are committed to supporting individuals, families, and communities in their endeavour to live healthy lives through a variety of strategies, initiatives, programs, and services. It is never too late to adopt healthy behaviours and make lifestyle choices that will decrease risks for stroke, even after a stroke has occurred.

Through our integrated stroke strategy, we are continuously working with the Heart and Stroke Foundation and our four regional health authorities to enhance stroke care in Newfoundland and Labrador and to improve patient outcomes. Through the twelve designated stroke centres in the Province, we have the necessary resources, including diagnostic equipment and pharmaceuticals, to treat acute stroke.

Residents are reminded that stroke is a medical emergency and every minute counts. Knowing the signs and acting quickly could mean the difference between life and death, or between a full recovery and lasting disability. All you need to remember is FAST. Face – is it drooping? Arms – can you raise both? Speech – is it slurred or jumbled? If yes, then it is Time – call an ambulance right away.

I invite my colleagues to join me in recognizing Stroke Awareness Month. I also want to thank the Heart and Stroke Foundation for their continued hard work in supporting the health and well-being of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. It is very important that we raise awareness about stroke in our Province. The rate of strokes here in Newfoundland and Labrador is the highest in Canada. We need to do better.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation has said that excess sugar consumption is linked to heart disease, stroke, obesity, and other health conditions. They want Canadians to limit their intake of sugar-sweetened beverages such as soft drinks, fruit drinks, and juices.

We could also discuss the promised e-cigarette legislation that we have heard about, but I do not suspect we are going to see any time soon. It appears the other side is more worried about legislation that keeps them in power as opposed to legislation that might save lives.

In addition to having the highest rate of stroke, we also have the highest rate of heart attacks. Defibrillators can increase the heart attack survival rate by up to 75 per cent. Last year, our side lent support to the Heart and Stroke Foundation; the big red team took a ride on the big red bike.

Education and awareness can save lives and we thank the stroke foundation for their work in trying to improve the lives of the people of this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Heart and Stroke Foundation is doing amazing work in promoting awareness about heart health and stroke awareness. Thank you to all the staff and volunteers who do this great work. Bravo! It is crucial government support their work. Prevention and education are so important.

Mr. Speaker, I have received numerous calls from stroke victims at home or in long-term facilities begging for physiotherapy, who need help from physiotherapists or assistants in order not to deteriorate. The wait-lists are totally unacceptable and detrimental to their health. It is time government improve this and have a heart.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the fifty members of Team Newfoundland and Labrador that participated in the twenty-first annual Skills Canada National Competition which took place May 27 to 30 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Every year, individuals from all corners of Canada, travel to attend the Skills Canada National Competition where they compete in over forty skilled trades and technology contests. This competition provides hands-on work experience related to skilled trades and technology careers. It inspires students, including apprentices, to demonstrate the passion and dedication in skilled trades and technologies.

This year, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that Team Newfoundland and Labrador took home fifteen individual and team medals in twelve different trades and technology-related competition areas from this event – three gold, seven silver, and five bronze. These competition areas included autobody repair, electronics, brick masonry, robotics, steamfitter/pipefitter,

baking, car painting, architectural technology and design, job search, job skill demonstration, photography, and public speaking. The medal winners attend College of the North Atlantic, the UA Local 740 Training Centre, and high schools located throughout the Province.

Mr. Speaker, Skills Canada Newfoundland and Labrador was established in 1998 as part of an effort to maintain Canada's international competitiveness, with a goal to raise awareness about skilled trades and technology sectors. In today's global community, education is vital for success and our government is committed to accessibility and affordability so that our students have the tools they require to be the leaders of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government is supporting the continued development of a highly-skilled, well-educated workforce through a variety of initiatives designed to revitalize Newfoundland and Labrador's apprenticeship program. In fact, the provincial government has committed more than \$100 million over the past seven years to support skilled trades.

I wish to congratulate all students who participated in the competition and I hope they continue to show an interest in a skilled trades occupation and consider choosing one as their career path.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. It is indeed a pleasure today to join with my colleagues to celebrate all fifty members of Team Newfoundland and Labrador on their participation in the Skills Canada National Competition.

The Skills Canada National Competition is the only national multi-trade technology competition for students and apprentices in this country. The Province was represented well with fifteen medals in twelve different

competition areas. Such competitions give people an opportunity to learn from their peers across the country, network with industry leaders, and have their skills recognized on a national stage, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it is a pleasure to join with other members of this House in congratulating the participants and the medal winners in this very important competition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement here today. Congratulations to all the students who have participated, Mr. Speaker. We think it is outstanding.

It is no secret that workers from Newfoundland and Labrador are renowned worldwide for their skills. I think that we have always known that. The skyline of New York City, for example, is a testament to the ironworkers of this Province who come from Harbour Main and the Holyrood areas.

Mr. Speaker, it is our hope that government has a plan to support these fine young men and women by ensuring that they have a chance to live and work in this Province, should they want to. We hope that government keeps that in mind every day.

We do have an example where government did not pay attention to that particular issue when it came to the Argentinia welding project down on the South Coast of the Province, Mr. Speaker. We could have done better than let that work go offshore. We could have had our people working there.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has announced that he plans to push this year's election out to November, past the fixed election date that is currently set by law. The Chief Electoral Officer has outlined in a June 2 letter that it is possible to have a September election. If the Premier wanted, he could have had our election over before the federal election.

I ask the Premier: Why are you ignoring that a September election is a possibility, and instead trying to push the election out to November for your own purposes?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the Chief Electoral Officer has sent a couple of pieces of correspondence now to myself and leaders of the other parties. He has laid out the time frame that he requires in order to prepare for an election, should the legislation move forward and be passed in the House to reduce the number of seats in our House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

He has laid that out, Mr. Speaker. Based on the review of his correspondence, I believe it would be prudent to have the provincial election after the federal election. He has clearly articulated that it would cause a conflict for him and his office himself. It would cause HR challenges for the provincial Chief Electoral Officer and conflicts with the federal government. He has clearly laid it out and articulated that in his correspondence.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the Premier did not say is that was a piece of correspondence in response to a letter that I sent to the Chief Electoral Officer, not one from the Premier's Office. In that letter it does say that there is a window there to have a September election before the federal election this fall.

I ask the Premier: Why are you ignoring what is clearly in that letter of June 2 from the Chief Electoral office? Why don't you have an election in September?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite is quite aware that there is a minimum five-week writ period for federal elections. The federal election being held on October 19 would mean that the federal writ of election would be issued around –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: The federal writ would be issued around Labour Day, in September, and that would cause a conflict with the federal election.

As Mr. Powers has articulated, it would cause a conflict for him. There would be an overlap, Mr. Speaker. He even suggests that for members of the general public, it may be a concern to have two elections running the same time. That is why we will be moving the election until November. I look forward to on Monday, once we receive the electoral boundaries report, we will be making and laying out publicly our date and our plan for the election, and also how we are going to move forward on electoral boundary change.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the Minister of Finance once talked about the value of fixed election dates. He said this: It forces government to focus on governing the province and not positioning itself for an election, or continuously thinking about what might be opportunistic and call an election at a time when it suits the circumstance the best. He also said: Without fixed election dates –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: – there could be manipulation of the electorate.

I ask the Premier: Since the benefits of the fixed election dates are clear, why do you want to change the law and push the election date past the federal election? Clearly, September is an opportunity for this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition wants to go down a road of someone once said. Well, if someone once said that it would be okay to move, he would be finally in full agreement with moving the election a few weeks if it meant to avoid a conflict with the federal election.

The member opposite also once said he agrees with reducing the number of seats in the House of Assembly. The member once said he does not agree with reducing the number of seats in the House of Assembly. The member opposite changes his mind on a daily basis. He should be able to identify sometimes when that occurs, Mr. Speaker.

We are taking the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer, we are going to avoid a conflict with the federal election, and, as he has endorsed himself, we are going to move it a few weeks so that we do not conflict with the federal election.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier goes through this plan to push the election out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: This is twenty-two months after this Province had an opportunity to vote for a Premier. The spirit of the current law is to keep that period of time within one year. The Premier is now trying to push this out twenty-two months.

So I ask the Premier: Do you intend to use your majority in this House to cancel the law that requires you to call an election within one year of being sworn in?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: So again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is confirming that he has changed his position on when the election could be held, because he has clearly articulated in the past that he supports the concept of moving the election a few weeks in order to prevent a conflict with the federal election. He has said it himself –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: – he said it publicly, and he is now once again, Mr. Speaker, as he has done over and over and over again, he is changing his position, and that he is taking on a matter.

Mr. Speaker, we have looked at the information provided to us by the Chief Electoral Officer, we have considered the information that he has provided –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: – we understand the conflicts that may arise. I will be quite clear to tell you, as I said before, the election will be held in 2015 – which he was fine with, he was fine with it – and it will be held in November, and we will lay out the full rationale for that on Monday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, clearly, what is very clear here is the Premier is using misleading comments to this House today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Clearly, what was said on January 15, I say to the Premier, was this: that we would indeed support that to get away from a federal election. What he is suggesting today does not do that, when you consider the special ballot process.

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, the new boundary legislation next week, and now with the Premier's attempt to change the fixed election date, several legislative amendments will be debated next week.

So I ask the Premier: Will these amendments be contained in a Harper-like omnibus bill, or will you separate the bills to be debated in this House?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we will bring forward legislation, table legislation in this

House on Monday that will make the required amendments to the current legislation –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: – to allow for the change in the boundaries, and make the necessary changes for the election date for 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I stand by my statements –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: – my very consistent statements in this House and publicly, that we will have a general election in 2015, and unlike the member opposite, I have not wavered one bit from that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it is very clear today that the Premier is trying to twist my words, just like he is trying to twist the rules of this Legislature, I say, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier to clarify for this House: Will these amendments be contained in a Harper-like omnibus bill, or will it be separate bills so they can be properly debated in this House?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is quite aware that when legislation is brought before the House, the members opposite have very much control over how long that debate continues. We will give them full opportunity to fully debate the legislation that we will bring before this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, if they want to stay here for weeks or months, we will do that. If that is what the members opposite want, we will give them fair opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, there are two sections in the legislation. There is one around, as he mentioned about when a new Premier –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: – takes office, and there is also a fixed election date. They are the two pieces, Mr. Speaker, that have to be corrected. We are looking at other amendments to be consistent with other provinces.

As I have said, we will lay out our legislation and our bill on Monday for everyone to see, Mr. Speaker. It will go through due process in this House with a full, fair, and frank debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It has been revealed that Nalcor chose a Quebec company for construction work at Muskrat Falls. The company has already admitted to a collusion scheme. At the same time Nalcor approved the company for work at Muskrat Falls, the majority owner was testifying at the Quebec Charbonneau commission on corruption in the construction industry.

I ask the Premier: Why did Nalcor choose a Quebec company that has admitted to collusion and handing over envelopes of cash for public works projects?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, the leader raises a very important issue. I will say for the people of the Province that government is not involved in a process of evaluating or awarding of contracts.

In the process of awarding contracts, there are some ninety-five construction contracts in Muskrat Falls. Nalcor has a responsibility to manage the projects. One of the mandates that they have is to ensure they get best value. Best value for the project, Mr. Speaker, means best value for the people of the Province.

Through their process of making that selection, the Opron company was successful, the work has been completed within the scope required. So they have gone through a process. The other point I will make, Mr. Speaker, is the process is clearly different than what is being followed in Quebec.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Best value with a company that was testifying in Quebec? Is that what the minister is suggesting?

We understand that this contract was worth between \$10 million and \$20 million range, and that the company is now facing at least a dozen lawsuits in our Province for not paying subcontractors. We would have expected that the procurement process would have identified this company's questionable past.

I ask the Premier: With so many Newfoundland and Labrador companies able to do this work, why did Nalcor go to Quebec and pick a company involved in the collusion scheme?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is trying to connect practices in Quebec with practices in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know their affinity for Quebec. They have a long history of understanding and supporting Quebec.

The process is not what we follow here. Let me get to the point, Mr. Speaker. The process that is followed within Nalcor is a very detailed, thorough, rigorous, competitive process where individuals look at issues of commercial, technical, and safety evaluations. There is a separate financial evaluation done through the process.

I have been assured that has been done on this company and through a process of Expressions of Interest and the final evaluations, Opron was awarded the contract, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe the minister should clarify – are you suggesting that the practices of a Quebec company are not important to the decisions that we make here in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, what I am suggesting is the integrity of the process at Nalcor protects against the kind of activity that is being evaluated and alleged in Quebec through the Charbonneau commission.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the process at Nalcor is set up so that individuals do separate evaluations on contracts, it flows up the chains before the decision is made. Like CBC reiterated today, they have no information to suggest that there was anything improper about the awarding of the contract, and we do not have any information likewise.

It is a concern, it is being looked at within Nalcor, but the process has been followed, the contract has been awarded, and the contract has been completed, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, for some time Newfoundland and Labrador's students' performance in mathematics has been declining and sounding alarms. This year's Budget committed to convening a group of educational leaders to review math performances. We have heard nothing about that since.

I ask the minister: When will government finally act on the math curriculum crisis in this Province and accept the urgency of this issue?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, recently we made an announcement, I guess, around the math issues in this Province. We have a brand new curriculum that has been fully introduced to the K-12 school system, but there continues to be some concerns about math. We take that very seriously. I have talked with educators. It is of serious concern, Mr. Speaker.

What we have announced is that we are going to have a math conversation. We are not just going to focus on curriculum; we are going to talk about broad aspects of teaching math in the Province. We will also look at other jurisdictions and what they are doing and what kind of results they are having, since we do share the curriculum in this Province as it is being delivered in other provinces. We will look at multiple things about math, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to having the conversation to see if we can address those challenges.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, it does not matter where they come from or who they are, if students can do math, they will have a future; it is that simple. This government is undermining our students and their future prospects by not providing the tools they need to excel in math.

I ask the minister: Will you just stop the political posturing and provide the resources that students need to turn around their math performance?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to play politics with the students of the Province. We have acknowledged that there are a lot of issues with math being talked about in the public. We have acknowledged it is serious. Also, our government is committed to have the conversation about math, include the experts, include the stakeholders, include parents, and talk to students.

Let's get to the bottom of what the issues are with math. Is it curriculum? Is it the amount of time we spend teaching math? Is it the professional learning? Is there something out at the universities – is there something happens when they transition from secondary school to post-secondary, Mr. Speaker?

There are many elements to consider and we want to have that conversation, and we are fully committed to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, to date, this government has undermined our students and compromised their employment and educational prospects by downplaying the seriousness of the math performance crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the minister now: If he is finally ready to get serious about this issue, will he come clean now and tell us exactly how much money has been set aside in this Budget 2015 for your so-called math performance conversation?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, so-call it what you will. I can commit to the people of the Province, particularly around the math issue, we have a million dollars in an excellent math strategy in the department, but I will cut travel in the department to deal with the math issue. I have no problem.

It is a very important issue and we are committed to dealing with it; but if you want to talk about what we are committing to the students of the Province, you want to look at how our results are in math. Our dropout rates have improved, our graduation rates have improved, and the results for academic students and honour student has improved. We are seeing improvements in our education system, but it is not without challenges. One thing people can be assured, we are not going to run from the challenges. We are going to take them on, we are going to bring them in, we are going to work together, and we are going to find some solutions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week I asked the minister responsible for Income Support if those who are homeless are able to receive Income Support, he promised to get the answer. Yesterday, I asked the same question, and he promised to table the answer after Question Period.

Mr. Speaker, that minister is usually forthcoming in providing the answers, but not on this issue. In fact, he is being very evasive.

I will ask again today: Are people who are homeless, without an address, able to receive Income Support?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, individuals who apply for Income Support without a fixed address, need to find a way to receive the money they are entitled to. Whether that be attached to an organization, to one of our – so, yes, there are ways that people can receive those supports.

Mr. Speaker, I question sometimes – I discussed this with the staff, and I think some of the staff take offence to the measures that the hon. member is challenging some of their positions, I truly do. These front line workers work day in and day out to approve programs and supports for their clients, and they are to be commended for those supports.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: It is not the front line workers, Mr. Speaker, who develop the policies, it is the minister.

Mr. Speaker, his answer does nothing to put a pillow under the head of a homeless person sleeping under the bridge down on Water Street.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. OSBORNE: The rental allowance provided by your department to those on Income Support has not kept pace with rental rate increases over the past decade. As a result, people who cannot afford to pay rent, find themselves with nowhere to live. Without an address, they do not qualify for Income Support. A support through Choices for Youth is not Income Support. Your department is forcing people to become homeless. I ask the minister not to play hide and seek with the answer.

Will you confirm –?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the member to ask his question.

MR. OSBORNE: Will you confirm that people are becoming homeless because the rental allowance is not sufficient to pay rent?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Now, Mr. Speaker, listen to that, just listen to that.

