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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin, the Chair would like to recognize in the public gallery today a group of Special Olympic Newfoundland and Labrador athletes, board members and supporters, fresh from the 2016 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games experience last week in Corner Brook.

We welcome you to our galleries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Also today we welcome Major Michael Pretty, who will be the focus of a Member's statement today, as well as Neil Burgess and Louis Marion.

Today I'd also like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery Kyle Johnson, a level II student from Waterford Valley High School, who is job shadowing me today.

Welcome, Kyle.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Members' statements.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Lewisporte – Twillingate.

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

I rise in this hon. House here today to recognize Deborah Bourden and Wilma Hartman of Anchor Inn Hotel & Suites in Twillingate on winning the Accommodator of the Year Award last week at the Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador Annual Conference.

Deborah and Wilma purchased the Anchor Inn in 2011 and have developed a successful hotel and restaurant that provides a cultural and historic experience to their visitors.

They have worked tirelessly not only to improve their own business, but to improve tourism in

their community and throughout Central Newfoundland. They have demonstrated a commitment to the long-term development of the tourism industry through their extensive involvement and leadership at various levels.

From co-developing a regional map that lists and locates all tourism operators and being instrumental in organizing the first annual Digital Arts Festival in September 2015 as a way to extend the tourism season, these owner/operators are great ambassadors to the region, the province and the tourism industry as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Deborah Bourden and Wilma Hartman on this prestigious award and the contribution they are making to the tourism industry in Twillingate and throughout the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels.

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a privilege to stand in this hon. House today and tell Noah Hunt's story. Noah is 12 years old. Two years ago, what began as a simple tummy ache escalated to a loss of 50 pounds. He was a very sick boy.

After weeks in the hospital, Noah's health took a step in the right direction. He began to feel better. As Noah's health improved, he started to wonder if there were things he could do to help find a cure.

This February, Noah – with the help of his parents, grandparents, family and friends – organized the first ever Noah Hunt Fishing Derby. It took place on Spurrell's Pond and over 140 people participated in the event.

After all was said and done, the event raised over \$3,700. As a reward for his efforts, Noah has been selected as the honorary chair for the Gander Gutsy Walk for Crohn's and Colitis for 2016.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Noah Hunt for this well-deserved honour, and thank him for doing his part to combat this serious disease.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge an organization and its leader for remembering Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who served and died in various parts of the world, during World War I. I speak of the Trail of the Caribou project team and their leader retired Major Michael Pretty of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. For the past 10 years these volunteers have researched every aspect of where Newfoundland and Labrador soldiers from World War I are buried. Their promise was to ensure that all members of the Newfoundland Regiment, who had died, would be remembered.

Their quest has taken them around the world to ensure all graves are identified and marked. At each grave site the team places a beach rock and a Newfoundland flag. They also perform a private commemoration service including the playing of the "Ode to Newfoundland," the "Last Post" and the reciting of the Act of Remembrance.

On Remembrance Day, Major Pretty and his wife completed the team's quest by laying a beach rock and Newfoundland flag on the grave of Captain Gerry Goudie of Northern Arm.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this hon. House to join me in congratulating and thanking Major Pretty and the Trail of the Caribou project team.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Placentia West – Bellevue.

MR. BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the heroism of a young man from

Sunnyside, in my District of Placentia West – Bellevue.

James Seaward was home over the Christmas holidays from his posting in the Canadian Armed Forces at CFB Shilo, Manitoba.

After spending the holidays visiting with his parents, Warrick and Shelley, he decided to drive his vehicle back to Manitoba. En route, while driving through Ontario, he witnessed a car go off the road and into a lake. He immediately stopped his vehicle, entered the water, with no regard for his own life.

The passenger of the vehicle, a lone woman, was submerged in over four feet of water. He pried the door open, cut off her seatbelt, put her over his back and carried her to safety. She now credits him with saving her life.

Mr. Seaward continued on to Manitoba, and it was only through media reports that his commanders at CFB Shilo learned of his act of heroism.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join with me in recognizing James and celebrating this act of valiance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to make a statement in this hon. House about Lt. Col. (Padre) Thomas Nangle and his recent designation as a National Historic Person on February 15th by the federal government.

The Deputy Chief of Police (Ret.) Gary F. Browne, author, historian and Member of the National Order of Merit of Police Forces worked relentlessly for more than 15 years to have Padre Nangle officially recognized.

Gary was astounded that Padre Nangle's efforts for World War I as chaplain to the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the Director of War Graves, Registration, Inquiries and Exploit Memorials, has all but been forgotten. Padre

Nangle was responsible for the iconic Trail of the Caribou – we heard just recently about – in France and Belgium, for the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial Park in France and for the completion of the Newfoundland National War Memorial here in St. John's on Duckworth Street.

Gary co-authored with Darrin McGraw a riveting book entitled *Soldier Priest in the Killing Fields of Europe: Lt. Col. (Padre) Thomas Nangle*. We thank Gary for his hard work and dedication to remember Padre Nangle for his services to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Topsail – Paradise, the Opposition Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the honour of attending the Depart with Dignity Flag Raising Ceremony at the Town of Paradise on January 4th, 2016, for Paradise native Sergeant Judy Sparkes.

The Depart with Dignity program is offered by the Canadian Forces to personnel who have at least 25 years of military service to recognize the member's contribution to the Canadian Forces and to Canada. In recognition of the member's lengthy service, the individual is eligible for presentation of a Canadian Flag which is flown according to the member's wishes.

Sergeant Sparkes began her career 35 years ago and included posts across the country and around the world. It also included five years as a flight attendant where she was involved in flights with dignitaries including the Governor General, our prime minister and the royal family in addition to repatriation flights. She had requested that her Depart with Dignity Flag Raising ceremony be held in her hometown, the Town of Paradise, right here in Newfoundland and Labrador where she intends to reside after her retirement.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating and thanking Sergeant Sparkes for her loyal service. We are proud to have a native resident serve our country with the dedication, the commitment and allegiance that she has shown.

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 BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate the City of Corner Brook, and the 2016 Special Olympics Canada Games committee, for their success this past week in hosting the first-ever national Special Olympic Games held in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I had the honour of participating in the opening ceremonies on March 1 and witnessing first-hand the positive energy and spirit that defines the Special Olympics movement.

Mr. Speaker, the Special Olympics remind us of the importance of inclusion when providing opportunities for all people to participate in competitive sport. They also enable us to recognize and celebrate the achievements of these accomplished athletes.

Close to 1,000 athletes from across Canada, along with their coaches, their friends and their family members attended the games. Mr. Speaker, I congratulate them all. I want to recognize, in particular, the 44 members of Team Newfoundland and Labrador and their coaches for representing us so well.

Newfoundland and Labrador athletes earned a total of 36 medals at the games – 10 gold, 16 silver and 10 bronze – more than double the medals that were earned in the 2012 Winter Games.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues in this House to join me in congratulating the 2016 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games athletes, as well as their coaches, organizers, volunteers and supporters for a job extremely well done.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement. I, too, had the privilege of attending the opening ceremonies last week in Corner Brook and was truly impressed by the organization – by the event itself, but particularly by the number of volunteers who gave freely of their time to ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador put off a number one show.

Mr. Speaker, I want to personally thank – on behalf of our caucus and our leader – the coaches, the organizing committee, the hundreds of volunteers, the host committee itself and the City of Corner Brook. Particularly, I want to acknowledge Mayor Pender who gave an inspiring speech in both official languages, which impressed the delegates from the other provinces in this country of ours.

Mr. Speaker, I want to particularly acknowledge, too, what this event was all about. It was about inclusion, no doubt, in the sporting world, but it was about comradery. It was about sportsmanship, but it was particularly about developing friendships. You could see on the floor that night the friendships that were developed between the athletes from Newfoundland and Labrador, the coaches and the volunteers, and those from all over this great country of ours.

I want to particularly congratulate our athletes for not only being great competitors, but being great ambassadors for this great province of ours.

Mr. Speaker, to those who won medals, congratulations and thank you to everybody involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement. I am delighted to join with him in congratulating everyone involved in creating a successful 2016 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games this year.

Congratulations to all the athletes, some of whom are here. In particular, the 44 members of our own provincial team, their coaches, the volunteers and supports. May I say, well done to Jessica Summers from my own district who won silver in snowshoeing, one of the 36 medal winners, and she's here today.

I'd also like to congratulate and recognize the law enforcement torch relay on running to raise funds and awareness of the games. I think it's a very important thing that they do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, our government knows that this province is facing a difficult fiscal situation and we are focused on reshaping Newfoundland and Labrador's fiscal future. As we continue down the road to long-term sustainability, we want to work together with our community organizations and bring clarity to their current funding arrangements.

Our government is keenly aware of the need to allow such organizations to focus their efforts on the important issues instead of spending valuable time on annual funding applications.

That is why, for budget 2016-17, our government will not be making any changes to the approximately \$70 million in core funding that it provides to community groups and grants.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: This support will be maintained for the next fiscal year to enable groups to continue the important work they do, while allowing time for us to conduct a comprehensive review of all funding for community-based organizations. This review will also support our commitment to provide multi-year funding to community-based organizations.

Mr. Speaker, through this action, our government is providing some clarity to these groups while we work with them over the course of the next year, leading up to budget 2017, to help ensure they are maximizing their funding and being as efficient as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for a copy of her statement. We, too, on this side of the House obviously recognize the important role that community groups like these play in Newfoundland and Labrador, certainly in our biggest city to our smallest communities and to all the regions of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I congratulate the minister and her government for recognizing the importance and making, at this time, a decision in securing that the core funding will stay in place so these groups can look at budgeting obviously for this year, look at providing the important service they provide,

and can move forward this year with their own budgets and continue the good work they do.

As well, it is worthwhile to look at overall reviews of funding to various agencies at any particular time to make sure that funding is maximized, it is well executed and going where those dollars can be maximized.

So it's great to see the government is starting to make some decisions. We hope to see more in the near future.

I thank the minister for her copy of the statement. Congratulations on securing core funding today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Our community groups provide life-saving work to our people efficiently and with great sacrifice, in spite of the drastic underfunding by government who downloads more and more on them.

With our current economic situation people will need their services even more, yet today the minister is saying she is freezing their core funding for another two years. This is clarity. How can the minister call this continuing support?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to provide my hon. colleagues with an update regarding early tendering for roadwork.

Early tendering is a commitment of our government and mandated by Premier Ball as part of the development of a multi-year infrastructure plan to allow companies to take full advantage of our short construction season in our province.

Over the past number of months, much work has been done to ensure early tenders this year, and to lay the groundwork for the issuing of tenders as early as January in the coming years. Regional directors and engineers have conducted assessments and rankings of potential projects. This has been followed by a provincial assessment and evaluation to identify shovel-ready projects based on immediate needs.

Early tendering, Mr. Speaker, is one element of a new approach that is informed by evidence and evaluation, and is proactive and long term. It also reflects the principles of openness, transparency and accountability.

Early tenders for the 2016 construction season will be announced very soon, Mr. Speaker, and in the coming months we will publicly release a multi-year transportation infrastructure plan that will outline projects for the coming years. This plan will also reflect projects to be cost shared with the federal government under the Building Canada Fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next Member to speak, I remind hon. Members that we refer to Members by their district or their title, not by name.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to thank the minister opposite for the advance copy of his statement.

It's good to see the minister releasing these tenders early this year. As you know, the construction season is short. On a personal note, I've had experience in the department. I know

what pressures – the Heavy Civil Association has always been logged in to have early tenders. It's something our previous government had committed to trying to get accomplished. So I want to thank you for this initiative.

The earlier the tenders, the earlier the work. It's a short season to get our work done. Pavement is very important every year in the province.

I just want to say thank you, and I look forward to seeing the tenders released in the very near future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

I am pleased to see government follow through on this commitment, which is something we've been calling on for years, especially the multi-year funding.

Early tendering for roadwork ensures as much work as possible is done during our relatively short construction season. I hope the government and the minister, in the spirit of openness and accountability, will provide a road construction web page similar to Nova Scotia's, which displays a scheduled roadwork program via the government website allowing people to know when roadwork will be performed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

My first question, in my first Question Period as Leader of the Opposition, is pertaining to a matter that's very important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians today.

Mr. Speaker, the sterilization challenges at Eastern Health have gone on for weeks. Eastern Health has now moved to handwashing to sterilize surgical equipment. Some surgeons are refusing to perform some surgeries. I know, as a surgeon, the Minister of Health would have performed hundreds, if not thousands – I know he's very familiar with the processes involved in this. However, the minister has been silent, largely absent and has declined media interviews on this very serious issue.

We want to know, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want to know, if a risk assessment has been done to ensure that new processes in place are protecting patients and ensuring patient safety.

I ask the minister if he has confidence in the processes that are being used to sterilize equipment today.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is my first answer in what I hope will be answer period.

First of all to the question about the ORs and the sterilization program at Eastern Health, certainly it is a concern for all of us on this side of the House, as it is for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I am happy to report today that all ORs are functioning and surgeries are proceeding.

I did meet with the CEO yesterday, with the minister and with officials of the department. I can assure the Leader of the Official Opposition that the minister is certainly on top of this. The fact that he may not be out in the media every day, in the social media or whatever it is, but I can tell you he is fully engaged with this. There

are lessons that have been learned by similar events that have happened across the country.

The minister is engaged; we are very pleased. I would assure you that this is a minister that has spent more time in the ORs than anyone else in this room.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition Leader.

