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*Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA*

Thursday

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

**Statements by Members**

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today we have Members' statements for the Districts of Lewisporte – Twillingate, Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, Conception Bay South, St. George's – Humber, St. John's Centre and Baie Verte – Green Bay.

The hon. the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate.

**MR. D. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize Mr. Goward Heath. Goward grew up on Fogo Island and in 1940 at the age of 24, he joined the Royal Naval with six of his buddies. He served throughout World War II and remained with the military until 1945.

His deployments led him to the Mediterranean and Atlantic oceans where he served as a gunner on a minesweeper. Post-war, Mr. Heath returned to Lewisporte and was instrumental in forming the Royal Canadian Legion – Branch 31. For 60 years, he held executive positions as president, secretary and treasurer.

Mr. Heath volunteered with Civil Defence and was a Canadian Ranger. He also volunteered with the Canadian Army in Botwood, the 617 Dambuster Squadron in Lewisporte, St. Matthew's Church and many other community boards and committees.

For his brave service and contribution to his country, Goward received many awards including the Queen's Jubilee Commemorative award, the Legion's Meritorious Service Award and the Palm Leaf. On October 22, 2015, Goward celebrated his 100th birthday with his family and friends.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in honouring Mr. Goward Heath for his service to this great province and country.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize two industrious young women, Nicole Whittle and Eemaan Thind of Harbour Breton, both recipients of a Youth Ventures Award at the 18th Annual Provincial Youth Ventures Awards in St. John's in 2015.

Nicole received the Star Coordinator Award for her exceptional work as the Youth Ventures Coordinator for the South Coast – Coast of Bays region. This award goes to the Site Coordinator that has shown initiative and outstanding efforts in the delivery of youth ventures in their area.

Ms. Thind received the Excellence in Product Design Award for EemaanArt. This award is given to a business that shows unique talent in the craft or artistic ability of their product. Congratulations to Eemaan for employing her awesome creativity and artistic skills creating customized handmade drawings and henna body tattoos.

We are all so very proud of Nicole and Eemaan for their great accomplishments and commend them for being excellent role models for our youth.

I ask that all Members join me in congratulating these fine young women who I am sure will continue to show outstanding effort and success in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for District of Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Winterfest in CBS was a huge success this year. The ten-day event kicked off on February 6 and took place at various locations throughout Conception Bay South. Winterfest has become a tradition in our community. I attended many events this year and experienced first-hand the strong community spirit.

I'd like to extend my congratulations and thanks to the Winterfest committee, sponsors, volunteers and the Town of Conception Bay South for contributing to the festivals' success.

Mr. Speaker, Winterfest 2016 had activities for all ages and groups. I was pleased to attend many events, including the Fred Squires and Annie Parsons Shield Hockey Challenge, as well as the Junior High Challenge.

The Annual Pancake Breakfast was a huge success, with a record turnout at the new CBS Arena. This year there were some new activities added, including an Outdoor Family Fun Day, and a Casino Night fundraiser in support of the 2016 Newfoundland and Labrador Summer Games.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating the Winterfest committee and the Town of Conception Bay South in hosting a tremendous winter festival.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. George's – Humber.

**MR. REID:** Mr. Speaker, recently American archaeologist Sarah Pareak received a lot of media attention related to her discovery of what seems to be the second Viking site in this province.

She used satellite imagery to help hone in on an area that seemed to have evidence of human activity at Point Rosie in the Codroy Valley. Last summer the team visited the site and found turf walls and stone hearth which seems to have been used to heat bog iron.

The findings were supported by researchers from the University of Massachusetts, who used radiocarbon dating to determine the bog iron found in the area dated back to 800 to 1200 AD, which would place them around the time of the Vikings in North America.

While there is still a lot of work to be done to determine the significance of these findings, this is a very important discovery for the area. Along

with the confirmed site at L'Anse aux Meadows, this new site would certainly solidify the province as the Vinland mentioned in the Viking sagas.

I ask all Members to join with me in recognizing the value of this work done so far and wish these investigators well in their future work at Point Rosie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of St. John's Centre.

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

How happy I am to announce that our very own Amelia Curran has won two ECMAs for Folk Recording of the Year and Songwriter of the Year for her latest album *They Promised You Mercy*. Amelia is on tour – and what a brilliant ambassador of mercy she is.

She represents the best in us; hard worker, brilliant songwriter, fierce feminist and a generous heart. A line from one of Amelia's songs pushes us all to action: "What will you be building when you have to go?" Has she ever been building!

In addition to her phenomenal song writing, she has been collaborating with people all over the province to bravely address the stigma that surrounds mental health.

Springing from the extraordinary response that she received last year from thisvideo.ca she and her team just launched their newest initiative. It's Mental is a fantastic grassroots project inspiring citizen action to de-stigmatize mental health perceptions and improve the mental health care system.

Amelia and her team are also building a documentary film to raise awareness and encourage appropriate resources for mental health care. Bravo Amelia!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Baie Verte – Green Bay.

**MR. WARR:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize a thriving sport in my district. The Dorset Collegiate Table Tennis Club was founded in 1992 by teacher sponsor and coach Mark Warren. The club grew from a handful of eager young players playing on one table at a school of 159 students, to a club today of up to 30 players, playing high-calibre table tennis on eight tables.

The team blossomed when it captured four consecutive School Sports Newfoundland and Labrador provincial high school championships from 2005 to 2008. The team recently captured its fourth consecutive Central West Regional Table Tennis Championship as well as its second consecutive SSNL Provincial Table Tennis Championship. So that's six of 12 SSNL provincial high school championships in the last 12 years.

Club members have participated in the last four Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games, the Canada Games in British Columbia, the North American Championships in Washington, D.C. and the National Championships in Quebec.

Dorset Collegiate is a small school, but its table tennis club is making big waves in sport in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating the Dorset Collegiate Table Tennis Club for its achievements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**The Commemoration of the First World War and the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel**

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honour 100. Today for Honour 100, we have the Member for the District of Carbonear – Trinity – Bay de Verde.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First

World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve, or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine. This will be followed by a moment of silence.