Mr. Speaker, the people within the department, in conjunction with the minister, develop and roll out programs. This member is accusing us as a government – we, as a government, work with all of the agencies out there – Choices for Youth, Stella's Circle, all who are involved in homelessness. We have committed dollars to that. We were down to a session just this past week and I have assured those people that we will continue to work with them. He need not underestimate what we are going to do and what we will continue to do as a government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General reported that Memorial University identified \$145 million in urgent deferred maintenance needs over the next five years. Memorial said in its budget submission last year that putting off will threaten their ability to provide safe, reliable and good quality facilities. Budget 2015 only allotted \$6.6 million, the lowest amount in the last ten years.

I ask the minister: Are you aware of the implications of compromising the quality and safety at Memorial University?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I have to say, I was very surprised by the commentary made by the Vice-President of Financial Operations at Memorial this morning. I was very surprised.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: I took it upon myself to call the President and the Chair of the Board of Regents, Mr. Speaker. Here is what we expect from MUN – there are priorities, there are life safety issues. While Memorial may have major projects happening, we expect that they attend to these life safety issues first and foremost.

I have been assured that there is an infrastructure plan in place, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the priorities around life safety to be addressed first and foremost.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. REID: Mr. Speaker, it is fine for the minister to have that expectation, but if he does not give them enough money to do it, it is hard for them to do it.

Putting off maintenance is going to cost the Province more in the long run, and not just in terms of physical repairs, Mr. Speaker. Memorial University is the only university in the Province and it is central to the population growth and innovation.

The VP of Finance at Memorial University says serious safety hazards exist, such as windows blowing out of the walkway over the Parkway. Mr. Speaker, in fact, they are thinking about closing down some facilities because of repair.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the member to ask his question.

MR. REID: I ask the minister: Does he think this is acceptable?

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

MR. JACKMAN: Maybe, Mr. Speaker, we should take a look at some of the professors who are operating in the House of Assembly giving up their bit of salary to contribute to the cause.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, our commitment and our funds to Memorial are at \$320 million this year. They have major projects underway. Before they are going to move with any of these projects, Mr. Speaker, we would expect that life safety issues would be addressed first and foremost. We expect no less.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, last September government said it would pay for any environmental liabilities at the Come by Chance Refinery without knowing what the liabilities are, and in an article in *The Telegram* it says that the Department of Environment and Conservation is just now planning phase two of a three-phase assessment.

I ask the minister: It has been eight months, why are we still waiting to hear how much environmental liability government has taken on?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, the owners of North Atlantic Refinery Limited are the ones that are doing the environmental assessment. We are the ones who are overseeing that process. We are working very closely with them. They are going to phase two. They are on target with what they promised and committed when they bought the refinery. Everything is going along perfectly well.

Mr. Speaker, we are taking indemnity with regard to the soil and sediment and water and groundwater in the area, but everything else is the responsibility of North Atlantic Refinery Limited. We are not taking on the full cost of remediation of that site, but that work is getting

done. It is ongoing, and there are facts that need to be told.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, government has been promising a new Waterford Hospital for over a decade. It is still years down the road. How many more horror stories do we need to hear? Government is shirking its responsibility and expecting Eastern Health and staff to somehow, what, just cope?

I ask the minister: What is he going to do to address this crisis at the Waterford until a new hospital is built?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we have acknowledged that the Waterford Hospital needs to be replaced. It is old infrastructure and it needs to be replaced, and as soon as the Province's finances will allow us to do so, we will do so. Some great groundwork has been laid. The functional program and master plan is complete. It is solid work and it will inform our future decisions.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that patients at the Waterford will continue to receive quality care from well trained professionals, and some of the changes we anticipated would come with the new hospital can be implemented in the meantime. For instance, we want to focus on a recovery model of care where patients are put at the center of decision making, and we are going to introduce that regardless of when we can build a new hospital, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, how could the minister allow the psychiatric unit at the Health Sciences Centre to fall into such disrepair?

I ask the minister: For God's sake, will he give them what they need to properly take care of our people?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, people who are sick need access to their basic needs, such as hot water, it is a must. They need to be supported in their recovery.

I want to be clear, that what has happened at the psychiatric unit at the Health Sciences Centre should not have occurred. It should have been fixed as soon as it was discovered.

I have a lot of questions, Mr. Speaker, and I do want answers from Eastern Health. I have given clear direction. I want Eastern Health to investigate the situation and I want to understand why a solution was not pursued when a modest investment would have solved the problem. It is completely unacceptable. We must learn from it, but we also must do better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the staff are telling us loud and clearly that these facilities are falling apart. A crisis intervention has to be done. Everyone in this House knows there is a shortage of staff at our psychiatric facilities.

I ask the minister: What is he going to do about this?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, while we have made a lot of progress over the last decade with our mental health and addictions strategy, I will be

the first to admit once again that we still have a long way to go. That is why we have embarked upon an all-party committee to investigate mental health and addictions services in this Province and come back to his hon. House to make recommendations for improvement; but, in the meantime, we are trying to improve the system every day.

In terms of this recent issue at the Health Sciences Centre, I have directed Eastern Health to increase occupational therapy assistant hours to allow access for more programming, including leisure activities and physical fitness. I have directed them today to purchase additional television units. I have directed them to increase access to the kitchen – which I understand is locked for safety reasons.

We are looking at all of these issues and we are constantly trying to improve mental health services and programs for people in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The other day in the House the minister, when asked about 911 service in the Province, said, and I quote, "... you will recognize very quickly that governments are constrained by the budgetary policies of the government ..."

Mr. Speaker, 911 service is not a budgetary policy of the government as consumers are the ones paying for 911 service in this Province.

I ask the minister: What say do consumers have and what type of system delivery if they are to receive the products?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good point, George – excuse me, hon. member. It is a very good point. Consumers do pay. You

are absolutely right. My apologies to the House, Mr. Speaker.

To the hon. member, consumers have all kinds of say in what kind of service they want. That is how we have got on the path we are on. We consulted with consumers across the Province and heard what they wanted in a 911 operating system. That is why we brought in, what we call, the first phase of 911 operating. We intend to take it to the Next Generation 911 operating system.

Very clearly, as I said to the hon. member and my colleague there several day ago on this issue, what we have right now is a system that for the biggest portion of people living in the Province, people in my district, in communities like Lamaline, Grand Bank, St. Lawrence, and Marystown, had no knowledge of 911, has never had the service. It is all brand new. We have that in every part of the Province and we intend to build upon that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

During Question Period, the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition referred to the Premier as misleading. This is clearly unparliamentary. I would ask the hon. member if he would withdraw.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I withdraw the comment.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: In accordance with section 19(5)(a) of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, I hereby table the minutes of the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting that was held on May 13, 2015.

Further tabling in documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for Which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a petition to pave Route 434 in Conche.

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

WHEREAS Route 434, Conche Road, is 17.6 kilometres of unpaved road; and

WHEREAS the current road conditions are deplorable; and

WHEREAS the Canadian Automobile Association ranked Route 434 the sixth worse road in Atlantic Canada; and

WHEREAS it is government's obligation to provide basic infrastructure to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; and

WHEREAS an improved paved road network would enhance local business, fish processing operations, and tourism, which is vital to the health of the communities affected;

We, the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly to urge the government to allocate funds in the provincial roads program to pave Route 434.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, today the petition is signed by residents of Roddickton, Bide Arm, and Grand Falls-Windsor. There is certainly support all across the Province to see a road like Conche receive what it should have, as it has been a major contributor to the provincial economy throughout the years. Residents are becoming very vocal and outspoken.

Those who live here in St. John's and other areas that have been from Conche, have ties to the community of Conche – this town once had a population of close to a thousand people, and there is still a very vibrant fish plant. The only processing facility that processes crab, whelk – multi-species plant – mackerel, herring, all sorts of pelagics there.

There are about 800 to 1,200 trucks that go across this road, as well as the tourism economy. It is the heart of the French Shore, with a 222-foot Jacobian linen tapestry – the only one of its kind in North America – that sees thousands of people. Cruise ships come here, there are archeological digs, and there is small business. There is a vibrant economy in Conche, and that if this government had the vision and the insight to pave this road, we would have a stronger economy on the Northern Peninsula East.

There was \$6 million put into this road, and now we need to see the investment to finalize the project. So I look forward to seeing that brought to fruition on behalf of the people of Conche, the neighbouring area, and the people who are employed from various districts, whether it be Piccadilly, or whether it be from other areas of the West Coast who work in Conche.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I have a petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled:

WHEREAS hundreds of residents of the Southwest Coast of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, including residents of the communities of Margaree, Fox Roost, Isle aux Morts, Burnt Islands, Rose Blanche-Harbour Le Cou, Diamond Cove, and La Poile use Route 470 on a regular basis for work, medical, educational, and social reasons; and

WHEREAS there is no cellphone coverage on Route 470; and

WHEREAS cellphone service is an essential safety and communications tool for visitors and residents; and

WHEREAS the residents and users of Route 470 feel that the provincial government should invest in cellphone for rural Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the government to partner with the private sector to extend cellphone coverage along Route 470;

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Now, Mr. Speaker, anybody who has ever watched this House will know that I have made this petition on a number of occasions, but it has significant meaning, especially today, after we had a near-miss. We had the possibility of a fatal accident on that particular road on Monday – one that I recognized in a member's statement today.

Now, thankfully those gentlemen are all safe, but the scary part is to think that there was absolutely no way for any of them to call anybody, because there is no cellphone coverage on Route 470. So thank God we did not have a situation where we had to call an ambulance or call a fire truck or call the police, because you could not – you could not call. It is unfortunate that this government continues to do nothing when it comes to this issue. They continue to do absolutely nothing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: They are spending their time figuring out how they are going to stick around longer when they should be spending their time governing and making sure that people have access to essential safety communication tools, but they do not want to do that. They are going to continue to sit over there and cling to power while people here were clinging on to the tailgate of a truck because in this case there was no cellphone coverage, and it is shameful and shocking.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud to stand in this House and present this petition to the House of Assembly.

We urge the House of Assembly to call upon the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to make literacy a priority by supporting the development of a robust provincial strategic literacy plan that addresses the learning and literacy of individuals from the early years through to the senior years.

Furthermore, recognizing that literacy is intimately connected to other societal issues, we urge the House of Assembly to call upon the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to invest funding in literacy programs so that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can enjoy the benefits of participation in our society so that no one is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, issues of literacy have been raised in this House of Assembly through a number of questions in this Question Period. My hon. colleague spoke earlier today about the ongoing issues that we have as a Province with our children's scores in math, and I listened to the minister opposite answer the question and answer it with platitudes about things that they are going to do.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the results of literacy issues in our Province are clear but this government continues to choose to ignore the facts, just like they continue to ignore the facts of what needs to happen in the best interests of the people of the Province. They spend more time talking about what happened yesterday and justifying what they do in this House of Assembly than they do about caring for the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, when we have less than half of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with a level three literacy or higher, we have to hold this government accountable for the money that they had, for the decisions that they made, and their inability to effect the change that must happen in our Province to ensure a workforce for the future.

Our Province, as the Finance Minister finally admitted, is in a recession. We have seen eighteen consecutive months of year-over-year job losses, yet this government continues to ignore the fundamental principles of workforce development – fundamental principles such as literacy.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the Province who continue to fill out these petitions and continue to call on government to act will continue to do so in the coming weeks when they hold this government accountable for its lack of attention on the people of the Province and its attention on its own selfish political priorities.

Thank you.

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS many communities in the District of Trinity – Bay de Verde do not have cellphone coverage; and

WHEREAS residents of the district require cellphone coverage to ensure their safety and communication abilities; and

WHEREAS cellphone coverage on many portions of the highway in the district is poor or non-existent;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to work with the appropriate agencies to provide adequate cellphone coverage throughout the entire District of Trinity – Bay de Verde.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity this afternoon to enter the petition on behalf of my constituents in the District of Trinity – Bay de Verde. It is interesting this afternoon when you hear the Member for Burgeo – La Poile talk about the accident that happened just this past Monday in his district and the role that cellphones could have played in safety and helping those people who were very fortunate.

It is very similar in my district. We have no cellphone coverage. It was brought to my attention a few days ago, Mr. Speaker, by actually a resident, not from my district, but a resident from New Harbour. The New Harbour Barrens is also a connecting road between Trinity and Conception Bay. It is in the Bellevue district. I think the Bellevue district has some issues with cellphone coverage as well.

The constituent said we get in there, there are very poor shoulders on the road, similar to the Heart's Content Barrens, and there is no cellphone coverage. Yet the minister of public safety stands up this afternoon in response to a question from the Member for St. John's Centre and talks about the seventy-five cents that consumers pay when it comes to their cellphone bills.

AN HON. MEMBER: St. John's East.

MR. CROCKER: St. John's East, sorry. The seventy-five cents that every one of us pay on

our cellphone bills every month, is there a plan to take some of this money, Mr. Speaker, and invest it in cellphone coverage?

You look no further than British Columbia, Mr. Speaker. In British Columbia the government went to work, worked with Telus, and now they have a plan to expand cellphone coverage on their primary and secondary roads. So I urge the government.

The Member for Lake Melville got up last week in this House and talked about how it was great for people in urban areas to have cellphone coverage, but he could not understand why us in rural Newfoundland and Labrador would even want cellphone coverage. Well I assure you, Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinity – Bay de Verde want cellphone coverage, and they deserve cellphone coverage for safety reasons amongst others.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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, Motion 7, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Thursday, June 4, 2015.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also move, seconded the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, Motion 8, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. today, Thursday, June 4, 2015.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. today.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also wish to give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, June 8, 2015.

I further give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Monday, June 8, 2015.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I further give notice, under Standing Order 11, I move that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 9, 2015.

Furthermore, I give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 9, 2015.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KING: Furthermore, I give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 11, 2015.

I further move, under Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 11, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I would like to call for Orders of the Day, Order 2, Committee of Supply.

I move that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole so that we can now consider the Estimates of Executive Council as well as the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that this House now resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider the Estimates of Executive Council.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Littlejohn): Order, please!

Today we are considering the Estimates for the Consolidated Fund Services, Executive Council in the Legislature.

Just a word to the hon. members, we will start with the opening remarks from the individual in the Opposition for fifteen minutes. We will go back to the minister who responds for fifteen, then ten minutes and ten minutes thereafter, the same as Estimates.

I just want everybody to be on the same page as we go through this. Just a suggestion, can we start with the first entry, which would be the Consolidated Fund Services –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Office of Public Engagement is where we wish to start?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

CHAIR: No.

Okay, the Clerk to call the first heading.

CLERK: Excuse me, it is Executive Council we are starting with?

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader, for some direction, please.

MR. KING: Yes, it would be our wish, Mr. Chair, to start with Public Engagement because that is the group that did not get covered in the Estimates that were scheduled. The member opposite has been very adamant and wanting to do that, but if members opposite wish to start in a different order we are prepared to co-operate.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Clerk to call the subhead, please.

The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Given that the Office of Public Engagement Estimates have already been devoted, my preference would be to start with the Consolidated Fund Services so we can debate Estimates that have not been – we only have two hours and forty-seven minutes, so I would like for us to get started on those.

CHAIR: Fine, thank you.

The Clerk to call the first subhead, please.

CLERK: Okay.

Consolidated Fund Services, 1.1.01.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.1.01.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I would like to ask questions relating to page 1.3 of the Estimates.

CHAIR: Page 1.3?

MS C. BENNETT: Page 1.3, which refers to item 1.1.01 Temporary Borrowings.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.1.01 Temporary Borrowings.

MS C. BENNETT: The Debt Expenses in the Budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 were \$50,000, revised were zero, and Estimates now for this coming fiscal year are \$50,000. I would ask the minister if he could explain that.

Mr. Chair, for speed, can I go through a number of these questions and give them to the minister, or would you like them one at a time?

CHAIR: Minister, do you have any preference? One question at a time or a number of questions?

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you.

The member, if they want to lay out a series of questions on a particular area – if we are going to do that, let's try to contain it to a smaller area so we are not rambling all over a number of different pages. If there are a number of things you would like to comment on with respect to consolidated fund revenue and then you want to raise them, then I can go back through them after. That may facilitate it easier rather than you and I popping up and down every two minutes.

CHAIR: Okay.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, what I will do, with the minister's permission, is certainly follow the pages as they are listed. That will make it easier for all of us to follow along.

CHAIR: Okay.

MS C. BENNETT: I have asked a question about the Debt Expenses. I will move now to 1.1.02 Treasury Bills, which speaks to the, "Appropriations provide for the interest expense on treasury bill borrowings."

Under the Debt Expenses there, Budget 2014-2015 had a budgeted amount of \$5 million. Actual expenses were \$2.3 million higher than that. Then the Estimates are \$6.2 million. I

would ask the minister if he could explain those numbers as well when he gets a chance to get up.

I will move over to 1.1.06.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.1.06. So now you are on page 1.4 is it?

MS C. BENNETT: Yes, please.

CHAIR: Okay, 1.1.06, yes.

MS C. BENNETT: At the very top of the page under Revenue – Provincial, the budgeted amount in fiscal 2014-2015 was \$711,600, the actual was \$432,700. This year Estimates are \$151,900. So I would ask the minister if he could provide some information on that one.