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We acknowledge and we fully agree that there is one expert in the room, who happens to be the Minister of Health. When it comes to this he is, no doubt, more knowledgeable and much more experienced than any other Member here in the House.

But, Mr. Speaker, the people of the province are asking for answers, and the people of the province want to know what the status is. The people of the province look for assurance from our government to make sure that processes and procedures that are taking place within our health care system are safe for patients.

I ask the minister as well, Mr. Speaker, if he can tell me if there's been any additional impact to the health care system as a result of delays in surgeries due to the sterilization issues. Have there been more backlogs? Have there been backups in emergency rooms? Are beds being occupied by patients that would otherwise be occupied by new patients if surgeries had gone ahead? What other impacts are in health care as a result of these delays?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I say to the Leader of the Opposition when you find yourself in the situation where you have surgeries that would be cancelled, there's obviously going to be people that would be impacted. I guess the only other option would be to go ahead and continue surgeries with equipment that is not sterilized. That is not an option for people on this side of the House. We take procedures and the safety of all our patients

and the people that actually provide those services – we take that seriously.

There are certainly problems there; that has been recognized. There are mitigation risks that have been put in place to offset the challenges that our workers are facing today.

I'm very proud of the work that's been done. This is three weeks into a situation, just over three weeks in. This is something that has happened in other jurisdictions. The minister and the officials at Eastern Health have taken the lead on this, and they've gone out and accessed the experts in this field. We are putting measures in place today to make sure that we can put this to rest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question was: What other impacts are in health care? We realize there are patients who have had their surgeries postponed. The question is: What other impacts have occurred in health care as a result of these delayed surgeries? We look forward to receiving some more information on that from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of political stripe, we can all agree that people come first and our number one goal is the success of the province. We are at a critical time as a province. The people in Newfoundland and Labrador are looking for leadership, a plan of action to deal with the fiscal crisis. And even Liberal insiders are publicly crying out for this administration to get on with it, to act sooner rather than later, and are saying 15 months is too long to wait.

I ask the Premier: When can the people of Newfoundland and Labrador expect a clear plan of action to address the current fiscal challenges?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This party and this government will be very proud to put a clear plan in place, one that was quite different than the plan we saw and we updated the people of this province on back on December 22 of this year. If we had continued on the plan the past administration had put in place, the people of this province would be faced with unprecedented borrowing, deficits of nearly \$2 billion a year.

So a plan will be put in place. What's important is the election of November 30th saw the mid-year update coming out on December 22, and a plan will be put in place that will be called budget 2016-2017. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, it will be much clearer than the plan that was announced in this very House less than a year ago.

By the way, the budget for the previous administration was announced last year late in April, and that was after years and years of an administration with no budget guidelines in place when they left their office. We had to start and get to a very good start line, and we're getting there, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier and his Cabinet and his caucus were elected to govern, and governing includes making decisions and showing leadership. Instead of taking action, this government has wasted time. They continue to kick the can down the road at a very crucial time in our province's history.

The lack of action is causing people of the province concern and, as I said, Liberal Party insiders are on the record of expressing their concern of the lack of action and decision making. Fifteen months is too long.

I ask the Premier: When will he show leadership, and when will he demonstrate to the people of the province he is willing to take action on the fiscal realities? Do we have to wait

for the budget? Can he be making decisions today?

He said yesterday in the Throne Speech he is very proud of the decisions they made. What decisions have been made? When is he going to get on with it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, there are a couple of critical components you must do when you make a decision. It impacts people in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am very pleased today that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board made an announcement, which was \$70 million, to support core funding for a number of associations in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I want to go back to decision making. Different than the previous administration, we believe in listening to people. We do believe in consulting with people in Newfoundland and Labrador. That will inform the budget process.

We've been just over 80 days as government right now. There's been quite a bit of work to be done.

We inherited a situation where there were absolutely no budget guidelines. Normally, these guidelines are in place in September. In October, the previous administration did nothing of that. So the first week in January, that was the starting point for us. We had to make sure, number one, the borrowing aspect – getting long-term borrowing in place. It was in a desperate situation in this province.

We've done quite a bit of work already. It will lead up to budget 2016 and 2017 and the forecasts there beyond.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition, right now we will be listening. We'll continue the consultation and you will not have to wait 15 months to see it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has stated their government will be smarter and watch every dollar spent.

I ask the Premier: What savings have been achieved since announcing in December changes to hiring practices and discretionary spending? What is the dollar value of those savings?

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

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

I'm certainly excited to stand and answer a question on behalf of the Opposition here today. I believe the number is somewhere in the vicinity of about \$100 million, which is substantially more than the former administration's discretionary spending freeze that took place over the course of a much longer period. I'd be happy to provide the Leader of the Opposition with the exact details, and also be happy to provide that to the media.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition Leader.

MR. P. DAVIS: Well, I thank you, Minister, for that – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for that. We look forward to the details of that information.

Mr. Speaker, we're hearing a lot more from government about cutting. Yesterday, in the Speech from the Throne, it was stated that "everyone will have to accept some level of sacrifice in the months and years ahead."

Mr. Speaker, we had a plan to reduce the size of the public sector through attrition with minimal impact on employees. In the fall, the Premier touted during the election campaign that cutting jobs is not part of their plan. He also said that

under a Liberal government, public sector jobs are safe.

Now, we know that jobs are on the table as part of everything's on the table.

I ask the Premier: How many public sector jobs do you anticipate your government is going to eliminate?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the Members on this side of the House have committed to is a process of fair negotiation. We've been meeting with our labour leaders. We've had many meetings with our labour leaders. So right now the primary way to reduce the size of the public service would be attrition.

I remind all parties in this House of Assembly that in the election platform both the Official Opposition and the Third Party had attrition as part of their election platform, I say, Mr. Speaker. So it will be a fair negotiation.

Realizing the significant impact that we have in our province right now, debt servicing, as it exists right now, would be somewhere around \$824 million, based on the plan that the previous administration had put in place. If that was left unchecked, you would see that debt servicing raise to over \$1.4 billion.

I can tell you, if there's a way to cut the public service, it is increase borrowing, keep having to pay debt servicing, then we will have no choice – someone else will make the decision for us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance has stated time and time again that everything is on the table. In the Speech from the Throne yesterday, the Liberal administration committed to proceeding with full-day kindergarten and also tourism marketing. Both were announced to confirm just

a couple of days before the Minister of Finance stated that everything was on the table. They did that to safeguard some things, and we understand that.

Did the government really not see fit as well to include safeguarding such services as child protection, health care and our hospitals?

So I ask the Premier: Is everything on the table or are other matters and others parts of government going to be protected?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I said back a few minutes ago, when it comes to making decisions, we had made a commitment to full-day kindergarten. That's a commitment that we stand by.

When you look at the way you offer services to people in our province, no matter what those services are, we always look for the most cost-effective way to be able to do it, because when you do that in the most cost-effective way, it's the way to make sure your services and programs are sustainable. That's what we want to do. So in order to protect those services, it's important now that we listen to the people who actually use those services.

When you look at things like public safety, you look at things like health care, you look at things like education, these are things we've had significant discussion on and we will continue to do that. Because as I said in the speech yesterday, if we simply do not change the way we do things, change the way we make decisions, well, I can tell you what, you will see programs that someone else will make a decision for because it will be unsustainable.

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is on the record as saying they have a plan. He has said: We have a plan and people are going to like it. The Minister of Finance is on the record as saying she wasn't sure which

parts of the public service she would eliminate until she saw the books.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Can you tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador which health clinics and which schools in rural Newfoundland and Labrador are on the chopping block? Is this part of the plan that people are going to like?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I can tell you there was one plan that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador did not like, and they voted on that on November 30th –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: – because that plan led to many closures of health clinics. It led to many closures and loss of services in a lot of areas in this province. The plan that the previous administration put in place, that we reported on, as I said earlier, on December 22 needed to be changed. It was not sustainable. It would not lead to increased services or better services for anyone in this province. So we're happy today to be able to work on a plan that will be sustainable, that will be viable and will continue to supply and provide sustainable services to the people of our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the people of the province did elect the Members opposite as their government. They did choose their plan. They went to the people of the province with what they said, they had a plan. For two years the Premier has been saying he had a plan, and they elected him on the basis that they had a plan. I just heard the Premier say we're working on a plan.

Is the Premier now saying today that they didn't have a plan when he told the people they did and now they're only working on it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you put in place a plan, as I said earlier, the important piece is to get to a start line. It's to understand where you are when put in place things like a budget.

What I did on September 28, 2015, is I wrote a letter. It wasn't a long letter. It was pretty concise, quite frankly, to the former premier, the now Leader of the Official Opposition. Two things that I was looking for was an update on Muskrat Falls, which was subsequently provided by the Oversight Committee, and I looked for a fiscal update in the affairs of this province. Well, quite frankly, for some reason I did find out on December 2 what that reason was, because that was just after the election when I had access to much more information.

The former premier made a decision not to answer that letter and hid the information from the people of our province. The stark reality is the circumstances in our province right now are quite different than they were last year at budget time. The Premier decided not to answer those letters, decided not to inform the people of our province the realities of what we face today in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, it certainly sounds like the Premier is now saying they didn't actually have a plan at that point in time. Well, maybe they did, Mr. Speaker, because at that point in time, last year we had anticipated a \$1.2 billion deficit, at the same time the now Premier is saying he had a plan.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: If you had a plan for \$1.2 billion, well, where is that plan? At least you should have that plan to be able to present to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, number one, on November 30th of this year the people of Newfoundland and Labrador made a decision to give this party a mandate for the next four years. Part of that mandate included a \$1.2 billion plan. It is not a three-month plan, or a four-month plan; it's a four-year mandate. For us to deliver that mandate we will put together – it will start with budget 2016-2017.

I would say to the Leader of the Official Opposition, after 10, 12 years in government I am surprised when you look at the significant deficits we've seen with this previous administration, with \$25 billion in oil royalties and money from the Atlantic Accord. The fact is, are they actually proud of the record that would lead to \$15.4 billion in borrowing for the people of this province at an unprecedented time, setting revenues at an all-time high in this province? This is what we get after 10, 12 years of this administration?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now from that answer, based on the question that was asked, it almost sounds now, well, maybe he did have a plan. Because earlier he said he's working on a plan, now he says maybe he did have a plan.

I ask the Premier: If you did have a plan for \$1.2 billion, will you table that plan here in the House?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's still on the website there, so he can just do his research (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition Leader.

MR. P. DAVIS: I guess, Mr. Speaker, he's referring to the rhetoric that was combined in his Liberal Red Book, I think what he's referring to today, because we know how academics and we know how professors at the university felt about their plan. We'll be asking lots of questions on their plan, I can assure you, in the coming weeks.

Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the matters I mentioned earlier, and it's very important to the people in our province, is health care.

I ask the Premier if he can confirm that the tender to construct Green Bay Health Centre has been cancelled.

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

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The tender for the Green Bay Health Centre came in way over the amount of money that was allocated. It has been deferred and is being reworked to be resubmitted.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will ask the Premier: Did he consult with the people of Green Bay before he decided to cancel that tender?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We consult with all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, unlike the previous administration.

He talked about a plan, well, maybe it's appropriate right now that I use my time, and the few seconds that I would have, to talk about a long-term care plan that the previous administration – which I'm sure the people in

the Green Bay area would be interested in knowing.

In the previous premier's plan, it talked about a long-term care plan. It was actually cost neutral. So when we went looking after the election to determine how this would be paid for, guess what, Mr. Speaker? There was no money allocated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We'll go down that road in the coming weeks as well. We're starting to get some information from the Premier, information that we didn't expect to hear, that's for sure. I can tell you that we have some further questions that we're going to pursue on that matter.

On the Green Bay Health Centre, Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite, the Premier and his government like to consult. They haven't consulted with people before they cancelled the tender.

I wonder if the Premier can tell us: Will you consult specifically with the people of the Green Bay area on what services will be eliminated from the Green Bay Health Centre clinic as you re-scope that project?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I didn't make myself understood. The cancellation of the tender has not actually occurred. It's simply being withdrawn, deferred, while it's being reworked. It's still there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the premiers of the other oil-producing non-equalization receiving provinces,

Brad Wall of Saskatchewan and Rachel Notley of Alberta, are fighting for infusions of federal funding while oil revenues are down.

Will our Premier join these premiers in fighting for fairness so our people will not have to endure deep cuts while revenues are drastically down?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you go looking for information, what's appropriate and timely is to actually read all the documents. Stop just reading headlines; read everything that's in the information.

What the Member is referring to, there's been no special or unique circumstances or money that's been allocated by the federal government to Alberta and Saskatchewan or to Newfoundland and Labrador. What's been announced is a \$1.4 billion fund; \$400 million, I'm proud to say, will be for Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: – less than \$400 million for Saskatchewan and the remaining goes to Alberta. In actual fact, I think the Member opposite should know that it's not even new money that we've heard so far.

We're all looking forward to March 22 when we'll see the federal budget that will come out. It is then you will tell what programs are in place for this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, he's exactly right, it's not new money. This New Building Canada Fund that was signed in 2014, originally, when it came out, they were talking about new money for infrastructure. So it's not new money; it was money that was approved by the prior administration in Canada to renew the Building Canada Fund.

Mr. Speaker, the principle of equalization is entrenched in the country's Constitution.