Lest we forget: Hubert Victor Gullage, William F. Gullage, Ambrose Guy, Chester Cameron Guy, James George W. Hagen, Albert Haines, John Halfyard, Silas Halfyard, Wallace Halfyard, Gordon Archibald Haliburton, Abel Haliday, James Hall, Richard Hugh Hall, William Hall, William Hall, Albert Hallett, Richard J. Hamen, Stewart Hamlin, Alan Hancock, Albert Hancock, Eli Hancock, John Hancock, Louis Hancock, Albert Hann, Brigham Hann, Fred Hann, George Hann, Robert Hann, William S. Hann, Frank J. Hannon, Wilfred T. Harbin, Ernest William Harding, Herbert Harding, William Harding, Edward Hardy, John Hardy, William Frank Hardy, Harvey Hare, Frank Harnett, William Harnett.

(Moment of silence.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

**Statements by Ministers**

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to recognize the 90th birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Her Majesty has visited Newfoundland and Labrador numerous times during her reign and our people have a strong sense of pride and connection to the royal family.

Mr. Speaker, in 1959, Her Majesty and Prince Philip visited the province as part of a Canada-wide tour. In 1978, her visit to the province included several highlights such as turning the sod for what became the Queen Elizabeth II Library at Memorial University and again, in 1997, Her Majesty celebrated the 500th anniversary of the landfall of John Cabot.

There are various examples of Her Majesty's impact on our province including the naming of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, which received its royal prefix from Queen Elizabeth II in 1979, and the Royal St. John's Regatta, which has the Queen as its patron and received its royal prefix from her in 1993.

Mr. Speaker, today we recognize and thank her for her service to the Commonwealth and for serving over the past 64 years with agility and poise.

On behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I wish Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II a happy 90th birthday and continued health and happiness.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement today. We join with Members opposite and all Members of the House of Assembly, as well as all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and all Canadians, in wishing Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II a very happy 90th birthday.

As the Premier alluded to, Canadians and particularly the people from Newfoundland and Labrador have a real sense of pride and connection with Queen Elizabeth and the royal family. It is obvious, as referenced by the Premier, the importance and the highlights and the focus that we've put on Queen Elizabeth in her reign.

In Conception Bay South where I live, there is Queen Elizabeth Regional High and the Premier mentioned the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. I think there's only seven police forces in the world that have the designation as royal and we have two of them right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, I thank the Premier and we extend and join in best wishes to Queen Elizabeth II.

**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'm quite pleased to stand with the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition in wishing Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth congratulations on her 90th birthday. I just thought of something; I live in a part of the city where Prince Philip Drive is to the north of me and Elizabeth Avenue to the south. I couldn't help but say that.

I think everyone can agree that her dedication to the people of her Commonwealth and the world, her work ethic and her decades of experience are an inspiration to us all.

Thirteen Canadian prime ministers starting with Louis St. Laurent, quite a career that no Canadian politician can match, Mr. Speaker. We hope she continues to enjoy many more years.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

**MR. TRIMPER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I recognize tomorrow as Earth Day, a time to reflect and acknowledge the need for environmental education and action.

Earth Day is particularly significant this year. In December 2015, all countries adopted the Paris Agreement to enhance global action to fight climate change and which aims to limit global temperature increase 2 degrees Celsius and ideally to under 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Canada played an active part in negotiating this agreement and committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. Since then, First Ministers, including our Premier, met and agreed to

develop a pan-Canadian framework to tackle climate change. Newfoundland and Labrador is part of this work.

Tomorrow in New York, the United Nations is convening a signing ceremony for the Paris Agreement. Leaders from 155 countries, including Prime Minister Trudeau, will sign the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, we must all work together to reduce our carbon footprint to create a cleaner environment for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians show their commitment to the environment every day through recycling in their homes, workplaces and classrooms, driving fuel-efficient cars and buying energy-efficient appliances.

I encourage all Members of this hon. House and all people of the province to reflect on what further action they can take in their homes and businesses to help combat climate change.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. We want to recognize tomorrow, April 22, as Earth Day as well.

Mr. Speaker, there is plenty we can do as residents to help make the world around us a greener place to live, from walking to the corner store instead of driving, picking up litter everywhere and can be involved in helping protect our environment. Other green tips include using recycled shopping bags, reusable water bottles, recycling paper containers, composting at home and so much more.

Climate change is important, Mr. Speaker, and I encourage the government to work collaboratively with industry during our fragile economy when we talk about carbon tax and whatnot.

So, Mr. Speaker, the list of ways we can improve our environment is endless, and I thank those groups encouraging us to live greener lives and I encourage everyone to continue to be mindful of how their actions impact the world and environment around us.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Every year on April 22 more than a billion people in 200 countries mark Earth Day with events in support of protecting the environment.

Earth Day encourages people to make changes in their own lives, such as recycling, carpooling, and not buying bottled water, but Earth Day is also important for what governments must do.

Tomorrow, the Paris Agreement will be signed for a global action plan to limit global warming. Our people want our government to take leadership –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. ROGERS:** – and commit to reducing emissions and to help people make changes in their lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

#### Oral Questions

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

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

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, outside the House of Assembly, the Premier stated that seniors making \$15,000-\$17,000 will be better off because of their Liberal budget. Now, I'm not sure that he'd say the same for a hardworking Newfoundlander or Labradorian who is earning say \$25,000. He also said the Liberal budget contains good support for our low-income earners.

So I ask the Premier: Where's your evidence to support your statements, which I suggest are completely out of touch?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, as you know, in the budget that we released in this House just about a week ago or so now, there are a number of tax increases and revenue increases in the province. Offsetting to that, there was an Income Supplement or support program that was put in place at \$76.4 million. That program is meant to offset some of the tax revenues that were put in place that would affect people, like seniors in our province.

The taxes that were put in place last week, Mr. Speaker, as you know, if you compare the tax rates to personal income tax increases and the levy included, it really puts us in the vicinity of a 2006-2007 tax level. As a matter of fact, we are below the tax rates in 2006-2007.

The levy that the former premier mentioned, I will say, it is a temporary measure put in place because of the current fiscal situation that we face as a province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, we're hearing differently from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are low-income earners but work very, very hard to

earn that income. They've sat down and went through the hundreds of fee increases, the levy and tax increases, and they're clearly stating they're not better off.

So I ask the Premier once again: Where's your evidence, and will you table that evidence here in the House of Assembly?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're happy to table the documentation related to the budget and as it relates to the impact on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're also more than willing to give briefings to the Members opposite and to the Third Party. This information is out there. We are more than happy to share that with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The impacts, we know these are significant impacts on the people of our province. This is a very difficult situation that we are facing financially in our province right now but it was important to us to put in measures to offset some of those increases. Some of those, as I mentioned earlier, is the Income Supplement that we put in place at \$76.4 million. But, yes, the information is readily available and we are more than willing to share it with you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I appreciate the invitation for a briefing but it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that want to be briefed and want the information as well. He should consider how he's going to brief the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday afternoon the Premier also made a statement that if people looked into the crystal ball they would understand why they made the choices that they've made. He went on to say that their budget is simply not the way it's been portrayed. Now we know that the Finance

Minister for days ahead of the budget had told the province there's nothing good in this budget.