I will continue to move along. Over to page 1.5, under the heading –

CHAIR: Could you just say that again?

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Sure. I am moving to page 1.5 of the consolidated funds.

CHAIR: Page 1.5, yes.

MS C. BENNETT: Down to the item 1.4.01.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.4.01 Guarantee Fees – Non-Statutory?

MS C. BENNETT: That would be correct, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

MS C. BENNETT: Under the Operating Accounts, there is a listing there for Professional Services. It was budgeted at \$50,000. No money was spent, and again there was another \$50,000 budgeted in this coming year. I will stop there.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.4.01.

MR. WISEMAN: Subhead 1.5.01, is that where you are?

MS C. BENNETT: No, sorry, 1.4.01.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.4.01, Minister.

MS C. BENNETT: The 1.5 was a page in the Estimates, my apologies.

MR. WISEMAN: Subhead 1.4.01.

MS C. BENNETT: Subhead 1.4.01.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Yes.

MS C. BENNETT: With that, I will sit down and let the minister answer those questions for now.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make sure I captured them all. I understand the first question was around 1.1.01 Temporary Borrowings. The question was centered around the \$50,000, the zero in the budget, the zero for the actuals, and then the original for this year has been \$50,000.

Mr. Chair, government has a couple of ways of raising capital. They can go to the market, as we did this past year and floated a \$500 million debenture. We have an opportunity through using treasury bills to raise some short-term money, but we also have a line of credit with the Royal Bank of Canada. We have an arrangement with them where there is some-\$200 million line of credit that is available to us as a part of our cash management process in any given year.

We have staff in the Department of Finance who monitor our fiscal position on a daily basis, managing our cash flow, looking at what our cash requirements would be on any point in time. So we take advantage of opportunities to save money and take advantage of opportunities of low interest rates. A number of times we will use treasury bills to borrow some money short-term, to raise some capital, generally ninety

days, but we also have available to us this line of credit.

If we were to draw on that line of credit, if that became an option we chose some time throughout the year to use the line of credit, then we would have to pay interest on that line of credit. We need to make a provision in the budgetary process, should an event that we need to actually use that line of credit, then we have to cover off the interest. What we have done here under the temporary borrowings provision, we have made a provision here for interest that would be paid should we use the line of credit.

As it happened last year, because of some decisions we made, we did not need to draw on that line of credit, therefore we did not spend any of the money. Obviously, as we look forward to the year coming, we are not certain what this year will bring; market conditions, interest rates, our circumstance. We may find ourselves having to draw on that line of credit, and should we find ourselves having to do that, regardless of what that amount would be, we need to pay interest. This \$50,000 that you see here, Mr. Chair, is a provision for the interest that may be paid on a line of credit should we decide to draw down on it.

I believe the next question centered around 1.1.02, which deals with Treasury bills. I just made reference a moment ago to the Treasury bill program and that fact that we use Treasury bills as a means of raising capital. I think the member had a question around the dollar amounts, what we were actually allocating last year for those costs, what provision we made, and how much we actually will pay this year. This activity in 1.1.02 is just that. It sets up the expense that we incur for interest that we pay on our Treasury bills.

As I just mentioned a second ago, as part of our strategy in managing cash and looking at debt and what portions of our debt may be long term, what portions of our debt may be short term, these Treasury bills are bills we generally issue for ninety-one days. They are ninety-one day Treasury bills. Every week, we go to the market, flow the bill as a part of our cash management process.

So a couple of things happened last year. When we started out the year, we thought about how we would manage our fiscal circumstance this year. I remember last year in the Budget debate there was a bill that came to the House that sought authority of the House of Assembly to borrow what was going to be about \$1 billion last year. So we had the authority to raise up to \$1 billion through borrowing. As we moved through the year, we had to make some decisions, whether some of this was going to be by way of long-term debt or by way of short-term debt.

As it turned out, we did not borrow the full \$1 billion anyway, but not all of it was long term; \$500 million was long term and we borrowed some additional on short-term Treasury bills. So a couple of things happened. When we started out the year, we were anticipating that we would be borrowing around \$490 million-odd through our Treasury bill program, but because of favourable interest rates, the interest rates on Treasury bills are 0.75 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. WISEMAN: As a result of that, Mr. Chair, because of favourable interest rates and because of our cash management processes in place, we found ourselves realizing that a better way to raise some capital last year was going to be by way of enhancing and expanding on our Treasury bill program.

So two things happened. We thought we were going to be borrowing around \$494 million, but we actually borrowed some \$780 million. The interest that we had forecasted to spend was about \$500 million, but because we borrowed more through this program, we actually spent some \$7.3 million.

Two things happened. The reason we choose this route is interest rates were very favourable last year. Short-term money was a better way to manage our cash, a better way to manage our finances, so we chose to borrow more through the Treasury bill program than we had originally thought, and that is how we managed, Mr. Chair. Throughout any given year, as we have said, we will look at our cash requirements, look at our

borrowing options, and some of it might be long term and some of it may be short term.

So two things happened, really, to influence that number, that change from the \$5 million to the \$7.3 million. Number one, we borrowed more through the Treasury bill program than we had initially thought, but at the same time interest rates were much lower than we had originally thought. Now, as we look at this coming year, the same thing will happen. We have made a provision here for \$6.2 million we are borrowing in our Treasury bill program, because we believe that this year we will continue to use that program. Interest rates are still favourable, but again this year we will do some longer term borrowing, and we will do some Treasury bill borrowing as well.

So will maintain our Treasury bill program similar to what it is now. In fact, when we go to the market again for some longer term borrowing, depending on what interest rates might be like, we may choose to liquidate some of that short-term debt and convert it to a longer term debt. That may be an option, but fundamentally, the provision here of \$6.2 million is just that, it is a provision for the interest that we will pay on our Treasury bill program throughout the coming year.

Now, I want to make sure I captured them all. I think the next area was 1.1.06, was it?

CHAIR: Recoveries on Loans and Advances, yes, Minister.

MR. WISEMAN: Recovery – 1.1.06. The questions centred around the difference that you would see in a forecast recovery of \$711,000 versus the \$432,000 that we actually received.

Mr. Chair, fundamentally this item here captures and acknowledges and records the interest revenue that we get from the Student Loan Corporation. That number is changing, obviously, because the amount of money that is in that Student Loan Corporation is not continuing to grow, and the reason it is not continuing to grow is because of some strategic investments that we have made in eliminating the Student Loans Program and converting it to a grants-based system. So this program here, over time, will disappear totally; and as time

evolves as well, as the amount of money that is paid interest starts to come down, the number that we will recover on annual basis will be much less. These numbers actually reflect just that.

Last year in our Budget forecast we talked about \$711,000, this year we actually are going to be talking about \$151,000, and we actually only achieved some \$432,000. So already this picture that you are seeing here shows the decline that is occurring as a result of the decisions we made to replace the Student Loans Program with a grants-based system. So students who are going to university now find themselves not having to borrow as much. As a result, the interest coming back to the Province through the Student Loan Corporation is a diminishing number and, over time, will disappear altogether.

The other number I think was 1.4.01, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Chair, the Guarantee Fees.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.4.01, yes, Minister.

MR. WISEMAN: Subhead 1.4.01. Mr. Chair, we provide a number of loan guarantees. Sometimes it is through private enterprise we will guarantee some loans. There are loans that we guarantee through Nalcor. For those guarantees there is a premium, there is a price. We charge a fee for those guarantees.

Obviously if the Province is guaranteeing a loan to an enterprise it needs to acknowledge that in its financial statements. So we need to make a provision should something happen. Should something happen and the financial institutions need to realize on their security, then we need to make a provision for actually paying that off.

In theory we are kind of setting aside a pot of money to make available should we be called upon by a bank to liquidate a debt because of our guarantee. So we have a number of guarantees to private corporations. We have Nalcor as well, or more precisely Newfoundland Hydro.

Newfoundland Hydro, a regulated entity, a division of Nalcor, has borrowings. Because that is a Crown-owned asset – it is a Crown corporation, it is an asset of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – the Government

of Newfoundland and Labrador was called upon to guarantee their borrowing. As a result of that we charge them a fee.

So the banks have said that if you want to borrow money, we want the guarantee of the provincial government. We have said we will provide that guarantee, but because it has an impact on our financial position and it is recorded in the books of the Province, we want to charge a fee for that. Right now there are four loans or four entities rather, I should say, where the Province has guaranteed the loans. We charge those entities a fee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. WISEMAN: What this number here reflects are the fees associated with those guarantees. Mr. Chair, I think that was the last one that there was a question around, 1.4.01?

Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay.

The hon. member – I am going to go there and come back to you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sure.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's East, would you have any questions between 1.1.01 to 1.4.01?

MR. MURPHY: Yes, Mr. Chair, I do have a couple of questions. The question is more of a policy question for the Finance Minister when it comes to actually dealing with the debt of the Province and the servicing of the Province's debt.

I know in the next couple of weeks, Mr. Chair, what they are talking about in the markets is an actual possibility of an increase in interest rates. So I am wondering about the timing of that, if these numbers are going to be susceptible to any changes as a result of that, or what government has negotiated as a result of some of the potential interest rates they are going to be paying in some of the long-term debt that they are going to be surfacing?

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Chair, it is an interesting question, because obviously markets change and we need to be very much aware of what is happening around us. We have a circumstance, as the member has pointed out, there has been some speculation for quite some time about what the markets might do, what interest rates might do, how that might change.

We are talking about this year's Budget. We laid out a five-year plan, and that plan includes some borrowing over the course of the next four years. We want to make sure we have accurately reflected what we anticipate our costs to be in that Budget, because there are a number of things that this Budget highlights for us. I just wanted to bring members' attention to the Highlights document that was a part of this year's budgetary information, where we talked about a borrowing program, we talked about performance targets. So there are a couple of things that are really relevant and impacts your question.

One of the things we have done this year is that we have said not only do we want to have a budget for this fiscal year, but we want to build a plan that takes us out for the next five years. Over the course of the next five years we will have revenues, we will have expenses, and we will have to borrow some money to be able to offset our revenue shortfall for at least the first four years.

One of the things we are very cognizant of is the more we borrow, the more our debt servicing goes up. So we need to be aware of what the interest rates might be. We need to be aware of the amount we borrow, and we need to be aware what that will do as a burden on future years, and how much of future revenues will be gone to actually service that debt, to pay the interest on it.

One of the things we have said, if you look at the Highlights document, particularly page 3 – one of the things we have said is here is our debt expense as a percentage of gross revenue, because it was not all that long ago, it was back

in 2003, this Province was running at over 25 per cent of all the revenue that was coming in was going to pay the interest on our debt.

When you talk about 25 per cent of your revenue going to service debt – that is just the interest, nothing to do with principle, just the interest. We want to make sure we will never find ourselves back in that spot again, so we have developed a performance target. We said that our debt servicing ratio will never go beyond 13 per cent of our revenue so we can contain that cost. We need to be mindful of that target and mindful of that performance measure as we borrow money, and not only do we think about the amount that we borrow but what we anticipate to be the interest rate.

We have enjoyed, as a country, very low interest rates in recent years. It has aided consumers in purchasing cars and homes. It has aided governments in their borrowing and their debt servicing costs.

Mr. Chair, one of the things we have tried to do is to be prudent in our forecasting, both in our borrowing and prudent in our forecasting with respect to our debt servicing costs. So we have given ourselves a bit of a cushion. We have had a look at what we borrowed for this year.

For example, we have a very favourable credit rating, which will help us, I say, Mr. Chair. A very favourable credit rating will help us. We have a circumstance today where we have three bond rating agencies that have provided ratings. Standard & Poor's have given us an A-plus rating; Moody's, an AA-plus rating; DBRS has given us an A rating. So that puts us in a position where we are able to borrow at very favourable rates, but the favourable rates, obviously, are relative to whatever the rates are at that moment in time.

For example, this year when we borrowed – we went to the market back in March of this year and we borrowed at a 2.3 per cent interest rate. We borrowed a \$500 million amount this past March and we had a 2.3 per cent interest rate, but we know that 2.3 per cent may not be a valid number next year. It may not be a valid number the year after. So what we have done in our forecasting, we have built ourselves a bit of a cushion.

We had the benefit of the work that we had done on our pension plan. This past year we went through a massive exercise with our public sector unions to do some reform of our pension plans, and we had some actuarially people do some forecasting for us. We needed to know the plans performance. We needed to know about future economic conditions, or at least forecast what interest rates might do and what the market would look like in future years for us to be able to do some evaluations for our pension reform.

We had the benefit of all that kind of work and expertise brought to bear in the last year to help shape some of our thinking on that. One of the things we have been able to do is we built in a bit of cushion. So, rather than use what our most recent borrowing cost has been at 2.3 per cent, we have given ourselves a bit of cushion.

What you see reflected in this year's Estimates in the forecast of what our interest costs would be, we are assuming that new borrowing, not what we already have on the books, but all new borrowing – we are using a 4 per cent interest rate for our target.

The numbers you are seeing in our Estimates for our debt forecasting, or interest cost forecasting, and the numbers you see in the Highlights document, when you look at the Highlights document when you see that forecast and what that performance indicator looks like, and we have mapped that out, we have also said we will use 4 per cent. If it ends up being 3 per cent, or ends up being 2.5 per cent, then obviously it is a bonus. Just to be careful and to be prudent, we have used a rate that is a little better than 1.5 per cent above what we have actually been given in this past – well, just a few short months ago.

We believe that 4 per cent cushion will give us adequate protection, and will give the assumptions and the forecast we have made in our Budget documents. It will validate them, and they have been validated by the actuarial work that has been done as a part of our pension in recent months. That is the number we have used in our future forecasting.

CHAIR: Okay. Just for clarification for Opposition members, I am going to start back with Ms Bennett. We are going to run the clock for ten. When the clock expires at ten, I am

going to go back to you, the Member for St. John's East. There you go, that was your ten minutes.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under the line item of 1.5.02.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.5.02 General Expenses.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, for those people who I am sure are home watching this afternoon's proceedings, I would just like to take a minute to remind them that the conversation we are having in the House of Assembly today is

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SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I ask hon. members – it is very difficult for the Chair to hear, obviously then it must be difficult for the Minister of Finance to hear the questions from members opposite. I ask hon. members to take their conversations either outside the Chamber or to the corners, or sit there quietly, please. Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, I am sure that those people of the Province who are home watching today's proceedings will by now understand that we are debating and asking questions as part of the review of Estimates that goes on as part of the – I guess the deep dive into what the Budget document is saying.

That in this particular format of discussion, members have the opportunity to ask government questions, and certainly the government has a responsibility to answer those. I think what is certainly evident from the conversation that was already witnessed here in the House, there is an awful lot of debt that this Province has as a result of this government. The cost of servicing that debt is certainly one that requires a tremendous amount of prudent discussion.

The cost of servicing that debt continues to rise. Not only are people of the Province, through this government, spending money to finance the debt that this government has amassed over more than a decade, now they also have to pay increasing costs associated with servicing that debt, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask a question about that number. We have seen the increase in the overall servicing of the public debt go up and when you have a cost associated to managing and executing the items that the minister has spoken to already, there is no doubt that managing debt certainly takes up a tremendous amount of time and effort and talent in our public sector that could be better deployed for other services.

I would like to move now to 2.1.02, which is the Ex-Gratia and Other Payments – Non-Statutory, which are listed under the Employee Retirement Arrangements. For those listening at home, these are payments related to special pensions that have been approved by various governments over a number of years and these would be people, for example, who – and I am sure the minister will correct me if I am wrong – my understanding is this would be for individuals, say, for example who serviced in the military, who may have not been available for a pension and this is where governments in the past have seen fit to make things right for those hon. men and women who serve us in making sure that we are safe.

One of the questions I would like to ask – and I did try to ask this in Estimates, so I hope, with the minister's permission, this would be the right place to ask it. When we were doing work on this side of the House and researching and speaking to a variety of people around the PeopleSoft implementation, one of the things that we discovered – for those listening at home, just to clarify, PeopleSoft is a very large piece of technology that government purchased. It involved several departments coming together to implement a software program that would allow our valued public sector employees to be paid appropriately and get every single penny of every single benefit that they are entitled to under their contracts.

Mr. Chair, part of what we discovered during the discussions around PeopleSoft was that some of

the many, many changes that were made uniquely in Newfoundland and Labrador's use, in this government's use of PeopleSoft, actually related to this pension line and no other jurisdiction had the amount of complexity around pension management that this particular Province has. As a result, the software had to be changed.

So I would certainly like to ask the minister if he would like to use this opportunity to share some insights on PeopleSoft, which I am sure will come up a couple of more times this afternoon. For those listening at home, I think the amount that government spent on that implementation was somewhere just north of \$35 million.

Mr. Chair, I would ask, moving over to page 1.9 under the heading of 2.2.02 Deferred Pension Contributions – Interest, there is an item there at the very bottom, consolidated funds. The estimate there has moved up from an actual, under the revised, of \$469,683,900 to over \$708 million. I am sure the minister has the information there to provide us this afternoon with exactly what that is. That was 2 – Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Subhead 2.2.02 the last total, Total: Consolidated Fund Services, the difference between 2014-2015 and the Estimates for 2015-2016. Am I correct, hon. member?