Quebec will get \$10 billion to help it cope with the revenue shortfall this year; Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, \$1.7 billion; Ontario, \$2.4 billion, as examples.

How can everything be on the table when our Premier is not advocating for a change to federal policy and additional revenue for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: I can tell you one thing that Members on this side of the House are advocating for and that is going looking for the money that has already been announced and available to you, like the Small Communities Fund; \$34.9 million that this previous administration just left there; never even used the \$60 million that was available, which they spent literally, or made allocations or commitments to in two years; missed the significant opportunity to use a leveraging opportunity on \$34.9 million; did not even take the time to sign the agreement.

We have done that. The Minister of Municipal Affairs right now, I am very proud to say – we got on that right away. That will be done. It will be available to the people of our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The government has been creating a climate of fear since they have been elected. During the campaign, the Liberals promised no job cuts. Now everything is on the table.

I ask the Premier: Will he guarantee the workers of this province there will be no job cuts?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing that I know about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, if there is a message, they want to know something; they want to know the

facts. What we have outlined so far, really, there is no pleasure from any Member on this side of the House announcing and talking about some of the things that we have had to, but they indeed are the facts.

It is not fearful. What it is, though, people will be engaged or offering some tremendous opportunities and ideas for us. It is part of the consultation. So it is not about fear really, I say to the Member opposite. What it is, it is about outlying what the facts are, what the current financial landscape is in our province right now.

The other option when you think about it would be, what, to lie to the people of our province? That is not something we are prepared to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier has said he is talking to people and consulting. Well, he can't be talking to the people I am speaking to. People are in fear.

During the election campaign, we all knew what was happening. We all knew there was a nosedive in the price of oil. We were going to be deeper in debt. The whole province knew that.

I ask the Premier: Why did he keep promising things that he is now not keeping, like no job cuts?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite should know, if you're following the financial situation in our province, things have changed drastically since the 1st of November. Even when the election platforms were announced, we've seen oil prices continue to drop, continue to erode. We've seen other sections and industries in our province significantly challenged as well.

These are all factors that you have to put in when you put in place budget 2016-2017. It's fair. The best way to do things is make sure you understand what it is you can afford.

Things have changed considerably in our province right now, and we will use the evidence and the information that we have to inform the decisions that we make in budget 2016-17.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Women and children are hit hardest in bad economic times. On February 1st, the eight Status of Women Councils wrote the minister asking for a modest increase in funding over a four-year period. Their funding has already been frozen for five years, even while the demand on their services was drastically increasing, and it's getting worse. Now, it looks like a seven-year freeze despite increasing operating costs.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: It being international women's week, will she guarantee their request for a modest increase over four years so they can continue their life-saving work for the women of our province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

Since being appointed the privilege of being the Minister Responsible for the Women's Policy Office, I've had the opportunity to tour several facilities and several Status of Women organizations in the last 86 days. I want to correct the Member opposite on her comment that she made in reference to the Ministerial Statement that I made.

There was no mention of freeze. There was clearly, clearly a mention that as we work with community groups, we intend to explore opportunities for efficiency. As a matter of fact, the Member opposite attended a session in my district where she heard from an accountant that said maybe we shouldn't have these

organizations paying \$5,000 accounting fees but rather a \$2,500 management review. That's the things we're looking at.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

A two-year guarantee of a funding freeze is not multi-year commitment in funding.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will she guarantee the Premier's commitment to multi-year funding for these groups, not simply a two-year freeze in funding?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

It is a privilege to get up again and explain to the Member opposite that when you look at the money that the community organizations are spending, it is very important we look at all of the costs they spend, to ensure every dollar possible that needs to get into the services – particularly for families and for women and children – gets there.

So when a former administration has a rule, as an example, that auditing has to happen in a certain way that puts restrictions on the amount of money that goes forward, whether as an expense of rents that are paid, it is important for us to work with those community organizations to ensure, first and foremost, that women and children who are affected by violence have every cent available to them in their service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Sorry, I didn't see the hon. the Minister standing. Were you –

AN HON. MEMBER: No, I was just stretching.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Striking Committee I have the honour to present the Committee's Report, which I will now read.

The Striking Committee appointed on March 8 recommends, pursuant to Standing Order 65(1) and (3), that the following Members comprise the Standing Committees of the House of Assembly for the 48th General Assembly.

Government Services Committee: the Member for Torngat Mountains, the Member for Bonavista, the Member for Burin – Grand Bank, the Member for Ferryland, the Member for Harbour Main, the Member for Mount Pearl North, the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port and the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

Social Services Committee: the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, the Member for Burin – Grand Bank, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, the Member for Harbour Main, the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, the Member for St. George's – Humber, the Member for St. John's Centre, the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

Resource Committee: the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay, the Member for Cape St. Francis, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the Member for Exploits, the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels, the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

The Public Accounts Committee will be: the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay, the Member for Conception Bay South, the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels, the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, the Member for St. George's – Humber and the Member for St. John's Centre.

The Privileges and Elections Committee will be: the Member for St. George's – Humber, the Member for Ferryland, the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

The Standing Orders Committee will be: the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, the Member for St. George's – Humber, the Member for Mount Pearl North, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and the Member for St. John's West.

The Miscellaneous and Private Bills Committee will be: the Member for St. George's – Humber, the Member for Bonavista, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, the Member for Harbour Main and the Member for Mount Pearl North.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Answers to questions for which notice has been given.

I'm sorry, the hon. the Minister of Finance.

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I want to give notice that I will ask leave to introduce to a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act, Bill 4.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act, Bill 6.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Inter-Provincial Subpoena Act, Bill 5.

Further, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Parliamentary Assistant Act And The Parliamentary Secretaries Act, Bill 3.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: It being Private Members' Day and almost 3 o'clock in the afternoon, we don't have time for petitions so I will call on the hon. the Leader of the Opposition to bring forward the resolution that stands in his name.

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for allowing me to begin debate on this private Member's resolution, and I'll begin by reading the resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urges the Government of Canada to recognize the impact of the steep fall in oil revenues on our province and that it consider financial support to our province in order to prevent deep cuts in services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House urges the Government of Canada to modernize federal-provincial arrangements, including the Equalization Program and the Fiscal Stabilization Program to more fairly and promptly reflect our province's needs and to more fairly account for our natural resources revenues.

That notice was given yesterday for debate today.

Mr. Speaker, leadership is many things and it's been defined in many, many ways. We know that one characteristic of leadership that's constant always is the ability to make difficult decisions. Sometimes, making difficult decisions may sometimes strain relationships. We know that and we understand that. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are no stranger to having strained relationships with other jurisdictions or with the country. We know that having strained relationships, sometimes, is particularly true when it comes to politics in particular.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has made a lot about his relationship with the prime minister. I'm glad he has a good relationship with the prime minister. We are all, on this side of the House, glad he has a good relationship with our prime minister.

We hope that this relationship will result in tangible benefits to Newfoundland and Labrador. We hope that this relationship will result in the Government of Canada paying greater attention to our province than we've seen in history. We all know the history of the relationship between us and our federal counterparts. We also hope this relationship will help, and prompt to action to address these very important issues that we face as a province today.

We know that hasn't happened before. Our history is very long, very deep and very colourful when it comes to our relationship between us as a province and our federal government. If history repeats itself, and the federal government continues to treat Newfoundland and Labrador with indifference, similar to what we've seen in the past, then it's going to be important for our Premier to step up to represent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The people of our province have to come before the friendship he has with the prime minister. Hopefully that won't happen. I have to stress, we're not advocating and hoping that happens. We're hoping that doesn't happen. We're hoping the relationship is going to be beneficial to our province.

Ronald Reagan once said, "When you can't make them see the light, make them feel the heat." That's quite often what happens when it comes to relationships between our province and the federal government.

We know the long history. Maybe it's because of our relatively small population; we have a small number of federal MPs representing our province. We've often had to fight tooth and nail to get attention and to get what we believed was our fair share, to get what we believed was rightfully belonging and that we were entitled to, that we should receive from our federal counterparts.

That's not how it's supposed to happen. Sometimes we have these bad and strained relationships. That's not how it's supposed to happen, that we have to fight tooth and nail when we're in a federation and supposed to be able to work together. We are supposed to be able to have those discussions. We hope that happens, but in reality it is not always the way that it takes place, even though as much as we wish it could.

The Atlantic Accord, back in 1985, was an agreement between two PC governments, but it didn't come easy. Just the year prior to that, there was disagreement between the governments of the day. There was a Liberal government in Ottawa and a PC government in Newfoundland and Labrador back in 1984 and there was disagreement over the Atlantic Accord. There was disagreement, fighting and battling between both governments in effort for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to benefit from the offshore resources that we believe we brought into the federation. We were blocked and we fought back.

The Opposition federal Tories at the time – and actually it included a gentleman that we all know very well and I know that we all admire, Mr. John Crosbie. He was there at the time and

he sided with us in 1984. When they were elected soon after that, the Atlantic Accord was born. We are all better off for it today and our province has been better off for it today.

Here we are a couple of decades later, we remember what happened. We realized the history of it. Again, we are facing a relationship between us as a province and our federal government as well, our Liberal federal government that is in Ottawa today.

Again, our government fought tooth and nail for fairness. It was by fighting, a couple of days after that, that we got a better deal from the Liberal prime minister of the day, Prime Minister Paul Martin. It was only because of the battle that Newfoundland and Labrador brought to the doorstep of Prime Minister Martin that Newfoundland and Labrador benefited and improved on the benefits being received. Again, thank goodness for that as well.

Voisey's Bay benefits were the product of a fight. Hebron benefits and other offshore benefits were products of fighting and advocating for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, putting our province first and our people first in our efforts when we went, lobbied and fought against our federal counterparts to get what we believed we should receive from such activities.

Some fights were not successful and in some battles we were not successful: the redress to the Upper Churchill, the energy corridor through Quebec. I think most generations have seen, at some point in time, what has happened between us, the federal government and Quebec in trying to open access in a corridor through Quebec. It has not been easy.

But it was right to take a strong stance and a strong view on these very important issues, because there were important benefits at stake for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. There were important benefits at stake for our province. Failing to take a stand would have been the wrong thing to do. It would have denied us important gains that benefited our people, the people of our province.

Now, we have a new prime minister today, Mr. Speaker. Prime Minister Trudeau, by all

accounts, seems to be a good guy, seems to be a nice guy. People like him and people are liking what he's doing. Many were quite optimistic when they saw his victory last year. There have been examples we know in the past, as I said, when we have these relationships, but we want to have a good relationship, if that's there, but we also need to protect our federation.

There are other premiers we see today now. We see other premiers today who are fighting for their jurisdictions, are fighting for their province. We look at who is now known as the most popular premier in the country, in Saskatchewan, Premier Brad Wall. He is fighting for his province. For several years, Premier Wall has been seeking and looking for a rework of the federal transfer formulas. Long before the current circumstances faced Saskatchewan, the premier, Premier Wall, was out saying the formula's not right and it should change.

There was once a time when the formulas benefited Saskatchewan, but they don't anymore. He recognized that. He recognized the system was broken, the system wasn't working, and he wanted it fix. Even more today, now that that broken system is proving him right, he's now looking for a correction by the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, when oil markets bottomed out, his case truly became more compelling and people started to pay attention to it. How could Saskatchewan continue to carry the country when their oil revenues were through the floor and they're facing what they're facing today? Why should he be paying to subsidize social programs in Quebec, in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, in Manitoba and Ontario when even in the Quebec example, Quebec was trying to block the very pipelines that were needed to drive the Saskatchewan economy? If Quebec was trying to block the pipelines, that economy in Saskatchewan is going to deliver value, money and transfers to the Province of Quebec.

What does Premier Wall do about it? Did he step aside, go in his office and close his door and say we had enough of this? No, he hasn't. He stepped up his fight, and something very interesting has happened. On the 28th of December *CBC News* reported not only has

Premier Wall fought for fairness for Saskatchewan, but he's also taken a strong stance for neighbouring Alberta. Premier Wall spoke up on behalf of Albertans.

Now, that's a long ways away, but he also took a stand for another province. He talked about Newfoundland and Labrador. He's talking about the benefits that Newfoundland and Labrador should be having from equalization, if the formula was changed and if it was fixed so that provinces such as Saskatchewan and Alberta, and also Newfoundland and Labrador, would benefit from it. We are the oil-producing provinces and it's our provinces that are being impacted the most.

Here's what he said, Mr. Speaker, "It might be time for the federal government, not through a direct bailout to any sort of sector, but to realize that Newfoundland and Labrador ... Alberta and Saskatchewan perhaps should be provided some of that [money] back." He was talking about the money that the provinces had contributed to the federation through equalization with the contribution the provinces made during the good times. He's saying that they should be provided some of that money back. He said it publicly and he said it on behalf of his constituents, the people of his province, the people of Saskatchewan.

He recognizes that rejigging the formulas is difficult. He realizes that, he's talked about that, and it's not likely to happen quickly. He said, to avoid the challenge of trying to reach consensus on changes to the country's equalization formula – which we know can take a very, very long period of time – he's asked in his talk about the possibility of a special payment that can be made outside of the program to alleviate the pressures that our government, the Government of Saskatchewan and the Government of Alberta are dealing with. He's called it a special payment.

This is at a time when these three provinces, who are significant financial contributors to the federation, have seen a quick shift in the economies of these three provinces. So asking for a special payment on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Alberta and Saskatchewan – well for me, personally, I thank Premier Wall for him taking that position. I

thank him, and I'm sure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians join with me, in him speaking publicly on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador and for standing up for us and fighting for fairness.