Can the Premier tell the people of the province how the heavy handed Liberal levy, the hundreds of tax and fee increases represents a fair budget? What is it that the people are not understanding?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well the budget of last week is \$8.48 billion. What I was talking about last week, there are a number of initiatives in there that will bring improvements to municipalities, infrastructure improvements around the province in the vicinity of some \$570 million. There are some good things in this budget I will say, Mr. Speaker. These are unprecedented times that we face as a province.

I think the Member opposite is forgetting that for the last 12 years there was \$25 billion. I think they lived in the situation that – at least they managed in a situation where they felt that oil would continue to go on; yet, C-NLOPB and others have made it quite clear that the production levels and the reserves offshore would continue to fall, which is why we find ourselves in this difficult situation that we're facing.

We would have been at a \$2.7 billion deficit. That burden would have been placed squarely on the shoulders of everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Not once has the Premier said what school should not have been built, what hospital should not have been built, what roads should not have been built.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, not once. Not once has the Premier picked out which school or which facility should not have been built.

Mr. Speaker, I believe, and clearly believe, that people of our province clearly understand what the Liberal choices in our budget, how it will impact them and how it will impact their families.

Mr. Speaker, we are hearing from hundreds of people. I know all MHAs are, people who are fearful and people who have lost their trust in this government.

I ask the Premier: You made a statement that the budget has not been properly told, can you explain to the people of the province the investments into your budget that will make their individual lives better?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, back in 2007 and beyond there were some decisions, if the former premier wants to know about decisions. Back in 2007 there were some decisions made about tax decreases.

As a matter of fact, if the former premier, the Opposition Leader, would only come forward with this, the decreases that his government made were at the higher end of the scale, I would say, Mr. Speaker. If you go back and look at the evidence and the facts, he made their decreases at the upper end of the scale.

If you want to know something you couldn't afford, it was the tax decreases that you put in place in 2007 and beyond. They just were not sustainable.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

So it's clear the Premier can't tell us what's good in his budget, but wants to go back to



decreasing the burden on taxpayers that the government prior to me – I wasn't even here in 2007 – did for the people in 2007 when they reduced the burden to help drive the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal levy, which his government has burdened the people of the province with, is simply unfair. A person earning \$25,000 a year is just barely making ends meet and now has to pay an additional \$300, while a person making \$450,000 a year or more only pays \$900.

I ask the Premier: How were these levy amounts determined? Is it fair to put the burden on our lowest and hardest working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me begin by saying first the former premier, now Leader of the Opposition, was in place through a significant number of budgets that actually continued to support the decreased tax measures that your government put in place at the higher income earners, Mr. Speaker. That's who you gave the tax breaks to. You had the opportunity and you did not do it.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the thresholds –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER BALL:** – that we see there, I want to go back to where the thresholds would be in terms of the levy and the personal income tax rates that we now have in our province, which is very competitive in Atlantic Canada. These measures that we put in place, I can assure you there is not one Member on this side of the House of Assembly liked what we had to do last week. When we looked at the other options that we had –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER BALL:** The other options that we had, when you look at the out years – that's an impact of the poor planning and the mismanagement of this previous administration. They did not prepare for these days. They were not sustainable decisions that they made.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

It's quite clear this levy has not been very well thought out. We know and people of the province know it's unfair. Combined with the hundreds of new taxes and fees that the Liberals chose to introduce, it's taxes that people cannot afford to pay.

Last year, we added higher income tax brackets. We added new tax brackets so higher income earners would pay more, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is on record as suggesting that the rich pay enough in this province.

I ask the Premier: Will you reconsider your levy? Will you remove your levy from this budget that's unfairly burdening the lower- and middle-income hard workers of Newfoundland and Labrador?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the former premier, if he read the budget, he would know this is a temporary levy. When I go back to, if we take the example of a senior couple in Newfoundland and Labrador –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER BALL:** – with taxable income of around \$26,000, the net impact of the budget, which includes, when you put in the offsets around the personal income tax and the levy,

plus the consumption tax – that would be in the HST – the net impact would be \$310.

So we will clearly outline and share this information with anyone who is interested in having this discussion, because we too want to get the facts out. We also want to get the facts out why we are in the situation we're in. And if we took no action at all, I'd also like to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians where we would be today after \$25 billion in oil and oil revenues that you had to deal with and did not prepare for where we are today.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Yeah, I remind him, it could be temporary. If he allows the Members in his party to vote freely with the people that elected them, Mr. Speaker, it may be temporary.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier has stated that no one anticipated the deficit. He said the environment is not the same one as it was when he knocked on the doors of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians last fall and made numerous promises he's broken to them.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2015 indicated a \$1.2 billion deficit and if the oil fell, it would get worse, and it's exactly what happened – oil fell for months after.

So I ask the Premier: What was your plan to address the deficit of \$1.2 billion? Did you base your campaign promises on that \$1.2 billion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Absolutely we put a platform in place based on where we were and what we knew at the time. I'll keep going back to the former premier who refused to answer the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, refused to answer me back on September 28 when I

asked him for the fiscal update, when we also got in there and started looking at some of the information, I would say, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the budget they put to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, in the out years they included revenue from a project that's not even done in this province right now – from oil revenues they do not have a development for. That was the kind of budget and materials and the information that former administration put to the people of our province. They were wrong; they couldn't even get the first year right, let alone the fifth and sixth year right.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, we also laid out our budget last year; for every dollar the oil fell, they'd lose \$29 million in revenue. Maybe the current Premier should have spent a little bit of time doing a bit of math and he would have figured out the deficit was higher.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Premier just said he did have a plan for \$1.2 billion.

Premier: Will you table that plan here so the people of the province can see it?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, interestingly enough, the former premier did campaign, I believe, in the same election we were in the last time around. I did not hear him say once that the mid-year update was \$1.8 billion. As a matter of fact, he stood by his five-year plan. I can tell you every single target, every revenue target, the expense target that he put out in his election platform, as a matter of fact, he did not meet any of them. Even on the long-term care initiative and program that he put in place, there was no revenue there or no

expense revenue put in their election platform for all of that.