MS C. BENNETT: Yes, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

MS C. BENNETT: In continuing to use up the remaining four minutes that I have, I would like to move through to the Executive Council.

CHAIR: Can we ask the minister, just for ease of maybe we can support these –

MS C. BENNETT: Will I get the four minutes back if the minister uses his ten?

CHAIR: Well, I am going to come back to you, so you are going to get your chance. You are going to get every fair opportunity, hon. member.

MS C. BENNETT: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

The hon. minister if you could respond to 1.5.02, the member's question, 2.1.02, the member's question there, and to 2.2.02.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Chair, did you say 1.5.02?

CHAIR: Yes. I think the question around that was the Servicing of the Public Debt, hon. minister.

MR. WISEMAN: Subhead 1.5.02 is a general expense.

CHAIR: General Expenses. Servicing of the Public Debt was the reference, the increase.

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Chair, this category provides for the issuance of costs associated with the new capital borrowing. So fundamentally when we borrow money, we pay a fee for the person who actually brokers that for us.

The \$239,000 that she is talking about here – the \$255,000 last year and the \$239,000 forecasted for this year are fees that you pay for the bond rating agencies to do the rating. They do that, but we have to pay for them. It is important for us to have our ratings done. It is important for us, for the people who lend us money to understand – I am just wondering, Mr. Chair, of the time. Am I running on the clock?

CHAIR: No, you are fine. You are going to answer those three questions, hon. minister, and then I am going to move forward.

MR. WISEMAN: Okay.

I just want to be cognizant of the time because I thought the clock was being reset for each speaker. These are the fees associated with the ratings and the bond rating agencies that we do and there are also some fees there that we pay as a part of our borrowing process, but the bulk of these fees associated with professional services is with the bond rating agencies.

I think 2.2.02 was the other question, if I am not mistaken. You can correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Chair, 2.2.02. No, it was more around the Ex-Gratia, 2.1.02.

CHAIR: Yes.

MR. WISEMAN: The question came up around the Peoplesoft question and, as the member opposite referred to, a similar question in Estimates last week. So obviously, there is an interest in the decision to implement a new software system.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador had a variety of payroll systems. They are the people who have retired from teaching. There is a payroll system that was accommodating their pension payment. People who teach in the system, there was a payroll system that accommodates their payroll. We had people who work within the core government departments, the House of Assembly employees here, for example. There was a payroll system that accommodated their payroll.

The payroll system was quite old and had minimal functionality for other human resource information that was required in the modern-day time to manage a workforce appropriately. Then the other part of this and in addition to its functionality, the software, like payroll software in human resource information systems, they are supported by vendors who support the software, no different than our personal computers. You might have an operating system on your computer today, a version that was ten years old, and all of a sudden some companies says that the version that you have on your computer we are no longer going to support so if it crashes you are done, you are finished, and you have no support for that.

You need to be current with these information systems. One of the things that government chose to do back in 2008 because of a variety of reasons such as that, government decided that it needed to do a couple of things: to make sure that the human resource information systems that it had to deal with its payroll, to deal with other information, tracking information around leave entitlement and benefit entitlement, all needed to be managed in a very comprehensive

way by an information system that was more current, had more functionality and better applications to use for the people – not only a benefit to the employees, but benefit to the people who manage those benefits and provide those services. There are attendance systems as a part of that, there are benefit administration programs, and there are leave-management systems as a part of that process.

So what happened back then in 2008, government decided to make an investment in consolidating the systems and making them more current. So that replaced the old one that was there for the general public service, it replaced the pension program, and it replaced the teachers' payroll system. So we then started a process to implement that new system. With bringing in and over time under the old system, there were many changes that were made to reflect the tracking of benefits that were negotiated in the collective agreements. Some of the things that happened in the human resource information system are driven by some of the benefits and some of the things that are provided for through the collective bargaining process. So that influences what might be there.

The other thing that happens is your old system starts to track a lot of historical information and starts to trend patterns and activity and summarizes data, so you need to be able to import that into a new system. What we found ourselves doing, Mr. Chair, we started to do that incrementally over time. It took up to 2012. The decision was back in 2008, and when we got to 2012, the first step was to take what was the core public service component of that payroll and move it over into the new PeopleSoft system.

PeopleSoft is a software, as I understand it, that has a great reputation. In fact, it was in the process of going to the market, it was found that this, in fact, was the best option, what it had to offer, its functionality, and its ability to be flexible and ability to make change to reflect the uniqueness of various payroll systems and the uniqueness of various collective agreements in this jurisdiction.

So, as part of the implementation team, there was a project team put together that mapped out a transition strategy from the old system to the

new, and in so doing identified those unique areas of the old payroll system, the unique areas of collective agreements that provided for a need to track certain information in a certain fashion, and then started a process to work with the vendor to identify some modifications. To help them with that process, they used the services of an outside expert in this area to work with them through the process.

Then after the core public service was done, we move on to the pension payroll system and then move on to the teachers' payroll system. Each of those employee groups has various uniqueness. Teachers, for example, have teachers who get called in to work on a contract. If a teacher phones in sick this morning and they need someone to replace them, there are temporary teachers who get called in. Payroll systems needed to have some flexibilities to do that.

It is a fair observation I suspect, Mr. Chair – I am not intimately involved with it, but I suspect it is a fair observation to say that when you are trying to have a payroll system that reflects the uniqueness of a variety of collective agreements – because obviously human resource information systems do things that are payroll related, yes, but they track other things. They are tied to an influence and how robust that system becomes and the need for uniqueness and customizations that occur are all a reflection of the diversity, the uniqueness, and the nuances in a variety of collective agreements.

If you think about it for a moment you have a teachers' collective agreement, you have the marine services collective agreement, you have skippers on ships, you have people who work with general service, who work maybe with the Department of Transportation, you have people who work with the Department of Health, so you have a variety of collective agreements governing a large number of public sector employees. The nuances of those agreements need to be reflected, and the need to track and capture the benefit of entitlements is needed in a robust human resource information system.

When the member talks about some of the changes that occurred as a result of the implementation of this system, she is absolutely correct. Choices, I guess, I am assuming – I was

not around for the evaluation of it, but I am assuming at the time the choices could have been do we actually build our own system internally, or do we actually go to the market and find a system that has a solid base, a great reputation, has an ability to be able to accommodate the bulk of the requirements of what government needed at the time and, at the same time, be flexible enough to accommodate most customizations that need to be made for a full and successful implementation.

Mr. Chair, hopefully that gives some context for the member. There is still some work being done. For example, there is some work to be done in some areas of occupational, health and safety; there is some functionality in the software that can be used to manage our workplace safety program within government. That is being worked on as we speak, so there are still things being done with that system. As I said a moment ago, it was selected because it was robust. It was selected because it provided the flexibility to accommodate to the member.

I see my time is out, but I am sure I will get back to answer the question. There are a couple of things that were raised on – I think it is 2.2.02 that I did not get a chance to answer.

CHAIR: Okay.

MR. WISEMAN: When I stand again, I will do that.

CHAIR: The hon. the member has four minutes and twenty-four seconds. Then George, after the four minutes and twenty-four seconds expires, I will be back to you. Okay.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, under the Office of Executive Council, 2.1.01, I would like to ask the minister and the Premier –

CHAIR: Subhead 2 –

MS C. BENNETT: Subhead 2.1.01 under the Premier's Office.

CHAIR: Subhead 2.1.01?

MS C. BENNETT: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MS C. BENNETT: I would like to ask the minister why –

MR. WISEMAN: Excuse me. Mr. Chair, this is a point of clarification, not a point of order. I just want to understand.

I understood in your introductory comment we are going to deal with the consolidated funds revenue and then we will move on to the Executive Council. Now we are moving into the Premier's Office in Executive Council. I understood we were going to deal with one section at a time and now we are moving off into Executive Council.

CHAIR: Okay.

MR. WISEMAN: I do not have any difficulty. It is better to track –

CHAIR: Can I go back there? Okay.

MR. WISEMAN: It is difficult to jump all over the Estimates.

CHAIR: Okay.

The hon. the Member for St. John's East, anything left on Consolidated Fund Services?

MR. MURPHY: Yes, Mr. Chair, just a couple of points really for the Finance Minister, and at the same time a question about one of the particular line items there, if nothing else for the benefit of the viewers and the listeners out there listening to the debate this afternoon.

The first point I have right now for the Finance Minister, I would certainly like to see some of these actuarial forecasts that his department may have. I am wondering if he could table those. I would certainly like to look at the numbers that they are talking about at the time, like 2.3 per cent interest now that is rising to about 4 per cent interest right – I believe they were talking about in 2021.

I will put a question mark on that particular part of it because I presume you will be talking about the debt financing up to 2021 under the budget forecast. I think that the department is good here with the numbers. I could see a quarter-point interest rate over the next year forecast to

happen, but I cannot 4 per cent right off the bat. So I think the department is safe on that.

Having said that, Mr. Chair, the question I have is on page 1.6 of the Budget, 1.5.01, Discounts and Commissions. I would like to get a breakdown of the Professional Services from the minister again. I am not quite sure if I caught this one earlier or not; I think I missed it.

The Professional Services right now for this year are showing \$14.7 million in the budget Estimates. The revised figure for this year was only \$3 million. The budgeted forecast for 2014-2015 was \$7 million.

That is 1.5.01, Discounts and Commissions, "Appropriations provide for underwriting commissions and management fees on new capital market borrowings by the Province." So I am just wondering if you could give us a breakdown, the list of the Professional Services at the same time that the government received for the money that it is paying out.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board on 1.5.01.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The forecast last year, and as the member has pointed out, we had built into our fiscal forecast last year \$7 million. You may recall, last year in the Budget debate and during the Budget discussions last year, the government introduced a borrowing bill and that bill was asking permission of the House to borrow, I think it was close to a billion dollars, in or around that. Now I just forget the exact number, but it was around that number.

We needed to build a number into the Budget as to what – if we were to go to the market, if we went to the market and actually borrowed that kind of money, what would we reasonably expect to pay when it comes to some commissions and management fees when we went to the capital markets? That is where that \$7 million came from, but the reality of it is, you never really know what it is going to be until you actually go out and look for the money. It is

a forecast based on the information you have available to you at that moment in time.

Last year, when we decided we were going to build in a \$7 million forecast, that was back last year in March 2014. Fast forward now to March 2015. As I said a moment ago, back in the first part of March of this year we went to the market to borrow \$500 million. As I had said earlier as well, our borrowings last year were part of – we went to the market for long-term debt and then we decided we were going to use treasury bills for some of the short-term debt. That \$500 million that we went to the market with in March was several months after our forecast. So a couple of things happened.

When we went to the market the numbers were better than we thought, in terms of the commission. I think we paid something like sixty cents per hundred for ten years, because it is influenced by the tenure. If we had gone to the market for thirty-year money, it might be a very different fee structure.

So with the ten-year money, \$500 million and favorable rates, favorable conditions – keep in mind, the Province has not gone to the market for quite some time. It was in 2007 or something when we went to the market the last time. We did not have a more current experience of what our commissions might have been. The \$7 million to be certain, gave us adequate coverage and adequate protection in terms of our forecasting so as not to be caught short.

We picked the right time to go to the market. We were fortunate, because of our rating, because of the manner in which we went to the market, that our selection of a ten-year time frame versus longer term money, we were able to come up with a very different figure; hence, the \$3 million we are talking about. When we use the \$7 million, obviously, we were thinking it might be about seventy cents a hundred, but it came out to be sixty cents a hundred.

This year now, you questioned about: Why the larger amount this year? You recall on Budget Day when I talked about the fiscal position of the Province, I talked about the borrowing. Again, if you go to our Highlights document, you will see clearly our borrowing pattern that

we have projected to have over the course of the next number of years. We envisage, in this coming year, going to the market for what we believe to be \$2 billion.

Now, if circumstance changes, and through cash management processes, that might become \$1.8 billion, \$1.9 billion, but we believe it is going to be about \$2 billion. A little later on I will be introducing a bill to the House to get permission of the House to borrow. So I will be introducing, in near term, a new bill asking the House for permission for government to go out to the markets and borrow again this year. I will be asking the House to approve a piece of legislation that gives us the authority to borrow up to what we believe to be about \$2 billion.

If that materializes and we get competitive commissions and competitive fees associated with that, then we believe the cost will be in the order or magnitude of \$14 million; hence, the distinction between the numbers that you referred earlier.

We started out with a Budget last year of saying it is going to be \$7 billion. We ended up actually spending \$3 billion, which obviously is a savings and one that we would obviously, gracefully, take. Then next year, because of the increased borrowing over what we did this year – if you look at ratio-wise, it cost us about \$3 million to get \$500 million, and if we have a forecast expenditure of \$14 million for next year and borrowing about \$2 billion, then that is the order of magnitude.

I do not know if that answers the member's question. If not, I will be only too glad to take a follow-up question from you, to give you a more detailed explanation.

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

MR. MURPHY: St. John's East, Sir.

CHAIR: East, I am sorry.

MR. MURPHY: That is okay.

I am finished my line of questioning, Mr. Chair, but I am just wondering if the Finance Minister can table those actuarial reports? Is that a

possibility to have a look at those or are they proprietary information?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: The actuarial reports I talked about were a part of the pension reform process. Offhand, I cannot think of why they would be proprietary. They were prepared by a couple of different companies for our pooled pension plan, and I am certain that information is – but I will follow up to make sure that it is not. If it is not, then it is fair game and I will share it with you and I will table it in the House.

MR. CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the clauses for Consolidated Fund Services.

CLERK: Subhead 1.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Subhead 1.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive.

Shall these carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 2.2.02 carried.

CLERK: Total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, total carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Consolidated Fund Services carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Consolidated Fund Services carried without amendment.

CHAIR: Moving along to Executive Council, the hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will move on to 2.1.01, the Premier's Office.

CHAIR: Subhead 2.1.01, the Premier's Office – page 2.4, for those who are following along.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, I would ask the minister to provide information on exactly what the costs were associated with Frank Coleman's failed attempt to become Premier of the Province, and was that related to the amount of salaries that were overspent last year in this particular office at \$215,000? Is that what the severance packages are for those individuals who actually were let go by this government as part of that failed transition when that leader, who decided not to become the leader, then came into the House of Assembly – or tried to get in the House of Assembly?

I move on now to the Cabinet Secretariat, 2.2.01, Executive Support, under Professional Services. Mr. Chair, I would ask that in the Cabinet Secretariat if the monies associated there, there was a spend of \$166,000, but only budgeted \$30,000. I wonder, are those expenses related to the changes that had to happen as a result of Mr. Coleman's, again, attempt to be the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party? Which took six months, which procrastinated this government's ability to be able to find a leader and get a leader in place, and has us in the position now to be able to be debating a Budget

that a government that does not have a mandate; an \$8.1 billion Budget, that a government does not have a mandate to bring in, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS C. BENNETT: I will move on to Purchased Services, line item 2.2.02, under the heading of Planning and Coordination. Under Purchased Services, the amount that was budgeted was \$9,400, but they actually spent \$25,000. This is under the area of Planning and Coordination, all under the Office of the Executive Council.

I would ask the minister what exactly those additional expenses were for. Are they related to consulting fees that this government is paying through the Premier's Office and other departments in Executive Council to prop up its positions and its messages as part of a political campaign to use the people's money in the Province to actually defend themselves in the public?

Mr. Chair, I move on then to 2.2.03, Economic and Social Policy Analysis.

CHAIR: Yes, 2.2.03. I am just trying to keep track here, hon. member.

MS C. BENNETT: No problem, I know I am going fast. I am a little excited today, Mr. Chair.

Subhead 2.2.03, Economic and Social Policy Analysis. It is interesting that on this particular line item, Mr. Chair, under Economic and Social Policy Analysis, this government underspent. In the area of Economic and Social Policy they actually underspent by \$131,700.

Mr. Chair, I scratch my head, and I am sure the people at home who are watching today also are wondering, that in a Province where we have a recession – as has been admitted by the Minister of Finance – why would we be underspending and analyzing the real reasons why we have a recession? Was it related to salaries? Was it related to positions that this government could not fill? I look forward to hearing the minister's answer on that line item.

I will continue over now to Communications, 2.3.01, the Communications Branch.

CHAIR: Subhead 2.3.01.

MS C. BENNETT: In this particular area, under Salaries they underspent by \$92,000. I wonder if the minister could clarify if this spending was underspent as a result to the excessive overspending in the prior fiscal year, in 2013. I would also ask under this line item, exactly how many positions remain unfilled? We have seen in Estimates throughout the last number of weeks that many positions have remained unfilled over the last couple of years in numerous departments.

I move down to Professional Services. In this particular line item, I am going to be very curious to see exactly what government underspent on \$498,000. I certainly hope this was a result of the discretionary spending cut that this Premier brought in last November, that he now has chosen not to have in place when they are borrowing what is the highest amount of money a government in Newfoundland and Labrador has ever borrowed in a short period of time.