We also recall another time in the past – this is not the first time Saskatchewan has stepped up for us. They've done it in the past. Today is so vital. It's so vital that we stand side by side with the counterparts in the federation, with the other members of the Council of the Federation – I know the Premier recently attended meetings and I'm sure he'll share some of that with us today; I would expect that he'd do that – and that they work together and talk about the circumstances that have changed so quickly. I'm sure they have talked about the circumstances that have changed so, so quickly in our province. That's sometimes what can happen; things can change very, very quickly.

Mr. Speaker, we know from yesterday – and I know from a story on CBC, I haven't heard the Premier say this directly, but the story indicates that the Premier will, at some time in the future, be having discussions, but also said he believes the Equalization Program is what it is. The story from CBC does indicate that the Premier's comments yesterday is that at some point in time there will be discussions.

Maybe he has already had them. Maybe he has already gone to Ottawa and he has already talked to the prime minister. I haven't heard that and it's not what's reflected in the story. I know stories quite often don't reflect all the information. If the Premier speaks on this today, which I expect he probably will, maybe he can talk about that a little bit, about the working effort he's already done. I expect he'll do that.

So what's at stake for us as a province, Mr. Speaker, is very serious, very significant for us as the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are limited opportunities for changing the circumstances we find ourselves in. There's increase in revenue, which is taxes, as the Premier talked about yesterday.

He was asked if he was going to increase taxes. He said, well, we're going to increase our revenue. He was asked again and he said we're going to increase our revenue. We know that

means a tax increase, unless there's some other way through the federal government that we're going to get extra revenue. We have to increase our revenue, we have to cut programs, reduce programs and spending, and we also have to borrow. That's the three remedies that are available to the government and to the Premier.

So having an opportunity for additional funding from the federal government is critical at this time. That's what this is about. This is about advocating. This is about asking the federal government to consider financially supporting us as a province. I believe we can do that jointly as a House.

We talked at some length yesterday about the importance of co-operation. We've stated our position that we're quite willing to co-operate with the government. I believe the Third Party is willing to do that to benefit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We ask all Members in the House to support the resolution that is on the floor this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've noticed and, of course, I've read the PMR that was presented today in this House of Assembly. The former premier just spent considerable time talking about an Equalization Program. What he didn't spend any time on, to my knowledge, was the Stabilization Program which is also available.

I'm pleased to say this is a program that we've been advocating on behalf of our province already. It's a program that will be worth around \$31 million. Only once before in our history did we receive this, and this was in the early '90s

With that said, this is a program that, as I said, will bring in \$31 million in revenue to our province, but is really part of a program that exists at the federal level. Many provinces would be able to access this program because

it's based on a formula that says if you see revenues that would actually fall in your province by about 5 per cent based on the previous year – so it is really 95 per cent of adjusted revenue from the previous year – you can access this fund. I am happy to say this is a program we will be able to access, which will be about \$31 million.

There's been a lot of discussion today around this resolution about a relationship. I think the former premier started about – he said leadership is many things. Of course it is, but so are relationships. Relationships are something that evolve and are developed over time. I will say with the current Prime Minister of Canada, with our federal colleagues we have in the federal Cabinet and the MPs who represent us, we have built up a relationship over quite a bit of time.

Will there always be, or from time to time do we anticipate or expect we will be able to have frank discussions and open discussions in meetings with our federal colleagues? Of course we will. Sometimes you need a little frank discussion, sometimes some intensity in a room, to get decisions made. I'm guessing over the mandate of this administration, and the federal administration, that might occur from time to time.

Rest assured, every Member on this side of the House will stand up for the people that elected them. We will stand up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Taking gestures and looking for sound bites and running out of meetings and offices and saying, well, I don't trust that guy, or you do some awkward things publicly for the sake of getting media attention because it looks to be dramatic at some point in time – don't expect that from me right now, but you will get very frank and honest answers as things evolve.

Well, I can tell you, right after November 30th, and prior to that, as I said before, we started to build relationships, not just with our colleagues, the federal members, but also with our Atlantic Canadian premiers. This is a relationship we've been developing for quite some time.

Now, I want to talk about equalization. As people who would know me, I like to lay out the

facts as they exist. There was a comment that was just made, and I find it a little odd to be honest with you because it was a comment that was made about provinces contributing to a pot or an equalization fund. Well, I want to clarify that because there is no equalization fund that provinces contribute to. In actual fact, this is how it works.

Equalization is a program that was put in place around 1957. It's worth just shy of \$18 billion. You get all provinces that would access this fund and it's based on trying to find a mechanism that you could actually supply services to the people across Canada. What you do is you compare yourself to other jurisdictions and where you fit on that benchmark. There is money then that is allocated out of the \$18 billion fund that the federal government put in place. That's how the fund exists. It's not as if Newfoundland and Labrador or Ontario or some other province would write a cheque called through the Equalization Program. That is not how it works.

The program actually is increased based on the GDP of the country, not what happens in your particular case within a province. It is a very complex formula, I would say to the Members opposite. I can tell you right now, in 2007 the former administration had to make a decision because the equalization formula was being reformed. You either had to opt into a new formula – the new formula was based on being predictable over a three or five-year period.

It was not as responsive as the old formula. What happened? The previous administration made the decision to go into a new formula. The problem is if you opt into a new formula, guess what? You could not come out of it. Therefore, the natural resource revenue and so on would get included in the overall revenue that we see within our province and it made it more difficult to receive equalization more responsive. All provinces, by the way, are into this new formula as it exists today, so it makes it more difficult.

What was not mentioned today – and I will challenge why the premier did not mention this – is the formula is actually negotiated every five years. It's a federal program. When you think about a government that's been in place for 13 years almost, there would have been at least two

occasions when the former administration in this province had an opportunity to put what they felt the equalization formula should look like, and they failed to do it.

As a matter of fact, it was as late as 2014 when this administration had an opportunity to put in place what they felt would be the appropriate program that would benefit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They failed to do it. They didn't stand up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians then, and here we are four months into this administration and they're over there talking about lack of leadership?

Mr. Speaker, I tell you, I am just absolutely bewildered that we would see someone stand up today after four months and claim that Members on this side are not fighting for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's actually not the way it is at all. There have been quite a number of meetings. I just mentioned one about the Small Communities Fund in Question Period, somewhere close to \$34.9 million. This is money that we will use now to leverage the money that we have available to us. There is quite a bit of dialogue that is happening with our federal colleagues right now.

I also want to make more mention about – he talked quite a bit about Premier Brad Wall who called the election just yesterday now. We have had quite a bit of discussion as well. The fact is when you talk about the pipeline, as an example, yes, there is no question, I think all of us in Eastern Canada support the pipeline, but right now Quebec is having some issues with this.

To get back to the resolution of where we are and the fact that you would see a premier from Saskatchewan standing up for Newfoundland and Labrador, well, I bring you back to just a few weeks ago to this discussion. Most of the national media were reporting, what? They were reporting that the Province of Alberta and the Province of Saskatchewan were having difficulty given the situation that we are into with declining oil royalties.

I can tell you now that it wasn't long that we met with a lot of the members of the national media. If you listen to the discussion as it exists today, there were three provinces that get included in this discussion every single time when people

speak to the media or when politicians from Ottawa speak. They do talk about Alberta, they do talk about Saskatchewan and they do talk about Newfoundland and Labrador.

It's the first time in the history of this province we see the national media have an understanding of the importance of our province right now. So I want to thank my federal colleagues and thank people on this side of the House that continue to raise (inaudible) we have in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I also want to say that when you look at the situation that currently exists today – I want to talk a little bit about Alberta and Saskatchewan because that is the comparison that we want to see. If you look at the Alberta budget right now, they budgeted revenue of just over \$43 billion. Their expense line is around \$49 billion. Right now, based on the forecast that they put out on February 24th of this year, they would anticipate a \$6.3 billion deficit. Contrast that to Saskatchewan, they put out their quarter on February 29th of revenues just shy of \$14 billion and expenses of \$14.2 billion, therefore a \$259 million deficit. They anticipate even lowering that this year.

If you compare that to the administration, the management and the planning that we have seen in our province over the last 13 years, well, we have revenue of about \$6 billion and expenses of \$8 billion and a deficit of \$2 billion. If you compare that to Alberta and Saskatchewan and you will tell that the management and the planning for this province, given the volatility around oil royalties, has been extremely different. The prior administration have put this province in an unprecedented situation and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are feeling the impact of that, I will say.

It's fine to say that you look to Ottawa as a solution, but the responsibility on every Member in this House is to manage your own home first. Look after your own affairs and be responsible for your own actions. I would question if the prior administration is prepared to do that right now: look to Ottawa for it to be totally an Ottawa solution. Well, Ottawa will be part of a solution, but what we have to do, too, is make sure that we properly govern and we properly

manage our own affairs, get our own house in order first before we look for support.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, there's one other thing that I want to raise today because it is a concern about equalization. Some of the stark realities are that when you come into a new administration, this is the kind of information that you find.

Back in 2005, there was an acknowledgement of \$378 million in an overpayment on the equalization – 2005. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. There was \$107 million of that repaid. We were overpaid, so what happens there is the province would have to repay it.

We started with \$378 million. Mr. Speaker, \$107 million of that was repaid, which left an outstanding balance of \$271 million. That outstanding balance with the federal government was never repaid. We had unprecedented surpluses in the history of our province, \$25 billion in oil royalties and Atlantic Accord money, and the previous administration did what? They ignored it, except for the former premier. Guess what he did?

The person that just stood up and questioned leadership on this side of the House, what he did last year was he signed an agreement with the federal government – one that finally the federal government agreed with. What he agreed to do was pay back the money for the next 10 years, starting in the spring of 2016. After ignoring it for over 10 years, now, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are left on the hook to repay \$271 million in an overpayment that was acknowledged by the previous administration back in 2005. Completely ignored, and here we are, Newfoundland and Labrador, left on the hook to pay back this equalization.

That was the agreement. Finally, they were successful in signing an agreement with the federal government. And what is it? To repay a loan based on an overpayment on an equalization payment they knew about back in 2005.

Mr. Speaker, the relationship with Ottawa and for people on this side of the House, I will say it is one we will continue to foster and it is a relationship we will continue to develop. Will we get everything we need as a province? Well, maybe we won't. But I can tell you what, we will not be shy of looking for and standing up for what Newfoundland and Labrador so rightfully deserves, and we will do that. Every single person will do that, and I challenge people on the opposite side of the House to be there with us when we do that. We will continue those efforts and we will do that on a daily basis.

I will tell you one thing, what we will not do is we will not abdicate our responsibilities; we will live up to and accept the responsibilities, and we will not, as the previous administration did – when we acknowledge what we are responsible for, then, Mr. Speaker, I will say this, Members on this side of the House, we will do it in a respectful manner. We will do it in a professional manner, and we will not be leaving the outstanding balances and the outstanding commitments to the next generation. We will deal with this and we will deal with it, as I say, in a very meaningful way.

I am very proud of Minister Foote and the job she is doing right now working for Newfoundland and Labrador. You can expect, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, lots of good things will come to our province with the relationship we have. I will tell you, long gone are the days of rhetoric, long gone are the days of when you stand on the steps of Confederation Building and shout and rant, because right now what is more important is that you get success in those agreements, and we do that with the many meetings we have.

If there ever comes a time when we see ourselves offside with the federal Government of Canada, I can assure you we will stand up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a privilege today to rise to speak to this motion, a very important motion indeed. Looking at history in this great federation of Canada and our particular circumstances today in regard to our finances and a very resource-based province, obviously it is extremely important to us, as we all know, here in the House. Certainly Canada as a whole is very resource rich with natural resources. It's important in the economics of Canada as a whole and certainly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some of the issues we face today in terms of the financial situation are tied to world markets in regard to oil, the pricing of oil. Certainly world commodity prices, particularly in the past number of months, the past years, have gone to historic lows, have basically tanked. Fortunately, they've come back in the last few weeks around the \$40 a barrel, which is good to see. But the decline has certainly been sudden; it's been steep and sustained, and pretty much unpredictable.

As many would say, internationally, it's almost a perfect storm. In other parts of the world – it's all interrelated. We see Europe was slow out of the recession. We see the United States coming out of the recession now, starting to produce more oil and gas, and get more self-sufficient in regard to shale production. You look at the Dakotas and different states, the amount of shale that is being produced through that process. That's affecting the world market and the impact in terms of their supply and what they have in their inventory.

China's rate of growth over the past number of years has slowed. A number of years ago it was unprecedented, the growth in China, 7 or 8 per cent, which was huge; but that's back again to a couple of percent. That's all affecting issues in regard to oil.

Inventories now around the world are a glut on the market. There is not enough economic activity to soak that up. So those are some of the things that are happening globally now overall on this issue.

OPEC itself in December agreed on their production cuts; they didn't do any. So oil production states still cause challenges in regard

to the overall volume that is being produced in the world.

I guess the context to put it in, Mr. Speaker, is that's out of everybody's control and we need to adapt and try to do the best we can. It is certainly out of our control in terms of the prices. Newfoundland and Labrador did not cause the global issue in regard to the price of oil and we certainly can't fix it, nor can any of the other oil producers in Canada: Alberta or Saskatchewan. It's just part of a whole world commodity market that we've involved with.