There was a lot of information that we became aware of –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER BALL:** – and I will say the mid-year update, \$1.8 billion, not once did the former premier trying to distance himself from his own plan, his own five-year plan – and we now know that was erroneous.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite is the Premier today. What I asked him to do is would he table his \$1.2 billion plan. If you cut through all of the rhetoric, as normally happens when the Premier speaks, you cut through all of the rhetoric, what he said was he will not table his \$1.2 billion plan. Because he doesn't have a plan, Mr. Speaker, that's why.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister criticized the 2015 budget for taxing and she stated that our plan was to take from those who could least afford it. She went on to say that their plan, the Liberal plan, would be more than just simply, well, taxing and borrowing. That's what she said.

Last Thursday she tabled a tax-heavy budget here in the province for the people of the province like never seen before.

I ask the Premier: Why has your party's position on taxing and fee increases flip-flopped only five months after taking office?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're more than happy with the election platform that we ran on and is still online, and you're more than happy to do that. I would also say at the same time that we should also discuss your election platform that you ran on too, I say to the Member opposite.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, these are difficult times in our province, and we know that. If no action was taken in this current budget, in the fifth and sixth year what you would be seeing in our province is in excess of \$2 billion in debt-servicing charges. Already this year, debt servicing outpaces and we will pay more for debt servicing than we do for education.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the budget last week, we are back to 2006-2007 tax levels in our province. That includes the levy.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today in our province 219 people, 219 families are waiting for long-term care. Some of them are lying in acute care beds in our hospitals, resulting in more cancelled surgeries, and more people are lying on stretchers in hallways in our hospitals as a result.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: Can he tell us how many people are in our hospitals today who have already been medically discharged?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

The exact number of ALC patients varies literally hour by hour. My understanding, in terms of long-term care, they differ also. I cannot supply him with today's figures, but if he gives me a particular hour of the day for which he would like them, I will endeavour to table them tomorrow.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask again. I appreciate the fact that the numbers change by the hour, the minister is correct, but could he give us an idea of the average, say, for the past week or the past month even?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

The average percentage in this hospital for ALC patients in acute care varies between 18 and 27 per cent on a day-by-day basis.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** I thank the minister for the answer. So there are roughly 219 people waiting for long-term care beds today. Some of those people are tying up acute care beds. They are the ALC patients that the minister refers to tying up 18 to 27 per cent of our hospital beds at any given time.

Now this week, the Liberal government is shutting down 50 existing long-term care beds. Our government had a plan to put more beds in the system while this government is taking them out.

I ask the minister: How can you justify closing beds when so many individuals and so many families are waiting for proper, dignified care for our aging population?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

The Member opposite is conflating two numbers. Alternate care level patients in acute care are not automatically long-term care patients. Currently, the numbers of people waiting for long-term care vary region by region.

For example, as of the end of March in Eastern Health there were 67 people waiting for long-term care. There are, as of yesterday, 68 vacant long-term care beds of various kinds within Eastern Health.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, the minister presented false information repeatedly last week. He clearly said that all residents of Masonic Park Nursing Home would simply be moved to the Veterans Pavilion. He said that in Question Period in this House.

However, families found out Tuesday night that there are only 25 beds available at the moment at the Veterans Pavilion. Some of the 40 Masonic Park residents will be scattered around the region.

I ask the minister: Why wouldn't he present accurate information to the families and accurate information to the public? Why does he continue to deny that he is shutting down desperately needed long-term care beds in this region?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** It's interesting the issue of erroneous numbers have come up, because the gentleman opposite has just presented the House with an erroneous set of figures. There are, or will be at the time the transition plan is completed for Masonic Park, no less than 35 beds in Veterans Pavilion.

As of yesterday, 10 of the families in Masonic Park have expressed an interest in placing their families elsewhere other than Veterans Pavilion. So the numbers he gave don't add up either.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At least the minister is finally acknowledging that his numbers don't add up. Mr. Speaker, the numbers that the minister is now providing are different than the numbers that Eastern Health provided to families about 48 hours ago. That is rather concerning that the numbers have changed since Tuesday night.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the minister has had a chance to visit Masonic Park. The facility is in good shape. Tuesday night, Eastern Health said that about \$500,000 is needed to be invested in improvements. The minister in this House said about a million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I'll acknowledge that every long-term care facility in this region needs capital improvements, Masonic Park is no exception. But now, the Liberal government, under this budget, has gutted the repairs and renovations budget for this year.

Can the minister provide the data to support his decision to shut down the long-term care beds at Masonic Park?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** It's interesting and slightly ironic, Mr. Speaker, that the gentleman opposite, who not that long ago occupied this chair, should talk about gutting renovations budgets when he did a number on the Health Sciences Centre, for example, in terms of a reduction in renovations budgets as well as across the province, cutting it by about 25 per cent.

On the issue of Masonic Park, I accept it's a very difficult situation to have to move elderly patients and clients. I understand that and I accept that, Mr. Speaker. However, there is a huge opportunity here to provide state-of-the-art care in a newer facility and save the system \$1.8 million, at least, on an annual basis.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad the minister has raised the issue of the \$1.8 million in potential savings. Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to review the recent financial statements of Masonic Park Nursing Home. Most costs associated with the home, of course, are salaries, medications and other resident services, none of which are going to be eliminated with the move. It is impossible to save \$1.8 million by shutting down long-term care beds at Masonic Park.

Will the minister produce detailed evidence of this projected cost savings?

He won't, Mr. Speaker, because he can't.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much.

It's interesting that a department run by the gentleman opposite, until not so long ago, has some very interesting magic mathematics in their budgets where money has been put in and then removed and people have not had the

opportunity to realize the savings that they were told to.

Having said that, as far as Masonic Park is concerned, I would be happy to find the figures from Eastern Health and discuss them at any time with the Member opposite.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** So, Mr. Speaker, the minister is acknowledging that he does not have the detailed information to substantiate his claim that there will be \$1.8 million of savings, he has to go get it from Eastern Health.

I ask the minister: Will he go get that information in a timely fashion and table it in this House of Assembly?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** I wouldn't have thought anyone needed to quite put words in my mouth, Mr. Speaker, but if he wants to try, then that's fine.