If this \$498,000 is the result of this government's choice last fall to implement a discretionary spending freeze, I would suggest maybe the minister may want to consider that if you were able to save that much money, how much money would you be able to save if you brought back the discretionary spending cuts into this year, Mr. Chair?

I move on to –

CHAIR: I ask the hon. member – you have asked six questions.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Okay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Go back to her.

CHAIR: Okay, go ahead hon. member, the next question.

MS C. BENNETT: Subhead 2.4.01 under Financial Administration.

CHAIR: Subhead 2.4.01.

MS C. BENNETT: This particular area refers to the Salaries that government – in this particular line item under Financial Administration, I would ask specifically, how many positions are unfilled there?

I move down to Purchased Services. I am wondering what exactly in this area are you planning to spend \$13,000 on?

Mr. Chair, since we are following along in the Estimates, and the next up would be the Office of Public Engagement, I will leave those questions to the minister today. I look forward to hearing what his answers are about the Premier's Office and the expenses that were associated specifically to the layoffs and severance packages that were provided to the employees who were let go when Mr. Coleman was to come into the office, and then what other expenses this government incurred as a result of continuing to transition through, I believe it was, multiple Premiers in a single year. I would ask the minister to clarify that for the people who are listening at home.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, that is quite a rant. I am not sure how you would – in Question Period, we get forty-five seconds to ask a question and forty-five seconds to answer it. It is kind of a sharp question. When you lay out a series of questions over ten minutes, but you lay your questions out with a lot of political commentary, I am not sure how to respond. The member laid out some comment about what we were doing here, so let me provide some additional commentary about what we are doing here today.

Every year in the House of Assembly there is a series of Estimates that are done for people in the House, in this case here, the Committee of the Whole. The entire House is looking at the Estimates of certain sections. We are looking at Executive Council. We just finished Consolidated Fund Services, and now we are going into an area of the Estimates called Executive Council.

This is where we look at the Budget itself and look at an item that is expended throughout, to say government plans to spend this much money on salaries or this much money on professional services. Members get a chance to ask questions about what we are spending it on and how we are spending it, and the Finance Minister gets up, or some minister will get up, and provide an answer as to why we are spending that money and how it is spent.

Obviously, there is always a little bit of political commentary as we go. I just want to make sure that members opposite do not get a sense that this is a banter about political 'upmanship', so I just want to make sure that we understand clearly what we are debating here today. We are debating the Executive Council in the Committee of the Whole.

Over the course of the next little while we will go through areas of Cabinet Secretariat. We will look at the Communications Branch, we will look at our Human Resource Secretariat. We will talk about Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. We will talk about the Office of the Chief Information Officer. The Office of Climate Change was dealt with a little earlier on in the House, called and voted on.

Today, we had the Minister of Health stand and offer himself to answer some questions about the Office of Public Engagement, but the Member for The Straits – White Bay North did not want to do that. He did not ask questions the other night in the Estimates. He did not want to answer questions today. So I am not sure whether they are not interested, or whether or not they would prefer that we would wait until next year to do it again. I am not really certain.

[Technical difficulties]

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Chair, I would ask the minister to clarify his comments or withdraw the remarks, because I certainly did not say that I would not ask questions today on the Office of Public Engagement.

CHAIR (Cross): The hon. the Minister of Finance, to the point of order.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

He is supersensitive I guess, because the Office of Public Engagement, the minister stood and offered his services and said he was available, even though the Table has indicated they had been voted upon, or deemed to have been voted on, so therefore – I suppose in terms of the rules of the House – technically, they have been disposed of. The minister has very gracefully offered himself to –

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

CHAIR: The Member for The Straits – White Bay North, on a point of order.

MR. MITCHELMORE: The Member for Virginia Waters clearly asked questions on the Premier's Office, the misspending that has happened there –

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

MR. MITCHELMORE: – the Premier-Designate to be Frank Coleman, and no answers coming from the Minister of Finance.

CHAIR: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Member for The Straits – White Bay North has political sensitivities when – it is fine for members opposite in the posing of questions to make political accusations about what happened on this side of the House or what government may or may not do. Then in response to a question they do not want any political commentary at all. I say, Mr. Chair, you need to recognize that debate in the House goes two ways.

I was prepared – as we did in the Estimates the other night – to answer all questions with respect to the Estimates and the forecasted budget items. We stuck to the text and we stuck to the Estimates. I am prepared to do that again today. If the members opposite want to engage in a political debate and pretend it is a campaign-

style Estimates debate, then I am game for that too. We can do this whatever way you want.

I am trying to enlighten those who are listening to this as to what normally takes place in this process. The normal process here is that we talk about the Estimates which is a budget forecast. I just wanted to make sure that we all understood that.

To the member's point and over the course of the next couple of hours, I will get a chance to answer all of the questions. I did not track them myself, but I understand the Chair tracked all of the points being raised. I think I will go section by section.

The member talked about 2.1.01. I do not recall in the last year having a Premier whose name was Frank Coleman. I do not recall in this Province having an elected MHA whose name was Frank Coleman. So I say, Mr. Chair, there is nothing in the Estimates here, there is nothing in section 2.1.01 that has anything to do with a Premier whose name was Frank Coleman.

Over the course of the last couple of years, Mr. Chair, there have been a number of changes that have occurred in the leadership of this Province. We have had Premier Marshall who retired last year, we had Premier Dunderdale who retired last year, and we now have Premier Davis in that office. We have had some changes in the Premier's Office in the recent year. Over the course of last fiscal year, there were some changes in the staff that were in the Premier's Office.

I would only be too glad to talk about some of the changes that occurred there. There were some severance payouts as a result of people leaving. We would all recognize – in fact, members opposite have their own staff who work in their offices. Some of them have members who work in their constituency offices as constituency assistants. Some would have people who would work in their caucus offices and there are staff that are appointed by their political party or appointed by the member involved and there are certain benefits that they have.

They get paid every two weeks. They have insurance programs. They contribute to a

pension program. They also are entitled to and they accrue severance. When they leave, they are entitled to that severance whether they leave after two years, or whether they leave after three years, or whether they leave after ten years. There is a severance entitlement that they have when they leave.

Anybody who would have left the Premier's Office, or anybody who would have left the Department of Finance, or anybody who would have left the employment of either one of the caucuses that are represented in this House would have gotten payouts which would have included any leave that they would have been entitled to that they had not used. It would have included any severance that they would have accrued at that time.

Regardless of when they leave, or regardless of what prompted their departure, they leave with those benefits. I would only be too glad to provide the members opposite a profile of those who have left the Premier's Office and the severances associated with that, or if there is interest in having an understanding of what severances would have been paid out across government, I can give you a sum total of what has been paid out across government, I say, Mr. Chair. There has been any number of times when there has been staff changes, and I would be only too glad to provide the member.

Interesting of note, there are a number of things with respect to the Premier's Office in terms of the cost of transition. One of the things is in this year's Budget that was not in last year's Budget is a reduction in the number of employees who work in the Premier's Office. Today there are two fewer people working in the Premier's Office in this fiscal year coming than there was last year. We have seen a reduction in the staffing in the Premier's Office in this coming year. That is a reflection of this Premier's intent of leading by example, wanting to ensure that as a Province, as a government, under his leadership that we have prudent fiscal management.

We are looking at areas where we can continue to provide services, continue to provide valuable services to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and doing it as fiscally prudent as possible and making sure that he is providing the leadership.

What we have seen this year, Mr. Chair, is a reduction in the overall cost of running the Premier's Office – fewer people and a different allocation across a variety of expenditure areas, Mr. Chair. What we are seeing here is a reduction in the total cost of providing services and supports to the Premier, directly in the Premier's Office with fewer people and a smaller budget than last year's forecast, and in fact a smaller budget than we actually had last year.

Included in that actual cost from last year, Mr. Chair, there were some severance pays that came as a result of changes in staff that were there, but that is a normal course of doing business. Every person who comes to work as a part of a political staff – the members opposite, your own staff, as I said a moment ago, they too are entitled to severance.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I think the minister's time has expired.

MR. WISEMAN: Hopefully, I will get back – given that long list that was shared earlier, over time I will get a chance to knock them all off.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will keep it simple when it comes to some of the line items here in most of the sections. I will not get into any policy questions in general.

I wanted to get a breakdown of 2.1.01. In the Premier's Office, there is an obvious difference here in the Salaries that I would like to ask the minister about. In 2014-2015 budget line item \$1,703,500 was actually budgeted for; the revised figure shows \$1,918,300 was actually spent. I would like to know the difference, why the over expenditure here in this particular case?

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The member has asked about the difference in the Salaries that were budgeted. Under the salary item, as I was explaining a moment ago, in that salary category it is the actual salary that a person gets paid but also should they be paid a severance upon their departure, then there would be severance that would be paid out to those.

Last year, there were severances associated with nine employees that were paid out of the salary from the Premier's Office. That difference though, the difference between the \$1.7 million and the \$1.9 million is not all severance. There was a greater amount of severance paid out than that but the Premier's Office last year, the Premier implemented some austerity measures last year in his department and offset some of those costs of the severances. There are nine individuals who received a severance last year out of the Premier's Office. Those nine – there was additional savings that provided some partial offset for the cost of that, so the difference you see between the \$1.7 million and the \$1.9 million was associated with the severance that was paid out.

If you forward then on to this year's budget, the \$1.6 million in this year is much lower than both the budgeted figure last year and the actual figure last year. That is the reflection and the reduction in the staffing levels in the Premier's Office. The Premier's Office this year has a total of nineteen people on staff. That is a reduction of two from last year. That is the difference between those two.

There are a couple of other areas here where you see again in Transportation and Communications, this year's budget is significantly reduced from last year's. Last year, you can see that the Premier's Office had spent \$161,000 on Transportation and Communications. That is a reduction from the \$276,000 that was in the forecast. What we are seeing here now is \$181,000 in this year's forecast, which is a reduction from last year's budget item.

You can see how overall, Mr. Chair – and to the member's question – if you look at the Premier's Office budget for this year compared to both its actual from last year and compared to its budget from last year, the forecast this year is lower

than both the actual and the forecast from last year.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to get an explanation of the Transportation and Communications line I ask the Finance Minister – under the 2014-2015 budgetary line item, \$276,700 was anticipated, but you only spent \$161,400.

Question number one here is: Why wasn't all the money spent in this particular case? Number two: What were the appropriations for in the first place that government had anticipated having to spend \$276,700? Why the difference?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the member pointed out, last year's budget – and I was not in Finance last year when the Budget came down and I do not know exactly what was envisaged to be spent in the forecast. What I can tell you, though, is that the \$276,000 that was in last year's forecast – much less than that got spent. I think that is a reflection of a couple of things. A reflection of, number one, there was a change in the Premier's Office last year. Former Premier Marshall retired and the current Premier moved into the office. There as a transition period. One was coming and one was going.

The other part of that, which is the most significant part, Mr. Chair, is the current Premier, as I said a moment ago, has made a commitment that he would lead by example in this process. As a result of that when he moved into the Premier's Office, he in fact made some decisions, announced publicly that there was going to be a freeze on discretionary spending, and that we were in a very different spot at that point in time than we were when we developed the Budget last year in March.

So, again, leading by example he reduced the cost of operating the Premier's Office, and this was one of those areas where he had some

control over and was able to reduce his travel and reduce his communication cost in his office. What we are seeing here is the result of that, which is an actual expenditure level much lower than forecasted.

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

MR. MURPHY: Subhead 2.2.01 under Executive Support, Professional Services, this particular line showed \$30,000 expenditure was anticipated, but \$166,000 was actually spent. So I am wondering, number one, what the extra \$136,000 was spent on – that would be the number one question – and number two, if we can get a list of those Professional Services at the same time and have a look at them ourselves.

Thank you.

MR. WISEMAN: Yes, Mr. Chair, thank you.

There are two things that drove that. One of them, you may recall there was a consultant who was engaged to do a piece of work around the Humber Valley Paving contract and that was about \$10,000 or \$11,000; and secondly, there was a consultant engaged to do a piece of work around Muskrat Falls. The two of those together came to about \$143,000. So that is the difference in last year.

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

MR. MURPHY: Can I ask the minister exactly what the consultant was asking around Humber Valley Paving and around the Muskrat Falls Project, and who this consultant was?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Those reports, I understand, have been made public. I think it was Ernst & Young did the Lower Churchill, Muskrat Falls evaluation. It was KPMG did the work on Humber Valley Paving. I think both of those reports may have already tabled or they have been on government's website.

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

MR. MURPHY: I am not quite sure that I saw the KPMG report myself. The Ernst & Young one, I do recall that one.

Mr. Chair, I am a little bit concerned here about the spending – why they would anticipate then this year that under Professional Services they would be spending another \$120,000. What consulting work are they going to be undertaking for that amount of money, number one, versus the \$166,000 that they spent this year?

CHAIR: It is a minute-and-a-half, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You might recall very recently the Premier announced that he wanted to make sure that as an employer in government, we wanted to make sure that we were dealing with harassment issues appropriately, and wanted to make sure that we were responding to the dynamics that exist in workplaces, and making sure we had a safe work environment for all our employees, and that any incidents of harassment of any kind was dealt with quickly, swiftly, and appropriately. To do that he wanted to make sure that our current policies and practices reflect the best practices that could exist in a workplace today.

He announced at that time that we would be engaging and went to the market. In fact, the RFP is already out. I am not sure what the status is in terms of whether it is closed or not, but this is to engage some outside expertise to evaluate current policies and current practices with government to make sure that we have a workplace that is safe from harassment. This amount of money here is a placeholder to ensure we have the money to fund that study when it is done.

CHAIR: Okay, I now recognize someone from the Official Opposition.

Just to clarify in a few seconds, the clock is set at ten minutes. If you choose to use as much as you want of the ten minutes, if you take the

entire ten minutes, we will offer the minister the same amount of time to answer. If you want to get up and down for three, or four, or five questions that will be brief and the minister is brief, you can go back and forth in the ten minutes, I will recognize the same member.

So right now the hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have a few line items. What I will do is I will compile them and then if I could have some co-operation from across the way, I do have just a few questions and I will ask them one at a time. We should not use the ten minutes.

CHAIR: Okay.

MR. EDMUNDS: Under Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, I will go through the line items. I will number them, Mr. Chair. Section 2.5.01.01, Salaries, the budget last year was \$72,300. The actual was \$105,000. This year the budget projection is \$302,600. That is the first question I have on line items.

The second one is under 2.5.03, Labrador Affairs. Purchased Services, last year the budget was \$309,600, the actual was \$205,000, and this year we are seeing a proposed \$192,600.

The third and final line item, Mr. Chair, is under Aboriginal Affairs. Professional Services, last year the budget was for \$10,000, the actual was zero expenditures, and this year we are seeing an increase to \$107,500. Those are the three line items, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the very first question, it was kind of a two-part question there, Mr. Chair, concerning Salaries. We had \$32,700, which was the difference. The delta there, I say to the hon. member across the way, was simply the fact that we had a part of a year with which to put a full ministerial office in place that was not jointly shared with the minister having several portfolios. That was a partial cost for that.

The \$230,300, in the second part of the hon. member's question, has to do with the full complement of the ministerial office. Of course, having to put in communications personnel, having to put in the executive assistant, having to put in all of the positions that normally would not have been there had the minister had several portfolios.

Moving on to the member's third question about Purchased Services and the \$104,600 question there, that was a buffer that, in the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, we had put in place for rent; due to, of course, the markets there fluctuating. We had anticipated we might have to move from the current office location. That buffer was put there in case we did not extend that lease there, which in turn we did. We did sign that extension, so there was no need.

Moving on to the last question from the hon. member, the difference in Professional Services that the member is questioning about has to do with a consultant being purchased for the Labrador Inuit Settlement Agreement Land Use Plan that will be working with the Nunatsiavut Government on. Basically, the land use plan, of course, designating inside the settlement area what can and cannot be done, everything from hunting and fishing, worrying about wildlife sanctuaries, mining, prospecting, et cetera. That is the one-year cost for that consultant which will be put on there for two years, Mr. Chair, at a total cost of \$200,000 across those two years.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a few questions now, the first one is pretty direct. The second one has a couple of little questions attached to it.

In 2015-2016, the attrition plan shows a reduction of twelve positions within Executive Council. I will just ask the minister if there are any of these positions from Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, and if so, how many?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When it comes to attrition, we have earmarked an amount that would be our attrition target, if you would, Mr. Chair. We have no positions, as such, earmarked for that at this particular time but as we move through the year we will adjust and make that decision at the time.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Chair, in the minister's speech on the Budget, tackling the wood project through the Muskrat Falls site, I would just like to know which department bore the cost of getting this wood out. The minister did mention Nalcor playing a role. I would just like to know what that role was, and what role Natural Resources played; how many cords of wood there actually were, where did this wood go, and what the total cost was.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I say to the hon. member, yes, we did have a small wood project, a pilot project if you will. What we did was we partnered with the Department of Natural Resources on a 50-50 split. We took wood. Of course, from the wood that was cut during the Muskrat Falls Project, we put wood in North West River. We put wood at a location just outside – not just outside, but at what we refer to as the Middle Docks for people from Happy Valley-Goose Bay to access, and we put logs down in Sheshatshiu for sawyer training. Of course, there are not a whole lot of wood stoves down there in Sheshatshiu, but in order to continue assisting Sheshatshiu in some of the transferring of skills to some of the youth in the community, we felt that appropriate.