Being part of this great country of Canada, 10 provinces and three territories, there are programs put in place by the federal government. And that's a benefit of being part of a great country like Canada. There are programs; there is assistance that is available. Historically, at varied times, jurisdictions availed of that; other times, they don't. They don't need to.

We look back at the principles of equalization and what it's meant to do. In 1957, Canada created an Equalization Program to help the poor provinces of the country deliver services at a level similar to the richer provinces. That meant across the board that no matter where you lived in Canada, there was always an opportunity for a comparable level of services and programs, and that was dealt with through equalization. That is another great attribute of Canada.

Certainly, when the Constitution was repatriated in 1982 by Pierre Trudeau he ensured that equalization at that time was entrenched in the Constitution.

Section 36(2) enshrined in the principle – it is just a single sentence and basically it describes exactly what equalization is all about. “Parliament and the government of Canada are committed to the principle of making equalization payments to ensure that provincial governments have sufficient revenues to provide reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation.”

Mr. Speaker, that is the fundamental principle behind equalization. In Newfoundland and Labrador we received equalization up to 2008. To that point, as we know, due to revenues and the calculation of the equalization formula, we

became ineligible at that time for the equalization. So that made us, as we know, a have province in terms of the equalization formula.

Quite simply, we talk about revenues that were generated over the past number of years from our royalties, basically through equalization, when you come down, there is a sliding scale over the past 10 years. So as federal dollars were pulled out of our Treasury, obviously, they had to be replaced by provincial dollars. Over the past 10 years there is almost \$10 million have been replaced with provincial dollars as those federal dollars retrieved and in 2008 we came off equalization.

In the 1990s and the 2000s we received significant dollars: \$1 billion in equalization each and every year. That is certainly a huge sum, a large amount of dollars. Well, you can imagine if that amount was coming to us today, we would be in a much better position in terms of our financial position.

In any jurisdiction in Canada, based on their production, based on those global factors, geopolitical factors that happened in the world, there are all kinds of things that affect us that are not in our control. But being part of an Equalization Program and being part of a country that has it, it means that in time of need they adapt and the program can adapt so you could get the true benefit from that. That is part of being Canadian. There is nothing wrong with that.

At times, various jurisdictions in Canada are part of the Equalization Program; other times, they are not. Remember decades ago, the Province of Ontario was the industrial heartland of Canada through manufacturing and through their exports. Today we see them on equalization. That is fine; that is how the program works. It balances through tough economic times to see jurisdictions through those economic times. That rise and fall in revenue certainly makes that happen.

When we look at the principle, the nuts and bolts we say, of the federal transfers, Ottawa has to figure out how to calculate those sufficient revenues that I talked about when I spoke earlier about reasonable and comparable levels of

public service and those reasonable and comparable levels of taxation.

That's where, as was mentioned earlier, I certainly acknowledge the Premier when he mentioned about a very complex equalization formula and in the legislation. Indeed it is. The piece of legislation, the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act*, has many parts to it. Many of the items identified in the legislation, we'd know well in this province or any jurisdiction in regard to different programs that are available to us.

Part II talks about stabilization. Part III is Administration Agreements, including things like tax harmonization, several transfer payments. Part V is other payments, the Canada Health Transfer.

So within the context of that legislation is a whole range of programs that any jurisdiction avails of. It gives us a list of formulas, a list of rules and a list of regulations in terms of how that's administered. These rules are changed or adaptive. I guess that's what we're talking about here today in terms of the particular position the province may find itself in. That within that program, within various aspects of it, whether it's the stabilization side or somewhere else, it's a regulatory or a policy change that could be adapted to meet certain circumstances of any jurisdictions in Canada. That's what it's meant to do.

So it's never a wrong thing to say we're going to go to the federal government and have a discussion about a need we have at a particular time for a province and how a current program can be adapted to do that. This program allows it to happen. It is important that we lobby the federal government, we advocate to the federal government, and we have that discussion.

I congratulate the Premier – he said about the good relationship he has with the new prime minister; that's great. We have seven Liberal MPs in Ottawa, so let's use that to move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Yes, it is great, so let's see what the return is going to be. Let's use that and

work on this issue collectively and see where we can go with it, because that's what we need to do. We need to work together to do it.

Equalization should be able to adapt with a year, within a shorter period of time. The current status is it's almost five years by the time you get to a three-year average, to a two-year review. It's pretty significant in terms of being able to adapt to current circumstances. I think that's what we're saying today.

Based on unprecedented changes in the resource-based industry like oil, it's not just unique to Canada, around the world, that we should be able to be adaptive within this formula to meet the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as we move forward as being a part of Canada.

One of the areas to look at would be the Stabilization Program which is within the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act*, and that's one area that we're proposing that we certainly look. That's what the motion speaks to, that we take a clear direction on looking for that and looking for extra funding to come from that.

As well, the Stabilization Program is pretty outdated in terms of when it was originally formulated several decades ago. The calculations look at per capita of individual, and its \$60 per capita per individual within a jurisdiction. That was probably put in place several decades ago. Those are the kinds of things we can look at to get modified, to bring it in line with today's costs and expenditures. That would allow us to look at accessing greater funds through the program.

Right now, I think the way it looks, based on some discussion in the past, approximately \$30 million would come to Newfoundland and Labrador under the current arrangement. Obviously, that's not something that would be – it's a small amount but looking at meeting our needs, there's a greater discussion needed to be had on how we can access greater funds to assist us through this program.

We look at the program as a whole, and other provinces in what they're seeing in terms of dollars; \$30 million is projected under the current arrangement, what we would see in

terms of accessing that program under the stabilization fund. Other jurisdictions – to avoid catastrophic budgetary decisions – use that money to offset those programs and services, the cost that I talked about earlier that is guaranteed which is in this formula.

If you look at jurisdictions, Nova Scotia this year will receive in equalization approximately \$1.7 billion. All of that kind of stuff, sufficient revenues – this will allow Nova Scotia to get sufficient revenues, reasonably comparable levels of public service, reasonably comparable levels of taxation, which, as I said earlier, is the ultimate goal of equalization that's entrenched in the Constitution, which I said is a tremendous asset as being part of this great country we call Canada.

New Brunswick as well, about \$1.7 billion this year for that same reason, to assist them in terms of what they are doing. Manitoba, approximately \$1.7 billion to meet those needs of revenues to provide the reasonable, comparable level of public service, and that's so important.

That means all jurisdictions, as I spoke earlier, this is a means to allow – that everybody across this great country is comparable in terms of the services and what they receive, and to allow them to do that. That's in times of economic difference in terms of their ability to raise revenues. We go across this country in decades, and in the past number of years various parts of the country, whether they're manufacturing, whether they're oil producing, based on what's happening in the world, their abilities to drive revenues could go up or down. That's what this fund is here to do.

What we're saying through this motion is government, and collectively us, need to, with the federal government, work collectively and say it's time to take a look at this. We need to see a better return from equalization at this time in terms of what's happened here. It needs to become more relevant, more responsive.

Three, four or five years are not responsive to particular historic economic downturns, we'll say. It's got to be more responsive and that's what we're saying. I think through this motion and collectively, all of us, coming together and supporting this motion, I think we can get there.

I think we can make it loud and clear that we want to work together. It's important to work together to get us where we want to go.

Federal Minister Bill Morneau has recognized in the past our situation is unusual and requires intervention. In the House of Commons he mentioned that we are talking about how we can help people who are facing real challenges across the country, middle-class families across the country, people in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador. So there is a recognition by the federal Minister of Finance that, indeed, there is an issue here to be dealt with.

A Saskatchewan MP referenced the fact that leftover money for infrastructure does not make up for the unfairness in the formula. So we need to lobby to make sure this is adaptive, it can meet the current needs. Three, four or five years is not just going to cut it and it shouldn't. It's a part of being Canadian. It's part of being a member of the Canadian federation and we certainly should get a response to it.

I ask all Members today to carefully consider the motion and certainly support the motion. At the end of the day, this is about the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's not about any political stripe, but it's about the province. It's about working together to achieve what we need to achieve in our great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Once again, Madam Speaker, I stand in this House as an honour. I thank the people of Humber – Bay of Islands for electing me in the House of Assembly.

This is the first opportunity, Madam Speaker, to welcome the people who were elected for the first time to this hon. House, the House of Assembly. I can tell you that it's an honour and it's a pleasure. If you look back it's unique, not a lot of people get the opportunity to serve in this hon. House of Assembly. So to all the new Members in this House – I see one in the Opposition, I welcome him also, to all the Members on this side: enjoy your time. We're here to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker. We're here to try to help make this province a better place.

I honestly believe, and I said it before, every person in this House is here to make the lives better for everybody, no matter what side of the House you're on. Sometimes, Madam Speaker, we may differ, but I just want to let everybody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador know we will work together when we need to as a government. We will work with the Opposition, we will work with the Third Party, because when we got elected, we got elected to represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, every single person in this province.

I congratulate everybody on being elected.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Madam Speaker, I just heard the Member for Ferryland, his speech, and I agree with a lot of the things he said.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I honestly did. We've got to work together on this, Madam Speaker. The only thing, he should have advised his leader. He should have advised his leader before he got up – what a nice speech you just gave and how we all got to work together, but you listen to his leader almost being condescending.

We hear Brad Wall, we hear the Premier of Alberta, but where's our Premier? Do you know that our Premier, the Premier of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, had more meetings with the Prime Minister of Canada than the last three premiers combined?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: They stand up, Madam Speaker, they stand up and say, well, it's time for him to stand up, be like Brad Wall, stand up and speak for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madam Speaker, consultation, you go up and explain a case. That's how you get things done. It looks nice going down, ripping the flag down – it looks good, it looks great. Everybody wants to get behind you, how we're Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I'll just tell you about that, Madam Speaker. I'll just tell you about ripping down that flag. I always remember this, and a lot of people – I just want to make sure I got the figures right here. I heard everybody coming down, coming off the steps down there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Madam Speaker, here's what we got: we got a \$2 billion advance from the Atlantic Accord. That's what we got. All this big idea that we got this \$2 billion extra cash coming into the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Members opposite over there cheering. Either you did know and you cheered and misled the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, or you didn't know because they kept you in the dark.

I'll just give you some facts here, Madam Speaker. The \$2 billion that came in, it was advance payment in July 2005. Year ending March 31, 2006, there was \$322 million put aside for that year. March 31, 2007, \$219,218,000 was put aside from the Atlantic Accord. March 31, 2009, there was \$152,785,000. The province no longer qualified for equalization for the remaining balance of the \$2 billion advanced to be recognized, and they were out there telling our Premier that you should stand up for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I always said one of the biggest flaws, one of the biggest fallacies, is when it came down to that, when we were fighting for that.

Madam Speaker, I have to say, you were part of the government. The Member for Corner Brook was part of the government who signed that and gave that money, and everybody knew. The Member for Corner Brook even stood up and

said it was an advance on the Atlantic Accord. The premier at the time and all Members opposite stood up, and you're here trying to tell our Premier you have to stand up for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker –

AN HON. MEMBER: Madam Speaker.

MR. JOYCE: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I have to say if you want to follow on with your tactics – you heard the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Ferryland, he spoke very well on it.

If you want to listen to the Leader of the Opposition – and I don't know who can remember this. Can you remember the last time he was in Ottawa? He stood out in minus 20 or so, and what did he say? You can't trust Stephen Harper. What a way to build bridges. What a way to go up and have consultation. What a way to go up and sit down and say let's work together for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what he did.

Madam Speaker, our Premier brought it up today, they are trying to come –

MR. KENT: (Inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: The Member for Mount Pearl North said he put something into it. I hope what he puts into it is honesty about the hospital in Corner Brook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: That's what I hope he puts into it, Madam Speaker. Honesty in that water to let the people know about the hospital in Corner Brook.

This is a major issue, Madam Speaker, for all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is something – you can't stand up, as the Leader of the Opposition is trying to say, that you're not fighting hard enough. This is not something you can stand up, this is a long-standing process, Madam Speaker.

The next time that Newfoundland and Labrador and it's because the lag – when you're in a

deficit for three years, with the oil revenues dropping for three years and there's a lag, the next time right now that we're going to be qualified for equalization, I think, is 2018-2019.

AN HON. MEMBER: 2020.

MR. JOYCE: 2019-2020, yes.

Madam Speaker, we can stand up here and the Leader of the Opposition can stand up, but what we need to do is we need to work with our counterparts. We need to work with the federal government. We need to work with everybody possible to change the equalization formula, if need be, to reflect the realities of all the provinces and territories in Canada.

Madam Speaker, there's another thing that I took offence to from the Leader of the Opposition, that our seven MPs aren't doing their jobs. I was shocked by that because if anybody knows Judy Foote –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: – she doesn't take the back steps with nobody for Newfoundland and Labrador. If people know Judy Foote like I know Judy Foote – and I won't even get into Yvonne Jones because I don't have long enough in the day to talk about her and about how she stands up for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madam Speaker, Judy Foote will work with anybody to better the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: This is what we need. We don't need the Leader of the Opposition standing up and trying to demean our Premier who just got in three months ago, and all of a sudden saying you're not standing up with Brad Wall, you're not doing this. The approach that the previous government took just didn't work – it just didn't work.

There's another issue I have, Madam Speaker. They're all saying this happened overnight. There were two opportunities, I think. It's done every five years, I think, the Equalization Program. How come we never heard of this

before? Do you know why? The biggest fallacy was when they got the \$2 billion. Everybody said, well we still have our equalization going on until 2012. It wasn't. They had it – they had it.