From my point of view, the information I am quite happy to discuss with the Member for his constituents at any time of his choosing.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** So, for the record, Mr. Speaker, the minister is willing to discuss it with me, and I'm grateful for that opportunity, and I'll take him up on that; however, he's not willing to provide this information to the people of the province, to the families affected, or to the hon. Members in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, when Masonic Park Nursing Home was taken over by the regional health authority in 1996 there was a complete inventory taken of

the assets of the building. The agreement with the non-profit owners of the facility states that upon giving notice to terminate the agreement comparable inventory must be left in the building. All beds, all equipment must remain in the building.

If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, and considering the ongoing renovations that are now happening at Veterans Pavilion, what is the true cost of this ridiculous move by the Liberal government?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** I have explained to the gentleman opposite that I will be quite happy to discuss the matter of finances with him at the time of his choosing, and I will do that, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only are people upset with the minister in Bay Roberts, but also in Mobile, Clarenville, Gander, Paradise, CBS – the list goes on and on. Ironically, it wasn't that long ago that the Minister of Education stood and petitioned government to intercede and ensure the school in Whitbourne remained open.

I ask the minister: You gave great reasons in your petition why it should remain open, do I need to remind you of your past arguments? Why the flip-flop now?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, we've had a lot of questions in the House of Assembly about the role of the school district and the government in the reorganization of schools, so I'm not going to revisit any of that.

Everybody here in the House of Assembly understands how difficult this is for people who have children attending Whitbourne Elementary, or any other of the schools that the board of trustees for the English language school districts decided to close. It's not lost on anybody here, but this is the job of the trustees to try to make efficient use of public funds.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** The decision has been made. If anyone would like to appeal that, there are processes they can use to appeal that as well.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** But the decision has been made and it won't be revisited here because it was not made in here.

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.

It was obvious when the Finance Minister's extraordinary attack on Nalcor during the Budget Speech that government had for some time lost confidence in the leadership of Nalcor.

I ask the Premier: Why did government not go about an orderly transition instead of throwing the province into the turmoil which has flowed from the minister's intemperate remarks?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all understand the impact that the Crown agency and Nalcor have on the people of our province. On Sunday night I met with Mr.

Martin and again at a later meeting he decided, and through the conversation, that he would step down. It wasn't upon me or any Member of this House of Assembly, I would suggest, that you would leave a significant agency, a corporation like Nalcor with a megaproject ongoing in Labrador, with lots of lines of business in our province and a significant impact as we have seen on our budget.

What we did was react fast. We put in place today a new CEO which comes with a tremendous amount of experience. We did what we had to do to make sure that the people that are working at Nalcor and the projects that they are involved in continues in a very stabilized fashion I say, 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 hope the Premier doesn't think that people aren't smart enough to know that they've been months making this happen and forcing it to happen.

The EY review of Muskrat Falls was an opportunity to answer some important questions for the people of the Province.

I ask the Premier: Why was EY not instructed to analyze the pros and cons of continuing with the project in light of the massive cost overruns and other challenges thereby speeding up this process?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We asked EY to do an analysis of the cost and the schedule associated risk of the Muskrat Falls Project. This was something that was important. Near the end of May, late May this year, you will see some re-baselining of the project, which is important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to get an understanding of where it fits within its own budget. It's also important to

get an understanding on the schedule, which affects reliability on our province right now.

I think the actions and the activities that we have seen in the last couple of days with Mr. Martin stepping down, the release that we had today with a new leader put in place, a new CEO in place, was a tremendous experience. He is willing to step up to help his province, I would say, Mr. Speaker, and will be making decisions very shortly to put in place a board of directors so the activities of Nalcor can continue in a very stabilized fashion.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

The newly appointed CEO of Nalcor has expressed great concern about the project in the past, as have the people of the province.

Will the Premier instruct the CEO to release real information about the state of the Muskrat Falls Project as soon as possible?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for her concern for this project. All Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have expressed a significant amount of concern in the last few weeks and months and really leading into this.

What we do know is that the new CEO that's in place today made it quite clear that he would go into his office and he would go in and meet with the leadership team. He would look at the facts, the opinions and the information that's available on the overall project.

I am not about to interfere with his decision making. He is going to go in, be the person that he needs to be, provide the leadership that he can bring to this project. Based on that, he will

put his opinion in place on what is best to do for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Surely if the Premier can give mandate letters to his ministers, he can give a mandate letter to the CEO of our own corporation. Mr. Speaker, the contract with Emera for the Maritime Link sets up the potential for privatizing Muskrat Falls.

Is the new CEO appointment the first step towards getting rid of Muskrat Falls at a basement bargain price?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, no.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Time for a very quick question.

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** I ask the Premier to back that no up with some concrete evidence.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll answer the question here. The new CEO of Nalcor is gone into Nalcor. His responsibility will be to lead that organization. He will base his own opinion on what he believes and thinks will be the best way forward for Nalcor and our province. That does not include privatization of Nalcor.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.



Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the Deficit Reduction Levy is an extremely regressive surtax, placing a higher tax burden on low- and middle-income taxpayers; and

WHEREAS surtaxes are typically levied on the highest income earners only, as currently demonstrated in other provinces, as well as Australia, Norway and other countries; and

WHEREAS government states in the 2016 provincial budget that the personal income tax schedule needs to be revised and promises to do so;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure the Deficit Reduction Levy be eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin immediately to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, we've been getting – as I'm sure every Member in this House of Assembly has been getting, because many of us have been copied by people who are talking about how

very difficult this Deficit Reduction Levy is on their own personal incomes, and how regressive the current tax regime that government has introduced is on the lives of people.

We know that as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians we are a resilient people. We all know how tough this fiscal situation is. Every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, every person in Newfoundland and Labrador is willing to roll up their sleeves and do their part to get us through this fiscal situation.

Mr. Speaker, this government has done nothing to lead us forward. In fact, what they're doing is that they're choking people who are already having a hard time making ends meet. Instead of taking us forward, this is taking the people of the province backwards. I'm sure that's not the intention, but I believe that is the consequence of this particular approach to our fiscal crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I have a short note from a constituent that just arrived today, an elderly gentleman. He says: If this goes ahead, I'll have to leave Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm not getting enough money to pay my bills and live. There's months I can't pay my drugs; every month I have to do without something. It's a hand-written note, Mr. Speaker, I'm only getting \$1,300 a month old age pension. There's rent, drugs for wife and I. She's not getting any income, so it's hard. I also have children living away. One daughter was going to come back and get married and is rethinking that due to the budget.