I believe the cost was approximately \$50,000. That was for the shipping, the trucking of the wood, Mr. Chair. We worked Aboriginal organizations, the Labrador Friendship Centre, the Nunatsiavut Government, the community corporations in North West River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay with which to try and get the low income and seniors direct access to the wood in an organized fashion.

To the hon. member from across the way, I will add to the conversation, that recently we have been meeting again with the Nunatsiavut Government. In the past, what we have done with some of the wood from Muskrat Falls is work with the NGC, the Nunatsiavut Group of Companies, associated with Nunatsiavut to get that wood up to some of the elders on the North Coast of Labrador. We are doing that again. We want to revitalize that, Mr. Chair, and we are talking about that partnership and where it is going to go.

I hope that is pretty much it for that topic. If the hon. member has any more questions, I will certainly do my best to answer them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just one question on that topic, and then I think I will ask the third question while I am at it. Mr. Chair, the only other clarification I wanted was you mentioned the role that Nalcor played, if you could just clarify what role Nalcor played in this project.

My final question is on the status of the – I guess you could call it the new Northern Strategic Plan that is being developed. How much is budgeted in 2015-2016 to develop the plan? What stage is the plan at now?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When it comes to Nalcor's involvement with that wood pilot project, it was simply a matter of access to the individuals we contracted out to move the wood from point A to point B. In that regard, it was a matter of getting access to the site and making sure they had what they needed to get to the woodpiles. So there were no other contributions other than that, Mr. Chair, except providing access.

When it comes to the Northern Strategic Plan, Mr. Chair, I think we can all certainly agree that

things have been quite different in Labrador in terms of what is happening with Muskrat Falls, in terms of some of the things we have seen in Labrador West in terms of commodity prices taking a dip, and people not being able to invest in the mining sector at this particular point in time. What we are doing with the Northern Strategic Plan is we currently have a new planning process underway to take all these things into consideration.

In terms of what we are going to be using in that plan in terms of the budgeting, we have the different grants that come with Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. I am just going to list out some of those for the hon. member across the way.

Mr. Chair, under the department – as I briefed the hon. member across the way in the past on as well, and I am certainly looking forward to doing that many more times – \$351,000 for the Labrador Transportation Grooming Subsidy. It is a wonderful program, Mr. Chair. People go in there and they have access to all the different communities where we do not have road access traditionally.

The Combined Councils of course, Mr. Chair, will have \$100,000. They meet regularly. Coming up actually next week, I believe, in Happy Valley – Goose Bay you will see the municipal leaders from all over Labrador getting together and passing resolutions.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. minister the time for that line of questioning is finished.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Sir.

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

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

Just to continue the line of questioning around Labrador Affairs, I do have a couple of policy questions. Hopefully the minister can deal with them.

There were some issues mostly with the federal government program in this particular case, so I am just wondering if the provincial government might have had some conversations with the federal government over the Nutrition North program. There were some problems with regard to pricing of consumer goods as they would reach the people of Labrador. I am just wondering if government might have had any conversations with regard to that. We can start there.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will say to the hon. member across the way, when it comes to, particularly the Districts of Torngat Mountains and Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, our Air Foodlift Subsidy tops up what happens with the Nutrition North program, Mr. Chair. The federal Auditor General did do a review of that particular program. We are in the process of reviewing that. We are certainly going to make ourselves, as the department, available for a briefing on our findings.

In particular, I will say – and this is probably what the member is specifically getting at – the big question around Nutrition North and the Air Foodlift Subsidy is whether or not the cost of the programs and the allocations, both on the federal and provincial side, actually end up in the hands of the consumer where it is intended to be.

What we are going to be paying strict and close attention to, at the federal level, Mr. Chair, are the federal actions on profit margins concerning the people who are in these Northern communities, specifically, who are distributing these goods and availing of the program. We want to make sure that, just as the feds are looking at it right now, if you are going to be availing of the subsidies – and when it comes to fresh fruit and produce and all that stuff – everybody knows what the intent of the program is. The intent is there.

More or less to sum it up, what I am going to say is if they want to avail of the subsidies and the programs, then they are going to have to open their books, so to speak, Mr. Chair. They are going to let us look at the profit margins so

we can identify, in fact, that the intent of the program is achieved and that it gets back to the consumer where it should be.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, that is a direct concern, not to mention the simple fact of the health of the residents along the coast and receiving proper nutrition. So I would certainly hope to hear of a program, an update if you will, from the minister in the coming weeks on that to see what progress they are making along with their federal cousins on that particular matter. I know it is of utmost importance.

Mr. Chair, I will ask the minister – the Lab West Regional Task Force was created three years ago to work on the impacts of mining expansion. I know that we are in period of difficulty right now when it comes to the whole centres around mining. Albeit there is a lot of hope, too, up there in Labrador when it comes to the future development of some potential properties that are up there.

I am just wondering what the Regional Task Force is working on right now, and if they happen to be working on some of the elements of the – well, I guess you could say in this particular case, the economic crisis that we are having to go through right now in Labrador?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a great question. We have all recognized the downturn in terms of the mining sector and what is happening. I say to the hon. member from across the way the total effort at present now is connecting people with opportunities, new education, and working closely with Advanced Education and Skills to get people jobs in Muskrat, to get people back in school to repurpose the skill set for what is happening there. Mr. Chair, we are also talking about tourism opportunities. We are going into the

district to talk about what we can do in the meantime while the downturn is being experienced.

Full effort is also being put onto realizing that this is temporary. Of course, markets being what they are, and being cyclical, we cannot walk away from the mining industry. We still want to explore opportunities. We still want to work with the communities involved, all levels of government, and those interested parties, and we are still seeing them. People still have their claims. There is still a lot of work to be done.

I agree wholeheartedly with the member from across the way. There is still one heck of a lot of promise in Labrador West and in Labrador in general when it comes to mining.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I think that while Labrador is not necessarily all about nickel, it is not all about iron ore. There is iron ore, copper, gold – what would be known as IOCG deposits – and sapphires around the St. Lewis area. So I mean the whole area, Mr. Chair, I guess there is only one way you can say it; Labrador is a gold mine for the Province in some ways.

Mr. Chair, just one last question when it comes to some of the policy matters in Labrador. This comes back to the whole question around the Combined Councils of Labrador. I know the funding for the Combined Councils – I think it was a couple of years ago they were affected. They did end up with a funding cut of about \$20,000 I think. The minister may recall exactly how much it was. I know that the dedicated funding right now on the part of the government is about \$100,000.

I am just wondering if government has given any thought to giving the Combined Councils of Labrador some more funding. We know that Labrador is an expansive area up there, and of course the travel expenses are probably one of the first big costs that they are dealing with. I am just wondering if the minister is considering

adding more funding to the Combined Councils of Labrador in this particular case. That will be my last question with regards to Labrador Affairs.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is another good question from the hon. member from across the way. We certainly recognize the great work that the Combined Councils do. We recognize the value and the amount that we put in there, and right now this year's allocation being \$100,000 for them to congregate, to talk about the issues.

We give them access to guest speakers as well, Mr. Chair. What we do is we go in as ministers of the Crown as well and the MHAs are going to be there. We are going to give them equal access to the politicians to ask questions about policy and things like that.

We are also in a point in time where we are willing, and we will give full and fair consideration to any of the requests that come out of the Combined Councils of Labrador. In terms of putting additional monies in there I think we would certainly entertain them and their requests that would come forward, but at this particular time, I think the allocation is adequate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to the Executive Council minutes.

I just want to point out for the audience at home that items like section 2.2.04, the Office of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, the Minister of Environment and Conservation was so gracious to allow this to happen in the Estimates Committee meeting scheduled in the past. Women's Policy was scheduled and voted upon in Estimates in the same way with what should have happened with the Office of Public Engagement. We are here with very limited

time and those minutes have been voted upon. I do have questions for the minister that I hope he will explain, as he has agreed to do.

Under 2.7.01, Public Engagement, Executive Support, why was the spending of Salaries below budget, \$395,600 compared to a budget of \$417,600? Why was the spending on Employee Benefits reduced from \$600 from a budget of \$2,600? What was planned for Transportation and Communications that did not happen last year? Only \$18,000 was spent of a \$53,900 budget.

CHAIR: Page 2.12, I think.

The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have been very much looking forward to having a chance to discuss the Estimates related to the Office of Public Engagement. As members will be familiar, the office is a part of Executive Council; it falls under Executive Council. That is why it is okay for us to be having this discussion during this debate within the House of Assembly.

As I have said multiple times on multiple days, I am more than happy to answer any questions that the member has. Recognizing we have just over an hour to go, if there are additional questions that the member has, if he provides them I will get him answers. If he wants to meet with me, we can do that, whatever works. If anybody has questions about the budget of the office, I am more than happy to provide the answers, Mr. Chair.

The question that the member asked relates to Salaries. What we have in the Estimates document, we have the original budget, a projected and revised budget for last fiscal year, and a restated budget as well. I will do my best to answer the member's questions.

His first question is related to the changes in the Salaries lines. The first difference of \$19,000 reflects an overrun of the 2014-2015 budget related to insufficient Youth Engagement salary funds. So we offset that by other salary savings within the Office of Public Engagement. We

have expanded our Youth Engagement office. We have more staff working to advance many of our Youth Engagement initiatives within the office. So that is the reason for that change.

The difference of \$32,600 reflects a net decrease in the budget consisting of some savings associated with deficit reduction and some savings associated with the attrition targets. For our attrition target for this fiscal year, we have spread the amount across several budget lines. Of course those two reductions are offset by a need to budget for the 3 per cent salary increase for public servants.

The member also had some questions related to Employee Benefits. So you see slight changes in both of those lines as well. First of all in terms of the projected revised budget, the \$5,100 reflects saving from last year's budget related to a re-profiling of funds to cover the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act review expense requirements.

Throughout the Office of Public Engagement budget there were significant adjustments over 2014-2015 to reflect the need to consolidate funds to support the work that was conducted by the Review Committee. Of course the review is a statutory review required under the act. It needs to happen every five years. Former Premier Marshall made the decision with Cabinet to do the review a year earlier to address concerns. I am glad we did that, it did have a cost, and we had to find funds within the Office of Public Engagement budget to accommodate that.

Those are the explanations on those two line items, and I am happy to answer any other questions the member has.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you.

I appreciate the minister's willingness to meet and also table and provide information as he has suggested on the Office of Public Engagement. Certainly that is something we want to see from this government. We have not quite seen the openness and the accountability aspect.

So if the minister is willing, I would ask a number of questions under 2.7.02, Public Engagement. What purchased services did the office purchase last year? Why was the revised figure under budget? What is the \$78,200 in this year's budget? What grants and subsidies are granted by the office? Why was the revised total of \$3.6 million compared to a budget of \$3,778,400? What was scheduled for this year and will he table them? What was the source of the \$360,300 in provincial revenue last year? Why was there no revenue budgeted from last year or this year?

Then under 2.7.03, Policy, Planning and Research, why was there only \$6,000 spent under Transportation and Communications when the budget was \$76,800? What is the \$51,800 in this year's budget for? For Professional Services why is this revised figure \$38,000 compared to a budget of \$154,500? What was planned that did not happen last year? The same question applies for Purchased Services.

Then under 2.7.04, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy, why were Salaries under budget by \$85,500 and why was there only \$45,800 spent on Transportation and Communications when the budget was \$124,900? Why was Professional Services over budget? What was the \$987,500 spent on?

I believe the minister will confirm that this was the ATIPP review that happened two years early. Why was Purchased Services over budget? How many ATIPP requests were received last year? Can we have a breakdown and by department? The Open Government Initiative that is planned for 2021, how much resources are allocated for it and the cost of operating the Open Government Initiative website?

If the minister does not have enough time in my limited time today, I certainly would appreciate either the documents tabled or provided to me, or the House, so that everybody has that information or maybe made available on the open Government website. As well as the Youth Advisory Committee that has been reinstated, the cost of that, the cost of their transportation budget and the resources that are applied for them to give the recommendations forward for this particular year.

Those matters would be greatly appreciated because those are certain things that I have certainly been pushing for in the House of Assembly to see the reinstatement of the Youth Advisory Committee, and if the minister can highlight any of the positions that have been cut on a go-forward basis.

I realize there is only two minutes to answer those questions, but we do have limited time. It is not like in Estimates Committee where you would have three hours where you can go back and forth. We are debating the entire Executive Council and consolidated revenues, as well as the Human Resource Secretariat and Women's Policy. Those things would not all happen here in the House of Assembly as they have in the past.

So I put forward my questions to the minister. He has agreed that he will table them or provide the answers at a later date. So, I give it to the minister.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Mr. Chair, as long as there is co-operation from both parties opposite, we can answer all the questions here today. As I have said, if this is not sufficient time, I am happy to meet with the hon. member and answer any questions that he has.

I was also prepared, though, to have this discussion during the allocated Estimates time, as I have also made clear in this House. Staff were ready. It was scheduled. I had suggested that we do Office of Public Engagement first. That was not acceptable to the parties opposite because the member did not show up on time for Estimates, which is unfortunate, Mr. Chair.

MR. MITCHELMORE: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KENT: I was fully prepared. Staff were prepared. I am prepared today, under the scrutiny of this public Chamber, to answer any questions that the member has, as I am prepared to do any day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: It is hard to hear, Mr. Chair, with the nonsense from the back row of the Opposition bench.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With co-operation, we can go back and forth. I know I only have twenty seconds left on the clock, but I am happy to answer all of those questions. I made note of as many of them as I could. I am happy to go back and forth or if the Chair will allow me a full ten minutes, I will answer as many of them as I can and we can go on. So, I understand we need an intervening speaker, Mr. Chair, and then I am happy to answer the member's questions.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to just ask a couple of general policy questions here of the minister, if that is possible. When it comes to 2.7.02, Public Engagement, I am just wondering about the cuts in this particular line item, number one. I am just wondering about the cuts, if they are due to travel freezes? Is that a normal part of –

MR. KENT: I am sorry, I cannot hear you.

MR. MURPHY: In 2.7.02 – let me come up with that section again now, I was just looking at it – under the benefits, Transportation and Communications. Are these cuts due to travel freezes on the part of – was that a part of government policy that there would be travel freezes?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair is having trouble hearing the member as well.

MR. KENT: (Inaudible) 2.7.02, Transportation.

MR. MURPHY: Under Public Engagement, yes. I am wondering about the cuts. Are they just travel freezes that government had instituted as part of policy at that particular time – the freezes?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand the format we are following is we are allowing this ten-minute interval for this exchange. So I will answer the member's questions and then get back to the other questions that have been proposed.

Transportation and Communications, 2.7.02; the change of \$16,700 reflects an overrun from the 2014-2015 budget related to increased travel requirements. Included with this overrun is \$10,000 that was re-profiled to cover the ATIPPA review expense requirements.

So again a lot of money was moved from budget line to budget line last fiscal year to utilize resources that were required for the review of the ATIPPA legislation. You are going to see that in multiple budget lines.

The change of \$55,500 reflects a decrease in last year's Budget related to deficit reduction. So it was a reduction of discretionary spending, discretionary travel in light of the Province's fiscal situation. That is the situation there and I am happy to answer the rest of the member's questions.

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

MR. MURPHY: That is great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Under Grants and Subsidies, Minister, can we have a list of the subsidies that might have been passed out to the various Community Youth Networks, youth organizations and such? Allied Youth, I think, was one recipient as well, and the Community Sector Council and Harris Centre. Do you have a list of the grants and subsidies that might have been passed out that we can have a look at?

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KING: A point of order.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader, on a point of order.

MR. KING: Yes, I am just trying to establish the parameters that we are operating in here. In Committee of the Whole it is usually ten minutes for the minister to ask and ten for the other member to respond.

CHAIR: Can I just clarify what we have been doing for the last few minutes?

MR. KING: Yes, you can – no issue with that –

CHAIR: I understand, yes.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KING: – but what had I observed at the beginning, that is why I raised the point of order – sorry, the Member for The Straits – White Bay North would like to speak?

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: What happened at the beginning was the Member for The Straits – White Bay North spoke for just shy of nine minutes, and the minister was given less than a minute to respond. So I am looking for some clarification – you cannot have a ten-minute block and not have equal opportunity to ask a question and respond. In order to make it equal it has to be ten-minute blocks. Maybe you can offer some clarity on that.

CHAIR: Okay – but in that ten-minute block prior to that, the member had asked three questions in series, and the minister had stood three times during the previous ten minutes, and he was at the end of the time. I was prepared to offer the minister the same amount of time as was taken by the member in his question.