For the Members opposite all of a sudden saying, now we have to go up there and we have to start dragging down flags, we have to stand up in the snowbank in minus 20 and tell the Prime Minister of Canada that you can't trust him, you'll never trust him again. Madam Speaker, it just doesn't work that way. It sounds good and it feels good, but did you get any results? That's the question you have to ask yourself.

This has nothing to do, Madam Speaker, with who's going to shout the loudest and who's going to haul down the flag the quickest. This is about getting results. I can assure you that our Premier has already had several meetings with the prime minister of Canada, and I can assure you he's had many meetings with all of our MPs. I know the MPs for Newfoundland and Labrador just last week were in Corner Brook. They sat down with all of us in Corner Brook to discuss all the issues we had. I can assure you that Newfoundland and Labrador is well represented.

We can work with all the other provinces in Canada, Madam Speaker, but we can't do it alone. I know our Premier has been saying that from day one. He said we have to work in a union with all the provinces and territories in Canada, and mainly, the prime minister. This doesn't happen overnight. There will be some discussions on changing the equalization formula, and I know we're going to be well represented at the table.

So I ask the Opposition – and when I was on the Opposition, Madam Speaker, I always said there are times you need to fight, there are times you need to stand up and that is your role as the Opposition. There are also times you need to stand with the government to fight together, to bring it in a certain way. That doesn't mean going out in the media and trying to embarrass somebody.

We did it with the shrimp. I know that committee has started up again. We did it before on many occasions. We did it with the all-party

on the mental health issues, Madam Speaker. This is what we need to do. There are times when we need to come together as people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Forget the politics. In four years' time you'll have a chance to get rid of us, or the people of the province will have a chance to get rid of us, Madam Speaker. Until then, it is very crucial that we work together. Right now, as we all know – with the drop in oil prices and other issues in the province and Alberta, which affects Newfoundland, people not working – there are major financial problems facing us, the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I heard our Premier mention, Madam Speaker, this didn't happen overnight. The Opposition, some would say – and I'm one of them who will say that they let it move on. The last two opportunities they had they never brought it up. They never discussed it. It wasn't an issue. Now all of a sudden, three months in, it's this big issue that we're not doing enough as a government.

Madam Speaker, I know my time is up, but I can tell you one thing: I know the Premier of the province. I know him well; I know him as a person. For the Leader of the Opposition to stand up and try to demean his position here because he's not standing up with Brad Wall, if anybody ever heard – when they were bringing up Saskatchewan and bringing up Alberta, Newfoundland was right in the midst of it. They were right in the midst, Newfoundland and Labrador.

When Ottawa talked about the financial crisis, they were talking about Newfoundland and Labrador also. So if the Leader of the Opposition wants to try to demean our Premier because he is not standing up for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker, he's the only one in this province who doesn't notice what our Premier is doing. He's doing it in consultation with our seven MPs and he's doing it in consultation with Judy Foote, who is our liaison and Cabinet minister.

We will make changes. It will take time, Madam Speaker. So I ask the Opposition and I ask the Third Party – we all need to work together. The financial problems of Newfoundland and

Labrador are grave. We can point and throw mud at each other all day long; it won't solve anything.

It feels good standing up here bantering back and forth, Madam Speaker, but it won't change anything. I call on the Leader of the Opposition, instead of throwing over all the mud, let's sit down and let's try to work together like we did on the shrimp, like we did on the All-Party Committee on Mental Health.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition: Here is your opportunity. You asked us to work with you before. We did on the shrimp. We did on the mental health. Here is your opportunity now to stand with our Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, who is standing with all the other premiers in Canada and the territories to say let's work together, let's make changes to reflect the realities of all the people in Canada, Madam Speaker, all throughout Canada. I call upon the Leader of the Opposition.

I will say one thing to our Premier: You can listen to what you like from the Leader of the Opposition. I can tell you he's leading this party over here. He's leading this government, Madam Speaker, and every step of the way he is informing this caucus of what is happening.

The Leader of the Opposition, here is the opportunity to come on board and help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We encourage you to come over and help us because we need your help. We need everybody's help in Newfoundland and Labrador. We need everybody, Madam Speaker. That is what we need and that is what we need to do. We support our Premier, the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I am delighted to stand this afternoon and speak to the private Member's motion. I don't know if I'll be as colourful as my colleague from Humber – Bay of Islands, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Service Newfoundland and Labrador. Entertaining or not, I do have things to say and I look forward to saying them. I hope I will be able to do that clearly.

The private Member's motion we have in front of us is interesting. We are in a difficult time in this province; there is no doubt about it. But we're in a situation that has been caused because of wasting an opportunity. That's what we're into right now in the province.

When you look at the first part of the resolution, that we will ask the Government of Canada to recognize the impact of the steep fall in oil revenues on our province and that it consider financial support to our province in order to prevent deep cuts in services to the people of the province, I mean that's right; it is a serious situation. But it means that we had poor management going on when we had oil money coming into this province hand over fist. That's what I mean when I talk about a wasted opportunity.

The wasted opportunity is there should have been long-term planning. Neither party in this Assembly, either the governing party or the Official Opposition, seem to understand what long-term planning is. When the current Official Opposition was in government and the oil money that was coming in was something that was unprecedented in our province, then we should have been looking at the long term. We should have been doing what good financial advisors say to individuals who start making a lot of money for the first time: Don't spend it all; make plans and make sure that you have money in the bank as you're also using the money because, if you don't, you could end up in trouble.

On a personal financial level, I hear people talking about young workers, especially young men, who start making big money in the oil fields, for example, over in Alberta. They start spending and they buy two or three vehicles and money is coming out through their ears and they don't plan for the future. Well, you know, that's what happened here in this province. It's a bit

embarrassing that we have a resolution that's recognizing the mess that we've been put in.

I don't hear anything from the other side now, from the government side, that's showing that they understand any better what that mess is in terms of our responsibility for it. Now, that's not saying I'm against the resolution; it's not. But we have to be honest about why this resolution is here.

When it comes to the equalization part, we all understand – and some of the former speakers have pointed it out – how complicated the whole Equalization Program and Fiscal Stabilization Program are. They're not simple; they're extremely complicated. I agree that there needs to be a review of those programs.

When we, for example, became a have province, what wasn't recognized and isn't recognized in the formula is that we had been decades and more than decades of being a really poor province. People in the province were poor. The province itself was poor. We had failing infrastructure in every way. We had schools that were falling apart. Our roads were in a mess. We still have roads in a mess. We have a school that is being closed on the Northern Peninsula, if the school board gets away with doing it, closing a school with a road coming out of that school that you wouldn't even send a cart over. You wouldn't even send a cart over with a horse pulling it, the road is so bad. So we still have a bad situation in this province.

There is absolutely no doubt that when money started coming in there was a lot that had to be done, but it should have been done carefully and with planning, instead of having a government that started to spend like drunken sailors because that's what went on, without planning, without care.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not nice.

MS. MICHAEL: Well, whether it's nice or not, it's true. It's a reality, so you're going to have to accept that reality. There was more than one premier involved with that. There was a history of premiers involved with that. One in particular who loved to spend and who didn't do any long-term planning and who went off and left a mess in the hands of his own colleagues, as far as that

goes. That's a reality. Those things are realities. Let's name the realities.

So that's what we're dealing with. We should, in actual fact, be having a feeling of shame that we wasted the golden opportunity when the price of oil was where it was. It may never reach there again. So we have wasted that opportunity. What do we do?

Yes, we can say that we want to have a review of the formulas, a review of the Equalization Program and Fiscal Stabilization Program, and I think we should. I really encourage the government to vote for this and to really put that on the table and say that they're going to work for it, but we know that's not going to happen overnight. Change is not going to happen overnight. So we need to look at the present.

We do know that the federal government, with the provincial governments, is looking at the whole infrastructure funding. So we are going to get money coming in to help with that part, but what else it is? Are there other things that we are missing?

I think this resolution is actually missing an important thing that we need to be looking at. What are the other ways in which the provinces receive money from the federal government? What are other ways in which we receive money from the federal government?

The big one, of course, is through our Canada Health Transfer, and that is something that does exist. From 2004 to 2014 we had a Health Accord between the federal government and the provinces that guaranteed a certain level of federal health transfers to each province with a 6 per cent increase every year.

That Health Accord expired in 2014. So what has happened is we are now under a formula that was imposed on the provinces by the then federal government. It wasn't a new formula that was worked out between the federal government and the provinces; it was actually imposed by the Harper government, which was the government of the day. The new formula which was put in place is going to cost our province, over the next 10 years, \$491 million. So \$491 million more will have to come out of our provincial coffers if we are going to maintain the

services in this province that are needed in health care.

If we are going to restructure our health care system to be a community-based health care system offering primary care on a community level, we are going to have to spend almost another half billion dollars out of the provincial coffers because of what was done in 2014 when the new formula was put in place.

So where is our government right now on this? I am not hearing very much from our provincial government. I am not hearing anything from the Premier. I am not hearing anything from the Minister of Health and Community Services on this.

The health ministers met in January of this year and health transfers were discussed. We got that through the media. We know that British Columbia proposed tying health care funding to demographics so that provinces with a larger proportion of seniors would get more support. I think that is a good thing, but not everybody at that table agreed to it. Where was our province? Did our province fight that? It is more than demographics with regard to seniors that we need to look at, because one of the reasons why our per capita spending is higher than other parts of the country is because we have such a small population spread out over such a land mass. We all know that. We say it over and over, and it's a reality. That is a reality.

So why should a formula not take into consideration that it has to be more expensive for Newfoundland and Labrador to run its health care system than it does for Nova Scotia, for example, or for PEI, for example, or New Brunswick – just looking at Atlantic Canada? You can't compare their cost to ours on a per capita level when you look at it from the perspective, not just of demographics – and that's one that's really important because of our growing number of seniors – but also because of the geographic place in which our small population finds itself.

So if we're looking at the present situation, and we want to deal with things in the present and we want to try to help ourselves financially in the present, we have something with the federal government – the health transfers – that is in

existence, that is going to cost a lot of money to us in Newfoundland and Labrador, approximately \$42 million a year because of the new formula, and where is this government? Are they saying anything publicly about it? I don't hear them in the media talking about it.

We don't know what was said at the table when the health ministers met in January. We do know the federal minister did commit to working with the provinces and territories toward a long-term funding arrangement. She said she is open to looking at the different circumstances and starting points of jurisdictions, but we have no timeline for that agreement. Is that something that can be put in place this year? Is that something that can help this year's budget? This is what we should be looking at.

Apparently, they are going to meet again in a few months. I invite the Minister of Health and Community Services to give us an idea of what the few months is. Did they send up a plan for looking at the health transfers? Was a plan of action put in place so that between January and the next meeting something is happening around this, or is it all on hold until the ministers meet again?

This is something real that we, if we're talking about, as the resolution does in the first phrase, trying to get the federal government to give financial support to our province to help our people, well, making the health transfers work for our province would be a big first step in doing that. They're not just going to take money out of another pot over there somewhere and say, oh, we'll just give a half billion dollars to Newfoundland. It isn't going to happen that way.

The money has to come out from programs that are in existence. We already know that money will be coming from infrastructure, as I've already said, but let's make this work. I'm calling upon the government to really become very proactive with the federal prime minister and with the federal minister of health to make the health transfers work to save \$42 million a year approximately out of our budget by making sure that the health transfer can work for us, that instead of losing over \$420 million over the next 10 years, we will not only save it but also have more money coming into us. We know Ottawa

can do that. We do know the money is there for that to happen, and we have to stop Ottawa from saving money in the health transfers off the backs of our people.

I want to hear more; I want to hear more from the government side of the House. I want to hear that the Premier and the Minister of Health – I don't care how often the Premier has met with the prime minister to this date, that's his job. I want them to meet again. I want him to do it with the Minister of Health. I want him to demand that Canada sit down with the provinces and territories and negotiate a new 10-year health accord, one that is fair to our province and one that takes into account why our per capita spending is so high.

Our per capita spending is not higher than other parts of the country. It's not high because we're wasting money. It's not high because we haven't skimmed things down to the bone, because we have. It's high because of the reality we're dealing with.

I call on the Premier, I call upon the Minister of Health, to not just sit back, not just wait until the next meeting. Go and speak for our province. Go and push for real action from the federal government in putting in place a new health accord. It's being demanded by people right across the country, and I'm looking for leadership from this government in doing that.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in this hon. House today. It's the first opportunity that I've had since we're back in session to speak to a motion and to address this House, so I want to take a quick moment to congratulate all hon. Members who were elected in the recent election that took place on November 30. We're back to work. It's great to see debate underway in the House of Assembly.

This is an important motion that a Member of our caucus is pleased to put forward today, Madam Speaker. It's about modernizing federal-provincial fiscal arrangements looking at the Equalization Program, but also the Fiscal Stabilization Program, looking at all federal transfers, all funding arrangements with the federal government to find out how they can be modernized to help us in the long term, but also to help us with this short-term financial crisis that we're dealing with.

I'm very concerned, though, by media reports today, Madam Speaker. When the Premier was questioned yesterday about these funding relationships with the federal government the question was posed to him: Will he stand up and fight? His answer was: It is what it is.

To me, if you say it is what it is, it implies that you've given up, that you've rolled over, you're going to take what you've been given and it is what it is. So we now have a Premier that is so cozy and comfortable with the Trudeau Liberals that after only four months he's thrown in the towel and he's given up, and it is what it is.