Mr. Speaker, we would hope that government would instill hope, not desperation. I hope that this government will listen to the desperate pleas of the people of the province.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a shame that I have to stand here and present this today, but I will present this petition on

behalf of the residents of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave District.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

WHEREAS we, the undersigned, require a primary school to service Bay Roberts, Coley's Point, Port de Grave, Bareneed, Shearstown and Butlerville areas; and

WHEREAS our leaders act to ensure that a new school is made a priority, primary children are overpopulated in the classrooms and there are health and safety risks in the current 60-year-old facility; and

WHEREAS the process for a new school has to be started right away to ensure our primary-aged children receive a quality educational facility; and

WHEREAS there are issues in the present facility with no air ventilation, overpopulated classrooms, no windows, natural lighting and office spaces, no designated cafeteria with children eating in classrooms and portable classrooms that will take up the mandated active play area;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to begin the process of building a new primary school for this area.

Mr. Speaker, we know, and it's very, very unfortunate – this is a 60-year-old facility. This has been a problem for years and years. As a matter of fact, we have a letter here by a hired consultant by the Department of Education back in 2007, and I quote: the school has exceeded its life expectancy and usefulness.

For three past budgets, Mr. Speaker, money has been allocated by this previous administration to replace Coley's Point Primary. Again, it's a 60-year-old facility. The student population is 350-plus. This has been ongoing for years and years.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. P. PARSONS:** As a matter of fact, ironically, Mr. Speaker, I have a letter here that was dated October 30, 2015, by then Education minister Susan Sullivan to the mayor of Bay Roberts: I am writing to this time confirm that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to the school, to replace the school in Coley's Point Primary. We know this did not happen.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. P. PARSONS:** We find ourselves in the situation now, it is a very unfortunate situation, but as the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, I am committed to fighting for my constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The Speaker doesn't want to name Members, but if Members are not respecting the authority of the House the Speaker will have no choice.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I guess the Member is not going to vote for the budget because there was no announcement in this year's budget for it. So that's good to hear.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, to the House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Deficit Reduction Levy as introduced in Budget 2016 unfairly targets the middle class; and

WHEREAS the Deficit Reduction Levy also asks low-income earners to pay more than their fair share instead of increasing taxes to high income owners;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge this government to immediately stop the introduction of the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy.

Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from everyone. We're hearing from people all across this Island, all over the place. I know every message I'm getting on Facebook – I've received more messages since this budget came down than I've ever received in the last eight years I've been in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I like to be fair, and fair to people. I think that's the name of the game, we should all be fair. This levy is so unfair. It's unfair to the poor people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at this, here is a person or a family that's making \$25,000 a year and they are expected to pay \$300.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No way.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Yes they are. If you look at your own thing it shows \$300. It's not wrong. That's what's wrote here on this.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** People from \$25,000 to \$36,000 pay \$300. It's right here in your document.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You're supposed to sit down when the Speaker stands up

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I don't listen to you (inaudible).

**MR. SPEAKER:** Well, the Speaker is standing, I say to the Member for Cape St. Francis.

I am not going to allow Members of the House to disregard and disrespect the authority of the House. I've recognized the Member for Cape St. Francis. I ask for order in the House.

The Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, listen, this is about fairness. It's about being fair to people.

I've received calls and emails from people in all the districts, in the other districts in this province, and they all tell me the same thing; this is so unfair. How can you justify that a person of \$25,000 a year is going to pay about 2 per cent of their income, versus a person who's making \$200,000, \$300,000 pay 0.18 or 0.15 per cent? It's just an unfair tax.

I ask the government, I really ask you to think about it, and all the backbenchers and everybody in this House of Assembly are getting emails; you're getting people's concern. People are really concerned about this tax. Do the proper thing and cancel it.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

WHEREAS the Deficit Reduction Levy is an extremely regressive surtax, placing a higher tax burden on low- and middle-income taxpayers; and

WHEREAS surtaxes are typically levied on the highest income earners only, as currently demonstrated in other provinces, as well as Australia, Norway and other countries; and

WHEREAS government states in the 2016 provincial budget that the personal income tax schedule needs to be revised and promises to do so;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure the Deficit Reduction Levy be eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin immediately to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I'm quite pleased this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, to be able to do what I've been promising the people of the province, and that is to present the voice of the people, especially the ones who have signed this petition I have in my hands today. Our responsibility as MHAs is to present the concerns of the people of the province. That's why we stand here.

Mr. Speaker, it was just today a senior came to me when I was outside in the community and said: Ms. Michael, I have one question. Do they stop to think about our lives? Do they – meaning the government – stop to think about the burdens that we carry as seniors? She started to talk to me about what it was like to be a senior who is now widowed – her husband has been dead for seven years – and that every year since he's died life has become harder for her.

We have a system both provincially and federally – but we'll talk about our provincial – that is so circuitous and so difficult that trying to work your way through the system with regard to your income tax, with regard to your government pensions, the OAS and CPP, and the way in which we claw money back from people's personal pensions, we don't stop to think about what's happening to seniors, Mr. Speaker. The thing that she said and raised was: And then, Ms. Michael, there's that Deficit Reduction Levy. What are they thinking about?

No matter who speaks to me – and we have all these signatures that are coming in on a regular basis from people asking the same thing: What were they thinking about? It hits middle income to low income. Then, when you think about fixed income – and this is what this government doesn't seem to think about at all. Our seniors

are on fixed incomes. Yes, they may have pensions but –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. MICHAEL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will be happy to speak again and present these concerns.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Budget 2016 decreased the amount of funding available for health care services; and

WHEREAS as a result of Budget 2016, Eastern Health has reduced routine breast cancer screening in women aged 40 to 49; and

WHEREAS early detection of cancer results is the best prognosis possible;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to direct Eastern Health to reverse its decision and to ensure that the population-based Breast Screening Program is accessible to women aged 40 to 49.

Mr. Speaker, we're all very upset with Budget 2016. I go to bed every night and pray that the Members opposite will have the courage to stand up and vote against it and vote with the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We just listened to the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi talk about the direct impact it's having on people's lives. People may die as a result of this move, that's how serious this is.

Early detection of breast cancer makes all the difference in a woman's survival rate. Many of these women have young children. They all have friends and families who love and care for them. To take such a backwards step when it comes to

women's health is absolutely deplorable, Mr. Speaker. I truly hope that this decision is reversed and reversed in short order.

There's no price tag we can put on a person's life. It was their own member opposite, who represents us in Ottawa today, who stood in this House year after year after year, a person who experienced breast cancer herself and lobbied for the breast cancer screening to take place, Mr. Speaker, at the age of 40. We did that. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the women of this province deserve no less. I would say almost every single day I get an email from women in this who are under the age of 50 and they're looking for breast cancer screening, or they've already been diagnosed.