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

MR. MURPHY: Oh, it is just to the point of order, Mr. Chair, but I think it is already straightened away that we were asking in ten-minute blocks, and I guess depending on how they would use it, I guess everybody was happy with it. So I think we are all good anyway – but I thank the minister for his concern in the meantime. He took up a couple of seconds of my time –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So I am just wondering if the minister might be able to answer that question again. Can we get a list of the grants and subsidies that would have been given out for, in this particular haste, the \$3,608,700 that was given out last year?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Mr. Chair, we will gladly –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: It is hard to hear, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KENT: We will gladly provide the list of grants. Of course, as we do through this process, whatever information we provide to one party we will provide to the other; that is not a problem.

The grants funding is largely for our Community Youth Networks. We have, I believe, it is twenty-four Community Youth Network sites throughout Newfoundland and Labrador that provides very valuable service to young people – primarily school-age young people, primarily older elementary, junior high, and high school students throughout our Province. Although, there are some exceptions. From talking to MHAs on both sides of the House, I know there is a great appreciation for the work that our

Community Youth Networks do – with very limited resources, I would say, Mr. Chair.

The grants that the member refers to, such as the annual grant to Allied Youth, is under our Grants to Youth Organizations program. I believe that the deadline either just passed or is about to pass for this year. We will move quickly to review those applications and get funds out to the dozens of youth organizations that benefit.

For many of those organizations this is really core funding. There is an annual application process, but many of these organizations have been receiving funding through government. The office has moved over the years, but for the last number of years it has been through the Office of Public Engagement. They rely on those funds annually to fund their operations.

I will gladly provide the list of all the recipients. Of course there will be an announcement in the weeks ahead, hopefully, about this year's grants for youth organizations as well.

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see I have about three-and-a-half minutes left here. Mr. Chair, I just want to get an explanation too from the minister on line 02, Revenue – Provincial in 2.7.02. Could he give an explanation as regards to what that \$360,300 is for?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That revenue line – and the Member for The Straits – White Bay North asked the same question so I will answer it now – reflects a refund of unspent grant funding. So I suspect that relates to our Community Youth Network funds. I will get the detail and certainly provide it to hon. members.

What it does relate to is a refund of unspent grant funding that was returned, hence it was revenue. That was not anticipated, which is why

it was not budgeted in 2014-2015, and it is not being budgeted in 2015-2016. I will certainly get the details and provide them to both members opposite.

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

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

Thanks to the minister for the answer. Mr. Chair, under 2.7.03, Policy, Planning and Research, under Professional Services the department only spent \$38,000 of an appropriated amount of \$154,500. I just want to get an explanation from the minister. Number one, what was the money budgeted for? What did they anticipate that they were going to be spending the money on? Number two, why didn't they spend it? Were there groups, for example, that was due to receive it that did not? What happened there?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are a number of Professional Services line items within our department's budget just like there are in most departments. The Member for The Straits – White Bay North asked the same question so I will cover it now.

In terms of the adjustment in the revised budget, there was savings in the amount of \$116,500, I believe. We re-profiled funding to deal with the ATIPPA review. So what that meant was that a number of other initiatives may not have advanced as far due to spending constraints.

Professional Services would be utilized to support a number of departmental activities; things related to our Open Government Initiative, things related to the community sector, and things related to Youth Engagement. That funding under Policy, Planning and Research exists to support policy planning and research work throughout the office for the multiple functions of the office. A decision was made to re-profile a chunk of that funding to support the ATIPPA review.

In terms of the Budget for this year, there is a net decrease of \$85,000. There was \$25,000 for the Open Government Initiative and we re-profiled that in from other areas of OPE. We have taken some money out of that Professional Services line for the creation of the new Collaboration Incentive Fund. Mr. Chair, \$55,000 is going into that new fund that we announced during the Budget. We have also taken \$55,000 out of that budget line as part of the deficit reduction exercise as well.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I think the time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to move to page 4 of Executive Council summary for – sorry, my apologies, page 2.11, Women's Policy Office, 2.6.01 please.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement on a point of order.

MR. KENT: Mr. Chair, there were several questions by the Member for The Straits – White Bay North that I have not had an opportunity to answer. If the member will give me time, I will answer those questions now and then we can certainly move along.

I just want clarification from the Opposition. Are we finished with Office of Public Engagement or are we not? I would like to answer the questions.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you.

Just for clarity, was that no point of order there, Mr. Chair? I just want to make sure.

Under the Women's Policy Office I would ask the following questions. Under Salaries there

was an increase of \$200,000 in 2015-2016. I would ask why? Are these temporary positions?

Under Transportation and Communications, this office underspent its budget by \$100,000. I would ask why? What is typically covered in this area with regard to Transportation and Communications for the Women's Policy Office?

Under Professional Services, this office underspent by almost \$100,000 here again. I would ask why? There was a significant increase in the budget for 2015, almost \$230,000 higher. I would ask what exactly the government is budgeting for here under Professional Services at an amount of \$230,000?

Under Purchased Services, this office underspent by \$200,000 here. I would ask why? I would also follow up and ask what are you planning to purchase this year as part of the budgeted line item related to Purchased Services?

Mr. Chair, the area that I would like to focus a little bit more deeply on as well would be the area under Grants and Subsidies. This office underspent by \$550,000. I would remind those listening at home, and certainly members of this House as well, that in Estimates 2014 the minister said that money, which was \$550,000, was money that was destined to accompany the rollout of the new Violence Prevention Initiative Action Plan, which to date we have not seen from this government.

I would assume that would explain why the money was underspent. I would ask the question if you budgeted for it in 2014 and you did not actually execute on it, don't you think that maybe you certainly did not commit to a plan, and actually execute it the way that you had promised you would? From what I understand, that money is not budgeted as part of this year's Budget.

Under the area of Grants and Subsidies as well, I would ask why isn't this unspent money of \$550,000 being carried over to 2015-2016. Some would assume the \$500,000 that was supposed to be for a Violence Prevention Initiative Action Plan that did not get completed and that is still being touted by this government

that it is important – there is no money there to actually execute on that and deliver on that. As has been brought up in this House many times, I believe that amount is enough to pay for the operations related to the annual expenses related to a family violence prevention court.

Sadly, that was a service in the area of violence prevention and safety for women, children, and men who are in abusive situations. That was money that this government cut several years ago and advocates have been advocating that this be brought back in. It is surprising that the government did not see fit to redeploy that money last year, and actually act quicker and faster to be able to provide the services for families and women and children who needed the supports.

As well, under Grants and Subsidies continued – there is \$2.5 million in Grants and Subsidies here. I would ask for clarification on the organizations and the initiatives that are specifically receiving funding in 2015-2016. I would ask the minister if he would – I should say, I ask the acting minister if he would table the list in the House. With that, I will stop and give the minister a chance to answer the questions.

CHAIR: Okay, the minister has six minutes or so. Or up to ten, if you require it. We will extend it to six minutes.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are a number of points being raised in the hon. member's questions. I will see if I can touch on each of them. I want to make sure I do not miss anything.

A couple of things; the grants number that she talked about, there is a forecast this year of \$2.5 million in the Grants and Subsidies. Women's Policy Office provides supports to a number of community-based organizations that do some great work themselves on behalf of the residents they represent.

A part of that funding, a million dollars of it will go to eight women's centres around the Province. We have one in Bay St. George; there is one in Corner Brook; there is one Gander; Labrador West; the Gateway Status of Women

Council; the Makkovik status of women council; the St. John's Status of Women's Council; and the Status of Women Central – a total of \$1,021,000.

Then, Mr. Chair, there are ten regional anti-violence groups. The total they will get would be some \$820,000. There is one in Burin; there is Central-West; the coalition in Avalon East; the Communities Against Violence; Eastern Regional Committee Against Violence; the Northern Committee Against Violence; Roads to End Violence; the Southeastern Coalition to End Violence; the Violence Prevention Labrador; and, then the Western Regional Coalition. Those get a total of \$820,000.

Then there is the Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, they will get \$105,000; the Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault, Crisis and Prevention Centre, they get another \$110,000; the Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador, they get \$100,000; the Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network, they get \$100,000; and the Aboriginal Women's Violence Prevention Initiative will get \$200,000.

There is a block here – in fact, it is a small increase. There is a block of miscellaneous because throughout the year there will be various issues that may arise that may require some special funding. So there is a block of \$85,000 there that provides for a miscellaneous amount.

One of the things this Budget does this year – and there was a lot of discussion around this earlier on before the Budget was delivered in the House. There was some concern about whether or not these organizations, and many others who do great work in the Province, were going to have their budgets impacted as a result of the fiscal position the Province finds itself in. Prior to the Budget, Mr. Chair, the Province, this government, recognizing the great work they do, made a commitment that all these organizations would maintain the core funding they had, that was allocated from previous years, and we would carry forward the same number into this fiscal year to support the great work they do.

This Grants and Subsidies is an amount that is significant. It is an amount that reflects, I think,

our recognition, and values the work that is done by many of these organizations; hence, our commitment to maintaining last year's funding level. That is the issue of where the money goes and what the grants are used for and who would get them.

I think one of the other questions that arose here is around some of the other changes. I think there was a reference particularly to Professional Services and Purchased Services, and why the spending last year was much less than what was actually allocated.

You might recall, Mr. Chair, one of the things we announced was the intimate partner violence initiative. The money for that initiative was placed in this budget allocation in Women's Policy, but the actual initiative is the Department of Justice's initiative, and more precisely, a partnership between the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the RCMP.

The money was allocated in last year's Budget to assist with that initiative. There were some delays in moving that forward, and the Minister of Justice may be able to provide you a little more detail with respect to the program itself. In terms of the budget allocation for the program, it was embedded in the Women's Policy Office. The money is still there this year.

So you can see where the allocations – for example, under Professional Services the number \$334,000, and \$209,000 for Purchased Services. The money that has been allocated for that intimate partner violence initiative is embedded in Women's Policy and is spread over a couple of those budget areas.

What you are seeing here, Mr. Chair, is the money that is committed to the project staying embedded in the budget. The money will then be used by the Department of Justice and, as I said, more particularly by the two police forces as they move forward with their initiative. I do not know if that answers the question with respect to the variances in some of those salaries.

The other part of it was in terms of the related revenue issue here. There is a revenue stream that came back in 2014-2015 that is not in this year. One of the things that happens is all those

community organizations that I just talked about that get grants on an annual basis to maintain their core programs and services, if they do not spend that on an annual basis, it gets returned. So what you are seeing here is last year, the \$77,000 came back kind of late in the –

CHAIR (Littlejohn): I remind the hon. minister his time has expired.

MR. WISEMAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MR. WISEMAN: Can I get a chance to finish my answer?

CHAIR: By leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

CHAIR: Okay, by leave, Minister.

MR. MITCHELMORE: A point of order.

CHAIR: A point of order, the hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Yes, because the Deputy Premier got up earlier and made commentary on this matter –

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Chair, (inaudible) give leave for the Minister of Finance to finish his answer.

CHAIR: Leave to finish your answer, Minister.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

What happens is the money comes back into –

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

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Chair, the health care budget is \$3 billion. The Office of Public Engagement is \$7 billion –

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to respond to the question.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will try to get it out this time. The \$77,000; as I was saying, money that they do not spend they return at the end of the year. As it turned out, the previous year – not 2014-2015 but the previous year 2013-2014 – the accumulative surpluses got returned, but they got returned too late to be captured financially in the financial records in 2013-2014. So they are recorded here. This was not a claw back of last year's money. This was purely –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No leave.

CHAIR: No leave.

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

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

Before I ask a specific question, I have to say I am very, very concerned that we do not have either a full Minister Responsible for the Status of Women or an Acting Minister Responsible for the Status of Women to be responding to these questions. We usually do this in a full Estimates session in terms of looking at the Status of Women and Women's Policy Office. I do not know what kind of message this is sending to the women of Newfoundland and Labrador, but I can tell you, Mr. Chair, I do not think it is a very good message. I am very, very concerned.

To think how this government is talking about being so committed to the issue of violence against women and \$1 million of a measly budget for women's issues not spent last year. That is absolutely shocking. I am appalled, and to think of the suffering that women are going through, and right now in this economic situation that we face ourselves in, that women are mostly affected by the downfall in the economic situation.

It is inexcusable to not have a Minister Responsible for the Status of Women to be answering the questions here today. It is absolutely ridiculous. If this is what this government thinks of women of Newfoundland and Labrador, well I think it is a sorry message.

Mr. Chair, I am very interested in what the Minister of Finance was saying that \$77,000 was returned from money the previous year. I know and have spoken to almost every women's group in this Province and there is not a women's group in this Province who does not need every single penny that they get because of the great services they provide, and they provide services on a shoestring budget. I would be very interested asking the Minister of Finance to give us a list of the money that was returned, who it was returned from, and why it was returned.

Also, Mr. Chair, women's centres were guaranteed certain core funding. When they were guaranteed core funding they were also guaranteed a 5 per cent increase every year in order to be able to keep up with the increase of costs that they experience. In 2011, not only did they not get their 5 per cent increase, they actually got a 5 per cent decrease, which meant they were cut by 10 per cent. They did not get their 5 per cent increase, plus they were cut by 10 per cent.

There has been nothing done by this government to address that budget shortfall, even though we see a million dollars was not spent last year. If they were getting the promised 5 per cent, they would have been up to \$146,000 a year, Mr. Chair, rather than \$127,000. That is a shortfall of \$19,000 to women's centres that are doing life-saving work.

I am asking the minister why, when we see a surplus, when there was a million dollars not

spent – why was that not given as the promised 5 per cent increase to the women's centres across the Province? The other question that I have, Mr. Chair, for the minister, if \$500,000 was supposed to be for the rollout of the new Violence Prevention Initiative why was that not done?

I also know that there was a commitment to do a series of educational videos on LGBTQ issues that were to go hand in hand with the anti-violence and the educational program that was rolled out in the schools all over the Province. There was a promise to do that. Where are those ads? I do not see them. Were they budgeted for? If so, why was that money not spent?

All the money, when we look at Professional Services – and I am also wondering the Professional Services, the \$334,000 going to Justice, to the RNC, and the RCMP, why is that not coming out of a Justice budget? Why is that money not spent within the women's community to do the programs that are so desperately needed? It is the same with the \$209,000.

I know that there has been an application from the St. John's Status of Women Council for a program called SHOP for \$127,000. They asked for that money for a full-time worker to work with women who are sex workers, some of the most vulnerable women in our Province. They will close their door in September if they do not receive this funding.

They work with over 100 sex workers in the St. John's area. They work with them and they get them methadone, they take them to court, and they deal with their sureties. They go to Clarenville and work with these women who then come back into town. They handle the sexually transmitted infections that are rampant right now in that community. To not fund this project I believe would be a mistake. Yet, again, we see \$1 million that was allocated, that was budgeted, in the area of Women's Policy and not spent.

I will sit down at that point, Mr. Chair, and hopefully we can get some answers.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has six minutes to respond.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just quickly, the issue of the LGBT video, that is in the Department of Education. The reason it is not here is because it is in the Department of Education's budget. So when you did the Estimates for the Department of Education that would have been an appropriate question for the Minister of Education. Just to clarify what is relevant to these Estimates.

The other thing, Mr. Chair, I just want to go back to the point the member made at the very beginning. I think what is really important for the Women's Policy Office and for the women of Newfoundland and Labrador and people who are actively involved, whether it is supporting issues with respect to women or dealing with women who are in crisis, regardless of what their circumstance is and what program or service is being provided and funded by government, it is not as much about who stands in this House to answer questions.

Members of the Opposition, whether it is in Estimates or whether it is in Question Period, can stand and ask a question of government and government will be providing an answer to anyone who asks a question in the House and the answer will be provided by a minister on behalf of government. The critical thing, it is not who answers the questions; the critical thing is the commitment that government makes to the issue at hand.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WISEMAN: So let's talk about this for a second.

MS C. BENNETT: (Inaudible).

MR. WISEMAN: The Member for Virginia Waters will get her chance in a few moments to stand and ask questions. I would ask her to let me answer the question uninterrupted.

The kinds of commitments we have made this year – not embedded in this budget, just to make sure the member opposite understands, not embedded in the Women's Policy budget. We have, in fact, made a big commitment this year in the Department of Justice's budget to return the violence prevention court back to the

Province – a new model of delivery, Mr. Chair. That is a commitment that we made. The Premier made a commitment that we would reinstate that.

It is not in this budget. No, it is not here. It is not a part of the Estimates that we are talking about today, but it is embedded – so whether it gets funded in one department or another, the fact that it gets done is what is important. It is embedded the Department of Justice's budget.

I am assuming when this House in Committee debated with the Minister of Justice or the Attorney General about Justice-related issues, I am assuming – if members had interest – they raised the question there and got the explanation that was required and they understand how the program would work and they understand the funding – a clear commitment, Mr. Chair.

The intimate partner violence initiative, again, I commented on it a moment ago with respect to the funding that is embedded in here for that, and the fact that it is embedded in the Women's Policy Office and not in Justice is because it is a partnership between the RNC and the RCMP. The fact that it is a commitment to that, it is a reflection of this government's commitment to the issues that are important to women in this Province.