One of the Members opposite talked about all the wonderful meetings they've had, photo ops, selfies and trips to Ottawa. In fact, it's very entertaining, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, we've got the first Premier in the history –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: Thank you for your protection, Madam Speaker.

We've got the first Premier in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, since Confederation, who's not prepared to stand up and fight for what is just and what is right for our province.

That wasn't the only statement that the Premier made yesterday that's concerning, Madam Speaker. In response to that question – will you stand up and fight, will you push the federal government for action on these funding arrangements – he said, we've got to do this on our own.

Today we heard about the cozy relationship with the seven Liberal MPs who, I guess, also aren't going to stand up for us. The Throne Speech yesterday talked about the new relationship with the federal government. So what does that new relationship consist of? Well it consists of it is what it is, and we've got to do this on our own. We're just going to roll over and take what we've been given. We'll have tea parties, socials and frequent gatherings with our Liberal friends in Ottawa, but we're not going to stand up and fight for Newfoundland and Labrador. That's concerning.

When pressed even further, Madam Speaker, the third thing that the Premier said yesterday was there will be discussions in the future, so no attempt to take action. No commitment to stand up. No attempt to push the federal government for much-needed support in light of the unique circumstances that we find ourselves in.

It is what it is. We've got to do this on our own. There will be discussions in the future. That's the stronger tomorrow that the Liberals are offering, Madam Speaker. That's the kind of leadership we're seeing from the new administration after four months. Giving up after four months is rather perplexing and concerning.

To today's motion, let's just think about what would be possible, though, if we were prepared to stand up and do what's right and fight for the province. What if Ottawa were to deliver the two things that we're calling for in this resolution? What would change if we were to see fairness in the formula, and in the various formulas and funding relationships? What if we also got the immediate relief that we so desperately require? Also, what consequences could we avoid and what benefits could we achieve?

That's what we should be asking ourselves today as we prepare for this vote. Based on the debate I've heard so far, I fear that Members opposite are not going to support this motion to stand up and pursue more support from the federal government. If that happens, it would be a travesty I feel, Madam Speaker.

Let's talk about the benefit of immediate relief should we be able to secure support working with the federal government. If we do get sufficient immediate relief, we could avoid deep

cuts in services. We could avoid outrageous tax increases. We could avoid unsustainable levels of borrowing at high interest rates. The benefits of all of that would be very significant.

Think about what's been put on the table. Not only do we have all the empty Liberal promises put on the table that were rehashed in the Throne Speech yesterday, but core programs and services that have helped people for years and years in our province could be on the chopping block as a result of these fiscal circumstances we find ourselves in. Imagine if the threat of those cuts were removed because we were able to reach some kind of agreement with Ottawa and renegotiate some of those arrangements and formulas.

The Finance Minister and the new government are talking cuts in the order of 30 per cent by department. That would be absolutely devastating. I don't always agree with the Members from the New Democratic Party, but fear is a good word to use. Every public employee in the province right now is fearful of what those cuts entail. Madam Speaker, 30 per cent over the next number of years, there's nobody who won't feel that. In fact, the Minister of Finance has said that some of the measures will be immediate, some will come later in the year and more will come in 2017. So the uncertainty will remain for those that survive the first rounds of cuts.

Think about what that lack of certainty and lack of stability does for your workforce, for stress levels, for mental health, for employees' ability to focus on delivering services people need that will truly benefit people in the province. I think highlighting that fear is legitimate, Madam Speaker.

Which public employee, though, is going to invest in a new home or a new car or appliances, or having another child, if, for the next few years, as a result of the uncertainty and as a result of these insufficient fiscal relationships that there's an axe hovering overhead for the next number of years. When you have a nervous economy, that lack of confidence ripples outward and it affects the entire community.

The fears of those nasty consequences become self-fulfilling because fear actually chokes the

growth we need to get through this crisis. That's why we need support from Ottawa. That's why we can't be afraid to negotiate. That's why we can't be afraid to stand up to the federal government.

If a federal infusion helps the province produce a budgetary plan that doesn't involve those deep cuts or doesn't instill the fears of cuts to come, then imagine what impact that would have on consumer confidence. Imagine the impact that would have on investor confidence.

As the Premier pointed out today, we did promote an approach of attrition as opposed to layoffs. That should be the strategy of choice. With the right support from the federal government I believe that could still be achieved. Then employees could really focus on delivering high-quality services to the people of the province rather than living in fear for the next number of years.

The plan that we delivered last fall was to reduce the public sector incrementally through natural attrition. I think that is still possible if we're prepared to work with Ottawa and achieve a new kind of fiscal relationship with Ottawa. Then public employees can get back to making investments in their communities.

Everybody will feel the impact. There will be a huge ripple effect in our economy. Car dealers will notice the impact. Home builders will notice the impact. Realtors will notice the impact. Retailers will notice the impact. Corner stores will notice the impact.

A very large number of people in this province earn their living from the Provincial Treasury. That is the reality. Either directly or indirectly, there are a vast number of people in this province that do earn a living from the Provincial Treasury.

Some say we need to adjust that balance. On this side of the House we agree. We agree that we need to strike a new balance, but the way to do that is not through massive layoffs. Massive layoffs will be unavoidable if we're not able to secure much-needed support from Ottawa.

Unfortunately, the approach from the new Premier and the new government is it is what it

is; we've got to do this on our own. Instead of dealing with it now, his comment yesterday is there will be discussions at some point in the future.

Mr. – Madam Speaker – I almost did it, too. Madam Speaker, Wade Locke just completed an analysis in which he said a program of layoffs to reduce the deficit cannot be done without extreme hardship on those employees and without throwing the economy in a huge recession.

So imagine if we take an economy that's already been battered by bottomed out oil revenues and add a huge recession that's caused by massive public service layoffs, that won't leave Newfoundland and Labrador stronger. We won't achieve that better, stronger tomorrow we were promised. We won't be positioned for growth and diversification of the economy. It's actually going to compound the problem, and it's going to put us into a downward spiral.

It'll be the 90s all over again – and there are some people in this House that probably remember the 90s under the previous Liberal administration. Massive layoffs in the fisheries and then there were massive layoffs in the public sector, and a decade later you could still see the devastation.

Right now at this point in our history – and it is a challenging time in our history, Madam Speaker – we can't afford to make the situation worse. So we need an immediate federal infusion of sufficient quantity that will avoid that scenario and actually leave us stronger, which we all want.

That's why the emergency infusion is so important; it gets us back on our feet sooner. Ultimately, the federal government, I would argue, Ottawa, also benefits from that approach. We'll do it if the Premier's not prepared to do so. Someone ought to make that case to the federal government. That case needs to be made consistently, it needs to be made clearly and it needs to be made strongly.

The case we need to make is investing in the province now avoids making us a perpetual burden in the future. Instead of taking that stand, the Premier's approach is we've got to do it on

our own, it is what it is, and there will be maybe some discussions in the future.

We don't want to be reliant again like we were for decades in the past. We want to be self-reliant, and we want to bridge funding through the revenue crisis that will keep us on the path of self-reliance.

Back in 2009 there was a global recession happening, and we took the very approach I'm suggesting here today and that's being suggested by the Leader of the Opposition with this resolution and it worked. It made a real difference. When others question the \$25 billion we managed, remember a chunk of that spending occurred during that global recession in 2009 and in 2010, and it wasn't money that was wasted. Wade Locke was not the only one to acknowledge that. Mark Carney, who was then the Governor of the Bank of Canada, came to our province in 2009 and applauded our government for the approach that we took at the time. He went so far as to say we were an example for the rest of the country.

So infrastructure investments kept communities moving forward. They kept consumers spending. They kept private sector investments continuing and our economy grew. If it wasn't for the huge drop in oil revenues in recent months, over the last year or two, we'd be soaring today. The drop in oil prices is our new recession. We can pretend that low oil is the new permanent reality. We can let our economy die and we just simply say, well, it is what it is. Or, Madam Speaker, we can treat the situation we face as a temporary storm. With bridge financing, with a new relationship, a true new relationship with the federal government, we can weather and emerge from that stronger. I think both approaches are self-fulfilling.

If you let the economy shrivel, it will shrivel; but if you invested in growth, the economy will grow. We have to make a strong case to Ottawa because the oil-producing, equalization non-receiving provinces have a direct stake in lobbying for federal relief funding. So if we three provinces don't stand up for ourselves and for one another, no one else will stand up and fight for us.

I am really disappointed to hear in this hon. House today that our new Premier is not prepared to stand up. He is simply saying it is what it is, we might have some discussions in the future, and we've got to go it on our own. If we take that approach, it is going to be a devastating situation for many years to come. So let's not sacrifice our future. Let's stand and let's fight together, as some Members on both sides have suggested, instead of simply saying it is what it is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, I realize my time is almost up.

When it comes to formula reform, only this province can make this province's case and we need to do so. Equalization is supposed to be up for renegotiation. We've got to stand up; otherwise, it could be devastating. We became a have province by standing up. Failure to fight will jeopardize our future.

So right now, we need relief funding and that requires a strenuous fight. So let's get on with it and let's just not simply say it is what it is. Let's stand up and fight for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, as I have had the opportunity to hear the debate this afternoon, I think it is important as an MHA, as a Member of this hon. House, as a Member of the government caucus, as a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, that we set the record straight on a couple of things.

I can assure you that the Members on this side opposite, led by our Premier, are in fact – quite the contrary to the Members' opposite

comments – standing up for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: We are standing up in the face of an unprecedented fiscal leftover, from an administration that was so focused on its own political survival versus what was important to the public sector, what was important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, I'll start with this one. I was stunned yesterday with the Leader of the Official Opposition when he said in his comments that they were proud that they had paid their own way. I believe that's the exact quote that the Leader of the Official Opposition said. I think his words were we're paying our own way.

As our Premier has mentioned earlier today, this is the same group who knew they had a liability of some \$271 million related to equalization overpayments, and punted it into the future without one thought to creating a legacy fund to pay for the purchases they wanted to make during their administration.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition likes to continue to talk about this problem and this fiscal reality that we're being faced with as it's because of the oil and it's because oil prices fell. Well, I'd like to remind the Members opposite that for their last budget, which was fiscal 2015-16, that in order for that budget to have ever been balanced, they would have needed oil to be sold for \$167 a barrel – \$167.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe that people of Newfoundland and Labrador are coming out in droves to participate in an honest, frank, open discussion about the reality of the situation that we are faced with in our province. Many of my neighbours and friends, our neighbours and friends, the entire province, understand that the problem we are facing didn't get created because of oil. It has been exacerbated by oil, but it certainly wasn't created.

Mr. Speaker, expenditures for the former administration from 2010 to 2016, compared to other jurisdictions, increased – and I share this with everybody – 36 per cent, 36 per cent, 36

per cent, 32 per cent, 32 per cent, 32 per cent, 34 per cent over six years. That's the total expenditure per capita increase that this Opposition here stands in the House of Assembly and continues to try to justify, even though the people of the province sent a very clear message on November 30 that they expect a government that is going to provide much stronger leadership and better management than the government that was here before.

The Member who spoke earlier said that – he pontificated about layoffs were inevitable and unavoidable. Well I can assure the Member opposite that I take very seriously, our Premier takes very seriously, our government takes very seriously the valuable work of our public sector and we intend to do everything we can to make sure that the best decisions are made to deal with the fiscal reality. We're not going to make knee-jerk reactions. We're not going to make the decisions that the former administration made in its dying days to continue to waste taxpayers' money, and we'll look forward to continuing to reveal those discussions here in the House as the debate moves on.

This situation we're in goes back to their inability, the former administration's inability to plan for the future. I find it ironic that the Member opposite actually spoke – he used the term, we should be looking for bridge financing. Now, Mr. Speaker, 86 days today I have had the privilege, with my colleagues, of working in our administration, and for those 86 days we have collectively worked tirelessly to understand the depth and breadth of the situation we've dealing with and the facts.

I can assure you that if the people of the province believe the Member opposite understands exactly what the term bridge financing means, I'll look forward to his explanations in this House when I continue to challenge him on the financial decisions that they made over the last number of years.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that this situation is extremely difficult for all of us. It is difficult for all of our families. It's difficult for the community. It's difficult for our workforce. That is why it is important for us to make sure as we're making the decisions; as the Premier has said today, we will make those decisions based

on evidence, based on data and based on the facts.

I hear the Member opposite taking great pains – she's taking great pains in heckling me over a comment that she believes I said in the House here. I guess what I would say to that Member, if she believes this situation is about comedy –

AN HON. MEMBER: She thinks it's funny.

MS. C. BENNETT: – and she thinks it's funny, I'm hoping that they're really appreciative of the fact that they are sitting in Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite also talked about the need for an economy that's robust. For years, Members on this side of the House have challenged the former administration about having an economy that was diversified and an economy that was based on more than oil royalties. The Members opposite continued to talk about how great the economy was they were creating. Well, I'm not sure the people of the province today who are coming out to have discussions with our government have that same confidence that they had.

This is the same people on that side who stood up here and told the people of the province everything was going to be fine. It's going to be great. I'm not prepared to do anything other than what our Premier has said we will do, and that's to be open and frank and honest with the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: We will continue to work with the federal government to ensure that we take advantage of every single opportunity to partner with the federal government and to find opportunities to enhance and empower our economy to be even stronger than it is today.