It's becoming a problem, and it's an issue that's confronting women's health. Our health, Mr. Speaker, is just as important as anyone else's in this province. I call upon the Minister of Health and the Members of Executive Council to reverse this budget, many components of it, including this one.

Thank you.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I call Orders of the Day.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

#### Orders of the Day

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

We'll call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd normally get up and say it gives me pleasure to rise to speak to a bill or a motion in this House, but I don't think there's anybody in this House – and I say this sincerely. I don't think there's anybody in this House who can stand with pleasure and talk about this budget. When you have Cabinet ministers and the media saying it's a bad budget, you know you have reason to be concerned.

Anyway, as Opposition Members we will have multiple opportunities during the budget debate to get up and talk about specifics in the budget, to talk about how it impacts people in our districts, to talk about any element of the budget or its implications that we wish. I intend to use my initial time today to just highlight some of the things that are in the budget.

There's been a lot of focus on some specific elements that are perhaps the most controversial, but there's a wide range of cuts and changes that will impact people, that will impact some of our most vulnerable people, our children and youth, and families and seniors and communities. I think the government has rightly acknowledged there's nobody in this province who won't be impacted negatively by this budget.

I realize we live in challenging times economically, Mr. Speaker, and I realize we're far too dependent on oil revenue. Nobody could have predicted what has happened to oil prices over the last year or so, but, Mr. Speaker, it's very easy to get into finger pointing and to try and lay blame. I can tell you that those of us who were part of the most recent administration do take responsibility for the decisions we had to make. That's part of what happens when you govern. I recognize Members opposite now face that reality as well, that you must stand and take responsibility for the decisions that you make.

The blame game is a silly one, because there are some factors that were, in fairness, beyond the control of this government in terms of oil prices. Some of those external factors were beyond our control as well, but we do have the ability to make choices today. We do have the ability to make decisions today that will impact the people that we represent in each of our communities.

When I'm talking to my constituents, and I know from talking to colleagues opposite, that

everybody is feeling the heat, and rightly so. Even Opposition Members are receiving a vast number of emails and phone calls and letters and petitions. More so than I ever recall in my eight years in this hon. House, because I think people are legitimately upset. I think people are angry. I think they feel betrayed and I think they feel like they've been lied to, Mr. Speaker.

I think the really unfortunate part of the entire situation, and it's fine – even in Question Period today the Premier talked repeatedly about our choices and our record and our spending. We'll take responsibility for all of that. I am happy to talk to any constituent and anybody else in the province about some of the decisions we had to make during our time in office.

The fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberals knew the financial situation this province was in when they made all kinds of irresponsible, reckless election promises. Members like to give me a hard time about my use of social media. I've been watching the public discourse in various social media channels. One of the things that's been most striking in the last few days is the posting of actual quotes, even video clips and formal advertisements that were presented by Liberal candidates and the Liberal leader during the recent election campaign.

I understand why people are upset. I understand why people do feel betrayed. I realize it's a very emotional time for everyone. So for that reason I'd like to use most of my time today to just talk about the facts of the budget and some of the things that jumped out to me as I heard the Budget Speech and as I've been reflecting on it and following the public discourse in recent days. It's clear that people are hurting. We're certainly taking our share of criticism as well.

One of the things I have had to remind people in recent days respectfully is that – because one of the things that has been presented to me over and over again, face to face and in social media, especially, is: Well, what was your plan? You're criticizing this Liberal plan or lack of a plan and this budget, which is extremely right wing and aggressive, and will impact every person living in Newfoundland and Labrador and will also have a devastating impact on our economy. People are saying: What was your plan?

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind people that we did present a plan. We did have a sustainability plan. We did have a platform. We did present a budget last year. We were very honest and clear about the situation we found ourselves in. Granted, given declining oil prices, that situation over the last 12 months has worsened considerably. That would have meant that even our plan would have required adjustments in order to deal with the enormous fiscal challenge that the province now faces.

We had a plan. We presented that plan to the people and, frankly, they didn't like it. Frankly, the people of this province sent a strong message that they wanted change. They listened carefully to what Liberal candidates were promising and to what the Liberal leader was promising. I think they took him at his word. They took candidates at their word.

The budget was known. The financial situation of the province was well known. As the Leader of the Opposition stated in Question Period today, there's a multi-million dollar impact every time a barrel of oil drops by \$1 a barrel in the world markets. It is regrettable and it is unfortunate that we're so dependent on natural resource revenue. That's why we spent an enormous effort – and I believe that the new government will continue this effort to try and diversify the economy in a number of key sectors.

We did make progress when it came to – the tourism sector jumps to mind and the great strides we've made over the last decade. Ocean technology – there are all kinds of specific sectors being targeted by Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development that is producing results. We do have the potential to grow the economy, but unfortunately this budget is not about any of that. This budget is about some choices that are now being made that are completely inconsistent with what was promised to the people of the province back in the fall. It's affecting everybody.

I think it is important that we focus on facts. I understand that people are emotional and they have a right to be. I understand people are upset and they have a right to be. In this Chamber, when we're debating this budget, and where every Member on both sides of the House will

have to stand and be counted, then even through this process we all have a choice to make, Mr. Speaker.

There's been some public call for a free vote. I recognize the implications of that. I've served on the government side and I know that this is a confidence vote which means that government could fall if the majority of Members of this House did not vote to support the budget. That puts the Premier and the new government in a challenging position to say the least.

But we all have to stand and be counted and we're all going to have individual choices to make. The choice for the New Democratic Party or for the PC Party is a rather easy one. We know what we would have done, we campaigned on it and we were honest about it. For the Members opposite, though, it's a different challenge altogether.

I think it's important we try and get past the blame game and talk about the actual merits of this budget and the implications it is going to have on people. For every Member, it means different things. I've been speaking passionately for the last number of days inside this House and outside the House about the decision to close Masonic Park Nursing Home. A measure that's being taken by Eastern Health, endorsed obviously by the Department of Health and Communities and the Liberal government.

I can honestly stand here and tell you that I believe based on all of the information that was available to me in the past year and all of the information that's been available to me in recent days that it is the wrong decision. But I'll also say I recognize, having sat in one of those chairs opposite in recent times, that some of those choices that need to be made around the future of our health care system are very near impossible ones.