The Violence Prevention Initiative, Phase II, major commitment – building on the great work done in Phase I. That program, Phase II, will be rolled out in the very near term, and members opposite, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will get to see the value and the benefits of Phase II that builds on some of the great work that was done in Phase I.

Phase I, just to name a couple of things: the public awareness campaign like the purple ribbon campaign – a great initiative, Mr. Chair, in Phase I. We will build on those things in Phase II. The Violence Awareness and Action Training, and Respect Aging training programs, which are offered Province-wide today – another great initiative in Phase I that we will build on in Phase II. That is another example of the commitment we have made to the Women's Policy issues in this Province.

Whether or not the budget is in one department or another, whether or not one minister speaks on it, does not really make any difference. The critical thing, what is really important to the women of Newfoundland and Labrador, that the issues that are important to them and that government have a responsibility for, they get addressed. They get addressed and people make a commitment to ensure the programs and services are available to them. That is what is important.

So, the member raises questions around the budget, the allocation that we see here in this year's budget, and there has been a discussion around a million dollars being not spent and why that was not returned to some other area. Mr. Chair, the money is still embedded in the department, this particular allocation. The Women's Policy Office still has that allocation.

I just want to clarify something very clearly. As I said a moment ago, \$500,000 of those funds, or close to \$500,000 of those funds are associated with the initiative of the intimate partner violence program that has been delivered by the RNC and the RCMP. There were some delays in the implementation. The process is well underway now. The commitment is there and the program is being delivered by the Department of Justice. I am certain that the Minister of Justice would be only too glad to answer some questions for you with respect to what the status of that program may in fact be.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, on a point of order.

MS ROGERS: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I believe that the Minister of Finance has not accurately reflected the issue that if the budget last year was \$4 million, but only \$3 million was spent, then the budget is back to \$4 million. There is a million dollars not allocated to Women's Policy.

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for the remaining time.

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Chair, let me try it again.

I only have a couple of seconds, so why would I bother to try and answer a question? When I get up on my feet again, I will get a chance to answer the member's question.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. member his time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, I have to say, I am surprised. Last year in Estimates my understanding was the Women's Policy Office was debated as part of Estimates, and this year it was shifted to the discussion we are having today, which has certainly reduced the amount of time and attention that this office is allowed to have debated in this House of Assembly.

It is shameful, considering that we have now had the third member opposite get up and speak about women's policy issues and say things like: what we do is not important, what is important is that women's issues are understood. Well, Mr. Chair, I can tell you that the women in Newfoundland and Labrador very clearly understand a million dollar cut in an office that is supposed to be designed to support their needs and their voices in this House of Assembly where they are drastically, drastically underrepresented.

The minister commented, during his answers to my hon. colleague's questions earlier, about the Purple Ribbon campaign. Well, I am sure the listening audience at home – many of which have seen these purple ribbons on vehicles throughout the Province – would also be very much appreciative to know that this office has printed, manufactured, and distributed 500,000 of these ribbons.

Now, Mr. Chair, I think I am pretty decent with math. When we have a population that is slightly over 500,000 people and we print 500,000 purple ribbons, I can tell you the priorities of this government are not about making sure that women and children and people who are in crisis are protected, with a delayed Violence Prevention Initiative that they should have had two years ago. I think the people of the Province and the women of the Province see through that very clearly.

Here are my general questions that I would ask, very quickly: Will you be purchasing respect for women magnets and ribbons and pins this year? If so, how many of each, and what is the total cost of all? Violence awareness and action training, we understand this training is going to be revamped; the VAAT training is going to be revamped. When will it be revised, and when will the training program be relaunched? What consultations have happened to make sure that training is happening in the best interests of the people who actually need to provide this service, and that it delivers the service of those who are actually in need?

I would ask, when will you launch the violence prevention action plan Phase II and the Domestic Violence Court? What role, if any, will the Women's Policy Office play in establishing these two courts and in the exploration project for the court in Labrador?

With regard to the work of the Regional Coordinating Committees under the Violence Prevention Initiative I would ask the minister – although this minister who is answering the questions today is not the acting minister for women's issues. The acting minister for women's issues in this government is the Premier. I remind those listening at home, it is the same individual who said that those of us in the House who happen to be female should pick and choose the questions that we ask.

I would ask, Mr. Chair, can you highlight some of the initiatives of the Regional Coordinating Committees that they have led in their communities? Are these groups evaluated for their effectiveness each year, or is the funding just continued automatically?

Under the offender program, will the Violence Prevention Initiative provide any funding for offender programs this year? Under Emergency Protection Orders, has the department conducted an evaluation of these orders to see if they have benefited victims of violence? It is said that a woman is most in danger during an estrangement, and in this case, the partner knows where she is. Has there been any evaluation from victims of violence who have availed of this to determine whether these people found the EPO effective in protecting them from harm?

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women; we understand the current president is finishing up her term and that term has not been renewed. Can you tell us about the process by which that decision was made? Can you advise this House as to how the council will be consulted on the decision of the replacement of the future president for the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women? How will that decision to appoint a successor be made? That is the end of my questions.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to remind members opposite – and the reference was made to the Estimates. Let's go back to what we are doing here today. When the Budget is read, we then deal with the Estimates of each department and each expenditure area. There are two ways to do that. They get referred out to one of three standing committees of the House, or they get dealt with in the Committee of the Whole. This is a committee of the House of Assembly. The three standing committees are also a committee of this House. There are four committees that deal with the Budget. There are three committees that are standing committees together with the Committee of the Whole. This is a Committee of the Whole.

So whether the Estimates get dealt with here or get dealt with as a part of one of the Estimates that get referred out to one of the three standing committees, they are dealing with the Estimates. What are Estimates? Estimates deal with the budget allocations that are set out in the Budget plan. This Estimate document that we all have lays out by category –

MS ROGERS: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: A point of order, the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

MS ROGERS: I believe, Mr. Chair, the Minister of Finance is not accurately reflecting the difference between what happens at a regular Estimates Committee when there are (inaudible).

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Let's establish a couple of things so that everybody understands the opportunities that exist to provide information and to get information. Members of this House, anyone in – in fact some of you, I suspect, have already taken advantage of this. I know for a fact that some of you have, based on some areas that I have a responsibility for.

Members of this House can at any time at all meet with, whether it is the Women's Policy Office or other areas of government, if you want to get an understanding of issues around policy, issues around programs or services. I suspect that some of you have already done that.

If you want to have one, just make arrangements with the appropriate minister or the deputy minister in a particular area. You can sit and have a discussion at your leisure and explore areas of policy, understand programs and services, understand how they are delivered, raise questions if you wish –

MS ROGERS: A point of order.

CHAIR: A point of order, the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

The Minister of Finance knows that the process of Estimates is a public process having a –

CHAIR: I am sorry, there is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Yes, Mr. Chair, let me try again.

What I am trying to establish is an understanding and some clarity around members having questions around Estimates versus members having questions around policy, and how programs and services may work.

So I say, Mr. Chair, very clearly, if members opposite wish to have some understanding –

MS C. BENNETT: A point of order.

CHAIR: A point of order, the hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Public Estimates are about discussing policy. I would ask the minister to remember that.

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Chair, policy and Estimates, there is a linkage, yes. All I am suggesting to you here is if members would want to have a clear understanding of programs and services there are lots of opportunities to do that. As I have said, members opposite may have taken advantage of some of those chances already with various departments.

So I say, Mr. Chair, with respect to the Estimates themselves, if you had questions around where the money is going and where the money is coming from, then we are able to address that in the Estimates. In so doing, there are maybe some tie-ins to some policy. Very clearly, if you compare what was – well we spent some time last week with the Department of Finance Estimates and we had a great discussion around the Estimates themselves. Where the department –

MS ROGERS: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: A point of order, the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

MS ROGERS: I would like to ask the minister how much time he has spent with the Women's Policy Office and with the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women so he can ask –

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Chair, if there are members opposite who have some issues with respect to Women's Policy programs, or policies of government that have an impact on women in this Province, or issues with respect to the Women's Policy Office itself and some of the policies and some of the programs that they have; if they have not already done so I would extend an invitation, either if you wish some minister in the House, or the department itself would only be too glad to set up an in-service for you to be able to answer any and all questions you may have about programming.

If you wanted to expand on some of the questions that you have raised here today, by all means I will make the opportunity available to you with officials in the department-

CHAIR: I remind the hon. member his time has expired.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, I will take this moment since the minister gave it to me. I will thank the staff from the Provincial Advisory Council and I will thank the staff in the Women's Policy Office who have met with me and who have been available to answer questions.

Quite frankly that is the reason why I am asking those policy questions in this House. Certainly those who are working in this area, besides the people who are working in government and besides the people who are working in community; all of these questions are questions that they have brought to me that I have every right and every responsibility to bring to this hon. House.

I will ask the minister if he will table the answers to the questions or at least review Hansard and provide the information. Maybe if he is not familiar with the answers – since he is pinch-hitting for the minister who is responsible – the minister who is responsible can provide the information.

With the Chair's permission I will move to 3.1.05, Strategic Human Resource Management.

CHAIR: Subhead 3.1.05, just to make sure I heard you correctly.

MS C. BENNETT: Yes.

CHAIR: Subhead 3.1.05, Strategic Human Resource Management.

MS C. BENNETT: Understanding the time on the clock, for those at home I have about eight minutes to talk about a significant portion of the budget. I will try to ask the questions as quickly as I can to allow the minister as much time as he can have to answer the questions.

Under the area of Salaries, in this particular area the government underspent by \$741,000. I ask for an explanation of that. They are budgeting over \$1 million more than was spent last year. There is a substantial increase in the spending in the Strategic Human Resource Management office. I would ask the minister to provide clarity on that \$1 million.

Under the area of Transportation and Communications, this office underspent by \$71,500. I would ask why? Under Professional Services, there was a budget in the prior fiscal year of \$12,500 and none of that money was spent. I would ask the minister if he might provide an explanation. In the area of Purchased Services, again there was an underspending of \$225,300. I would ask why?

The people who are observing this debate and listening to this debate at home, or the discussion at home, might be asking why is the Opposition Finance critic asking questions about underspending? Part of the reason for that is understanding what the actual impetus of that underspending was, and if that underspending was a result of this government's implementation of a discretionary spending freeze last November that they have since lifted. I think the people of the Province want to understand exactly the fundamental reasons why those underspending line items happened.

We move over to the area of 3.1.06.

CHAIR: Subhead 3.1.06, Payroll and Compensation Benefits.

MS C. BENNETT: Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Salaries there in the area of Payroll and Compensations Benefits, ironically were overspent by \$900,000, which I believe is the same amount of money that the Finance Minister is trying to claw back from pensioners who were overpaid on pensions, Mr. Chair.

They spent \$3,446,000 last year in the prior fiscal year, but are only budgeting just over \$2.7 million this year. So the questions would be: What positions have been cut? Where they temporary positions, and if he would provide a breakdown of all fund allocations related to the overspend of \$903,000, as well as the line items that make up the difference between the \$3.4 million and the \$2.7 million?

As we move down to Benefits Administration, under Salaries –

CHAIR: Subhead 3.1.07?

MS C. BENNETT: Subhead 3.1.07.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MS C. BENNETT: Thank you.

Under Salaries there is an overspend here of \$145,000. I would ask why.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will provide the minister the remaining five minutes to answer the questions.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will try to be as quick as I can. I understand there is a total of five minutes left in this whole exercise.

CHAIR: Seven.

MR. WISEMAN: I will try to be as quick as I possibly can.

On the 3.1.05, Mr. Chair, we have a number of what we refer to as shared service units. Across government, we have clustered groups of human resource professionals to provide services and supports to a variety of departments. They assist, and some of them are a dedicated unit to one department, if the department is large enough. Some units are responsible for a variety of departments that may be smaller and have less demand.

Mr. Chair, one of the key areas of responsibility – which is one of the things the member opposite zeroed in on. One of the key areas of their responsibility is to provide training for very specialized areas. In Occupational Health and Safety, for example, there is first aid; in the case of the RNC, there is gun safety. So there is a variety of training opportunities that are provided to staff that are mandatory. These are core things that employees need to have to ensure they work in a safe environment and they are protected in their workplace.

I say, Mr. Chair, one of the areas this unit is responsible for is just that. That gets costed under the area of Purchased Services. When you see last year's budget of \$1.3 million and what was actually spent was \$1.75 million, then what that reflects is there were not as many of those training sessions conducted last year as there was forecasted to be.

What we now have done, Mr. Chair, the budget for next year getting back up to \$1.3 million is a reflection of our recouping those opportunities that we did not do last year. That training will continue into this year. We need to have the necessary funding to ensure that those core areas of safety training get provided to our employees.

Mr. Chair, that obviously is one of the things that the member opposite had posed. The other thing she had asked earlier as well was around the – I think the next area was 3.1.06, which is Payroll and Compensation Benefits. I think if I captured the question correctly, there was a concern about the Salaries and why there was a budget last year of \$2.5 million and an expenditure of \$3.4 million which is a huge gap, Mr. Chair, and it is a fair question. As I said a moment ago in answering another question, embedded in this salary item here is the compensation that is paid to employees who are

working in those respective areas but also captured under the salary heading is the area of severance.

Last year, Mr. Chair, there was two things that happened in this area. There were four individuals who retired, moved on or left – I am not sure if they retired or just left government but either way, they either left government, left the employment of government or retired, and they were entitled to a severance payment. Mr. Chair, these four individuals, their severance payments were captured in this area.

The second thing that happened, there were a number of positions within government – every employee has a particular classification that dictates their salary level and if their duties and responsibilities change, they have an opportunity to request a reclassification. There were a number of individuals who went through that reclassification review process and as a result of that had their classifications adjusted upward, retroactively, and there was some \$400,000 that was spent as a result of that retroactive application of the reclassification of those employees.

That, Mr. Chair, speaks to the difference in the Salaries for what was in the budget and what was actual for last year. Just speaking now to – which I think was the other part of the member's question – why then in 2015-2016 would the budget be again up at the \$2.7 million level. Staffing levels have remained relatively the same, but recall as well, Mr. Chair, that employees ended up with a 3 per cent salary increase last year. They resulted in a 3 per cent salary increase over last year and so that is reflected in the growth in the budget. The other one was there was a small adjustment as a result of one of these units having been in rental space that is no longer required.

I just want to make sure, Mr. Chair, that I am capturing all of the questions being posed. I think the other one was around section 3.1.07, if I am not mistaken, Benefits Administration. I want to make sure I captured the question. I think that too was around the salary difference and why there was a salary difference.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. member his time has expired.

MR. WISEMAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

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

I would like to ask the Acting Minister Responsible for the Status of Women – the Acting Minister for the Acting Minister Responsible for the Status of Women – if there is a commitment to fund the SHOP application that is for \$127,000 to work with women sex workers in the area of St. John's. Also, I am asking the minister if there is a commitment to increase the funding to women's centres by 5 per cent, which was promised years ago by this Administration.

I would also like to ask the minister to explain to me why is a \$500,000 cut in Grants in Subsidies. That means \$500,000 less for women's programming, for women's centres, and projects across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Finance and President of Treasury Board, you have fifty seconds.

MR. WISEMAN: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure – there are multiple questions there and I think I have thirty-eight seconds to answer the questions. So trying to deal with those multiple questions is going to be difficult. So, in fairness to the question and in fairness to the member opposite, I want to make sure you get the answers to the questions, and I cannot do justice to either one of them in twenty-three seconds. So why don't I commit to you to give you the answers in writing to the ones that you just posed because this debate is over in twenty-three seconds. Not only is my time up, but the debate is over totally. So in fairness to you, I will give you those answers in writing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: I would like to know when you might be able to do that, Sir?

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: I am sorry, Government House Leader, just one second, please. We need to call the clauses.

MR. KING: No problem.

CLERK: Executive Council.

CHAIR: Executive Council.

CLERK: Subheads 1.1.01 through 2.2.03 inclusive.

CHAIR: Executive Council; shall 1.1.01 through 2.2.03 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 2.2.03 carried.

CLERK: Subheads 2.2.05 through 2.6.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Calling 2.2.05 through 2.6.02 inclusive.

Shall the clauses carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.2.05 through 2.6.02 carried.

CLERK: Subheads 3.1.01 through 4.1.05.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 through 4.1.05 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 4.1.05 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, total carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Executive Council without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, Estimates of Executive Council carried without amendment.

CLERK: The Legislature.

CHAIR: The Legislature.

CLERK: Subheads 1.1.01 through 6.1.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall the clauses of the Legislature carry, 1.1.01 through 6.1.01?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 6.1.01 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, total carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Legislature carried without amendment?

On motion, Estimates of the Legislature carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move that the Committee and report having passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Committee of Supply.

CHAIR: The motion is that we rise and report Estimates without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair of the Committee of Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Consolidated Fund Services, Executive Council, and the Legislature.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report that they have passed without amendment the Estimates of Executive Council, the Estimates of the Legislature, and the Estimates of Consolidated Fund Services.

When shall the report be received?

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The House now stands
adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned
until tomorrow, Monday, at 1:30 p.m.