We certainly won't leave applications unsigned as we race to put political signs up, like the Members opposite did when they didn't commit to a funding application that would have seen

some \$30 million go into communities in Newfoundland and Labrador that they left undone. That doesn't speak to the integrity of making decisions that are in the best interests of the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues in this House continue to work every day to make sure that we will create the environment for families and people to feel successful, hopeful about the future of our province. We will fix the mess that was left for us as an administration, we will fix the financial situation that we have been presented with and we will fix and plan that this will never, ever happen again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: Never again.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the people of the province – somebody said to me once the electorate are never wrong. I believe that today's private Member's resolution is a testament and reinforces what the people of the province knew back on November 30. They knew the best idea that people could come up with in that administration was to get somebody else to fix it and not accept accountability for the problem that they, in fact, created.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to supporting my colleagues and voting on this PMR in a few minutes. I look forward to continuing to have discussions in this House about the things that we will do to recover and clean up what was left on behalf of the Members opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition to close debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't expect the Member to not use up all of her time. I apologize for being caught a little off guard. I expected she'd want to go way beyond 15 minutes, but she hasn't. She chose not to use up her time today on this important matter.

I thank you for acknowledging me. I'd like to just start very briefly by thanking all of the Members who entered in the debate today and who have brought their viewpoints. Some of them I'm going to reference in my closing comments. Now that we've been here for a couple of hours, Mr. Speaker, I think it's quite clear. For those of us who are returning, it's like we never left in many ways.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs continues to be his usual entertaining self and liking to take his shots and provide his viewpoint in his way. After many years I am glad to see now he has made it to Cabinet and has a different role in government. I thought we would probably see a little bit of a different Member today than we have seen in the past, but his old self is still around.

Also interesting as I sit here this afternoon is listening to what we came quite accustomed to before, being the condescending remarks and comments off camera and off microphone from the Member who is now the Minister of Education, and even condescending remarks around employees as well. We have seen that in the past as well and he was doing that again this afternoon, so we see he is back to his old self again.

MR. KIRBY: (Inaudible.)

MR. P. DAVIS: There he goes again, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Now we are seeing more of it, so it is just confirmation of what I just said, I guess, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this discussion this afternoon and this motion this afternoon is about fiscal support by the federal government to our province. I don't know of any reason why anybody in this House of Assembly would not support a motion that's asking the federal government to consider

the circumstances we are in and provide fiscal support to our province, and also to have a look at modernizing the federal-provincial arrangements. We know that includes the Equalization Program and also the Fiscal Sustainability Program.

The Fiscal Sustainability Program, the Premier talked this afternoon about – I think he used \$31 million in his comments. To my recollection, I believe it is about \$32 million and that is about \$60 per person, but \$31 million or \$32 million is neither here nor there. This fund was established in the '60s at \$60 per person. So if we were to apply inflation to that today, that means the Premier should actually be going to the federal government looking for about \$210 million. Because \$1 today compared to the '60s is about seven times the value. The Premier today really should be going to look for the win of about \$210 million.

If you think about the HST that they reversed – and I remember on budget day last year, the Premier was out in the lobby on one side, and I remember the Minister of Finance was on the other side of the lobby, the now Premier, who was the Opposition Leader at the time, said we are going to do away with the HST. We are not going to do the increase. I don't know where the evidence-based decision making was. Minutes after we announced it, he said he was going to do away with it.

He also said that he'd have to look at how you deal with the public service. He was very kind, very supportive and throughout the whole campaign said jobs are safe and so on. What is interesting, the Minister of Finance, on budget day last year, sat in the lobby of the House of Assembly talking to the media and said until I get in to see the books, until we understand the complexities, I can't tell you what part of government we're going to eliminate, was her words. She was going to eliminate parts of government.

We know that was a plan for a year ago, that if they were elected in the fall, which they were – and we have clearly articulated our respect for the decision of the people – she was going to eliminate parts of government. So we hope they don't do that. We really hope.

I remember back in 2012 when I was on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and we laid off public servants. Well, the Opposition at the time, who is now the government, I mean they just clobbered us day after day after day. The Minister of Municipal Affairs especially at the time, who was a Member on the Opposition, day after day and every day he came in he had a new number. First he was talking about hundreds of employees we cut and then it became thousands and thousands of employees; he just kept coming with a new number. He clobbered us over the head for cutting public service, every single day in the House in 2012. I remember that. Do you remember that? The Minister of Municipal Affairs remembers when he came into the House, he used to do that. He used to clobber us over the head.

Last year when we had our budget we knew we had –

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. P. DAVIS: Sorry, I missed that. He's saying it with a smile on his face, so it can't be too bad. What's that?

MR. JOYCE: Abandon ship.

MR. P. DAVIS: Last year, we were quite honest with the people of the province, Mr. Speaker. We were in an election year, it was known as an election budget, and did we go in and promise the world to people. We went in and said, look, we have to increase HST. We've got to do this; \$200 million annual value to the province. The Premier made an evidence-based decision within seconds of us announcing that saying he's going to cut the HST. He said it's a job killer.

Well, it's really interesting, in New Brunswick, the Liberal premier of New Brunswick just increased the HST, did exactly the same thing we proposed and has no evidence to say that it's a job killer. The Liberal premier of Nova Scotia has publicly said that all of Atlantic Canada, all provinces in Atlantic Canada, should have a 15 per cent HST. The last time I checked, we're part of Atlantic Canada. That's the Liberal premier in Nova Scotia said that and he said it before New Brunswick put theirs up, and now New Brunswick has increased theirs to 15 per cent.

They did it, by the way, after a 14-15 month consultation process almost identical to what this government is doing. We know Members opposite had some good friends. The Minister of Finance, when she was in Opposition last year, came to the House and talked about the great trip she had in New Brunswick. She talked about what she learned in New Brunswick. One of the things she learned was to do a 14-15 month consultation process, go out to the people of the province with what your plan is and ask them – no, no, they didn't do that, sorry. Go out to the people of the province with a blank slate and ask them how they should fill in the blanks, what they should do.

In New Brunswick I know that for some time now they're calling it the blame-it-on-the-people tour. The Government of New Brunswick said, well, we're doing this because the people told us to do it. We made decisions based on what people told us during our consultations. It's not our fault; it's because that's what people told us to do. That's what they're calling it now in New Brunswick; they're calling it the blame-it-on-the-people tour. We know how the people in New Brunswick are responding to that.

We talked about public-private partnerships. Oh no, they weren't going to have any part of that. We talked about staff reductions, we talked about through attrition and we talked about increasing revenue through HST. They weren't going to have anything to do with that. Now, apparently, Mr. Speaker, all of that's on the table today and that's now being considered. I'm glad they're looking at those measures, because we do have to take measures – we have to take measures.

Now the Premier talked this afternoon – and it was interesting to listen to what the Premier had to say, because he's thrown up his hands and he said it is what it is. The Member for Mount Pearl North has articulated that and spoke to that (inaudible) it is what it is.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs, I hate to go back to him and give him credit again, but he did say when he was over there – you did say when you were on your feet this afternoon, you talked about my relationship or lack of a relationship with the prime minister. He was absolutely right – he was absolutely right. We worked with and

met with and consulted with and discussed and debated and went through countless meetings with the federal government trying to conclude what they had promised to do.

The day I walked out of the prime minister's office and I said that's a prime minister you couldn't trust, I can tell you it was well fleshed out and flushed out before I went to the people and said you can't trust him. He's turned his back on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I'm sure Members opposite and their federal friends, MPs, are glad we did that, because I'm sure that didn't hurt him in the election this year when we said you can't trust that prime minister.

That was the position we took. We crossed what some would say were party lines and we said, no, you can't trust him. And the people of Newfoundland and Labrador spoke. You're right, they believed you can't trust him, and they voted him out, and of course the prime minister is no longer the prime minister. He's no longer the leader of the party and the party has moved on and it's obvious the federal Conservatives are now taking a different viewpoint in many of the areas with different leadership there.

Not once when I took a position and I had a position with the prime minister – and yes, I did; I wasn't afraid to say here's what I'm doing and here's where I am and this is my place. But not once did I throw my hands up and say, well, it is what it is and that's all I can do. Because that's what we heard from our Premier when it comes to equalization, when it comes to funding and assistance from the federal government. He threw up his hands and said that's all I can do – that's all I can do.

I'm not sure if my time – has my time run out? I can see the clock is not running, so –

AN HON. MEMBER: They stopped it.

MR. P. DAVIS: Oh, they stopped it? Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you'll let me know when I'm getting close to my time.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not, Mr. Speaker.

MR. P. DAVIS: What's that?

Mr. Speaker, what equalization is – and I referenced this in my comments in the response to the Speech from the Throne yesterday. Under the Constitution, equalization is defined as this, and I quote: “Parliament and the government of Canada are committed to the principle of making equalization payments to ensure that provincial governments have sufficient revenues to provide reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation.”

Mr. Speaker, if the Premier was to increase the HST by 2 per cent, then now it’s being an equal level of taxation with the other parts of Atlantic Canada. PEI is 14 per cent, but I suspect before long they’re going to go to 15 per cent as well. It would be a reasonable level, a comparable level of taxation.

That would better position – and people are going to say, well if we need this more money, we need this help, we need this assistance, instead of just saying, well, that’s all we can do and it is what it is. I believe we should do that. I believe we should lobby. I’m sure the Premier – I think one of the speakers this afternoon said there’s been four times that the Premier and the prime minister met. We need to know, where has that gotten us and is there value in that? Are we receiving benefit from that and are we going to receive benefit from that? We should. Are we going to receive benefit?

We know the Minister of Finance is taking action and made some policy announcements in December. Except for one, they’re all the same ones that we announced previously. It was said in the House today that there’s been \$100 million in savings. I understand now that at some point in time I expect she’s going to correct that because I don’t think that was the right information. I expect she’ll correct that.

The government hasn’t taken steps and bond-rating agencies look for that. There’s no denying this, when we brought our plan forward of a tax increase, reduction of public service, looking at public-private partnerships as a way for better value for taxpayers dollars – when we brought that forward the bond-rating agencies maintained the rating. From the glory days of highest priced oil to those really tough challenges we had last year, we were very clear,

here’s the price of oil, here’s what we predict and, if it changes, it’s going to have an impact.

Even our budget books indicate the impact is going to be \$29 million for every dollar we lose in oil. Our document said that, \$29 million for every dollar that oil drops. So that’s about \$30 million. If it dropped \$20, that’s \$600 million. That’s not difficult math to figure out.

We know there was a considerable amount of drop in oil pricing since the election last year. That’s what happens. If oil goes up, we’d be in a much better position, and if oil goes down, we’re in a worse position.

Members opposite continue to talk about when the big, bad PCs were in power, here’s what they did and here’s what they didn’t do. You know, while we were doing all the things I just talked about, while we were laying off staff in 2012 – well, last year we brought forward a budget that said increase the HST. We said we’re going to reduce the number of staff.

Do you know what the Opposition of the day, the Liberals, were doing? Every day after day after day in Question Period they were asking us for more. They wanted us to spend more. Every single day last spring, there might be a couple of exceptions, they came to the House – and if I remember correctly, I remember researching this last year. I think in the first three weeks of the spring sitting a year ago, the Liberal Opposition last year, I think it was around \$3 billion in additional spending they asked for in the House of Assembly. I stand to be corrected, but if my recollection is correct, it was about \$3 billion.

MR. HUTCHINGS: It was \$2.5 billion.

MR. P. DAVIS: It was \$2.5 billion, was it? I’m told it was \$2.5 billion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: They came in and asked for hundreds of millions, billions of dollars day after day. While we were trying to reduce spending, they were criticizing us for doing that. While we were trying to reduce staff, we were being criticized for that; yet, they asked for more.

Now they have a different tune. There is a different tune today. Now the tune today sounds much like we did last year. We can't spend everything. We can't give everything you want.

I say to the Minister of Fisheries, I'm glad to see you're here. I hear you down there. It's good to see you're here. I'm glad to know we have a Minister of Fisheries. We weren't sure until last week. We saw you at the rally, but it's good to see you here.

MR. KENT: How was Boston?

MR. P. DAVIS: What's that?

MR. KENT: How was Boston?

MR. P. DAVIS: Yes, he was in Boston, too, but the Minister of Fisheries is here. I'm sure he's going to speak. It won't be long and he'll be having questions, too.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. The disruption is throwing me off. I apologize. Even my own Member is disrupting me here and I apologize for him as well.

The important part is they were elected. As the Minister of Finance just talked about, yes, the people said to them we like all your promises, no job layoffs. We like all your promises that you're not going to privatize. We like your promises that you're not going to increase taxes. We like all that, and they elected you based on that.

I was asked this afternoon when I was out talking to the media, one of the first questions they asked was: How long do you think the government is going to blame everything on you? I said, well, you're going to have to ask them. I don't know, but that's what we expected to happen. When there's a change in government there would be a constant: Oh, it's your fault, your fault, your fault.

Whose fault is it that Premier Brad Wall is where he is today? Or whose fault is it where

Alberta is today? Or whose fault is it where Ontario or Quebec are with their matters today?

Mr. Speaker, what this is about –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll wrap up very quickly.

What this is about today, Mr. Speaker, is about asking the federal government to support Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: We will support you in that effort if you go to Ottawa, as you've been asking us for, we'll support you. This is about the people of the province; it's about nothing else, the people of the province first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It being Private Members' Day, the House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.