We had a plan to bring the system towards sustainability and there are many difficult decisions that we as a province face in order to get there. I sincerely wish the minister well in pursuing some of those choices and decisions because a 1.5 per cent cut to Eastern Health's budget is not in any way going to achieve sustainability. It's a step, but there are many more steps to take before we get to where we

need to be, given our per capita level of health care spending.

In this particular instance, I don't believe the evidence supports the decision. So I have a choice to make and as a Member of the Opposition perhaps it's a little easier to make that choice than it is for some of the Members that are sitting opposite. I have to stand and speak for my constituents because there are now 40 residents of Masonic Park who are going to be displaced, who are vulnerable, who are in the final years of their lives, many of whom are very attached to their current living environment and it's very disruptive for those families as well.

On a bigger scale, though, if I was to park the concerns of my individual constituents for a moment and look at the bigger picture, which I acknowledge the minister and the Cabinet and the government has to do, then I'm still concerned. What we're talking about in this particular individual decision is a reduction overall in the number of long-term care beds in this region.

The minister and I had an animated discussion about it during Question Period. I will accept his invitation to sit down and have a further conversation about the numbers and where they come from because I do have a hard time believing them, Mr. Speaker, having been through the financial statements of the home.

By having spent the last 18 years visiting the home, I know what condition it's in. I know some of the improvements that have been made in recent years to that facility as well. I also have some appreciation – perhaps not as much as the minister who has a far more extensive background in health care than I do. I do have some appreciation for the costs that are involved in running that facility that are operating costs based on the number of patients, the number of beds, and the staffing mix and the staffing ratios that are required to provide proper care to those patients. Most of those costs are not going away.

I can't stand and support a budget that's going to see long-term care beds reduced in our province. I frankly don't believe anybody should. We've been talking for years in this province about the need to grow long-term care beds and we had a plan to do that as well.

I will also agree with the minister that we need to do more to keep people in their homes as long as possible. That is part of the *Close to Home* strategy that we have been working on for the last number of years. That effort needs to continue.

There's some innovative work being done in the country and has started within Eastern Health to advance a home first strategy, which is a great move and something that we need to aggressively pursue. We have more of our personal care homes in this province that are private facilities that provide excellent care to about 3,000 residents in this province that can do more in some cases, that can provide an enhanced level of care. There's a pilot project that demonstrates that it makes good sense.

Even if you do all of those things, for the next two decades we are going to have a shortage of long-term care beds. Even despite the fact that we've added hundreds of new beds to the system over the last 10 years, we're still going to have a shortage. We have a shortage today. We have a couple of hundred people waiting today. Those numbers aren't going to get dramatically better any time soon.

There may be weeks, there may be days, there may even be months where those numbers improve because as the minister pointed out, it does fluctuate. Overall, based on the population trends, based on our population that's getting older and older, faster than the rest of the country, and sadly, a population that's getting sicker and sicker, faster than the rest of the country, we can't avoid the need to expand long-term care beds. So a decision to close 50 in this budget is something that I can't stand here and support.

Now, I did notice – and I would be remiss if I didn't comment on it, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member for Port de Grave – and I'm trying to remember the new district name.

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

**MR. KENT:** Carbonear – Port de Grave?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Harbour Grace.

**MR. KENT:** Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, thank you. The change of district names is going to take those of us who have been here a while some time to adapt to, I think.

On one hand I'm glad to see the Member stand and raise concerns on behalf of her constituents. That does take some courage, and I applaud that. I don't want to be overly skeptical, Mr. Speaker, but then when I hear the government Members who are all going to stand one by one and vote for this budget, a budget that does not include replacing Coley's Point Elementary; they are all going to stand and pat each other on the back today and applaud the Member's petition. But when it truly matters, when the time comes to stand and be counted, will the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave stand and vote for this budget that will not address the needs of her constituents?

It is fine to say, as she did today, with a great deal of passion, you have known about this for years and you didn't do anything about it. Well, that's not true. We made a decision. We made a commitment to build the school. We've built all kinds of new schools in areas across the province, and not all in government districts at the time. There have been schools built in various places where they have been needed, based on aging infrastructure and based on the population growth in certain areas of the province as well.

So we'll stand by those decisions that we made. We knew that Coley's Point was a high priority, and that's why we committed to getting it done and the groundwork had been laid.

Now, I know given the financial situation the new government faces, they can't necessarily proceed with every single infrastructure project that was slated. They are now, despite the fact that there's a limited amount of design work to be done before tenders can be called on the Corner Brook hospital, the Liberal government ironically has now chosen to delay the Corner Brook hospital, despite the fact that over the last number of years they've been quite critical of the previous government for not advancing the project fast enough. I acknowledge that project did not advance fast enough; there is no doubt about that.



They also campaigned on building a replacement for the Waterford Hospital which would start in 2017. Now they've backed away from that commitment as well. So, Mr. Speaker, we all have choices to make. The Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave is going to have some choices to make. The theatrics of presenting a petition is one thing, and I commend her for standing and doing that today. The theatrics of people applauding that are great, but when the time comes to truly stand and be counted, when people in this House are going to determine if this budget passes, the question that has to be asked: Will the Member and will other Members then stand and applaud? Will they stand with their constituents? Will they stand with the people of the province or will they not? Time will tell.

We'll do our best during this budget debate to present our concerns about the budget. We're hearing the same concerns from people around the province, just like government Members are. We have a responsibility to make sure those concerns get heard during this debate, and that's what we'll do in the most respectful way that we possibly can. But there will come a time where we all need to stand and be counted.

So, Mr. Speaker, I said I was going to give the overview of all the things I was concerned about in this budget, and unfortunately my time is quickly ticking away.

One of the things I've heard the most about is the levy tax. I've not heard of governments anywhere, really, introducing temporary measures that magically disappear after a year or two, or three or four. Most times when government introduce taxes and fees and levies, they tend not to go away rather quickly. I think income tax was a temporary measure after the First World War, and we're still paying a heck of a lot of it. This, actually, Mr. Speaker, is income tax by another name.

The criteria that's been established, thresholds that have been established, how this is being applied with a cap just doesn't make sense. Especially for our lowest income families and individuals, and especially for middle-class families who are struggling right now to get by. When you're going to increase the cost of insurance dramatically, when you're going to

increase the cost of gasoline dramatically, when you're going to increase personal income tax and increase the HST after promising you wouldn't do that, it's hard to swallow the levy on top of all of that. So, this Liberal levy needs to be reconsidered.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have confidence in this budget and I don't have confidence in this new government. I, as the Member for Mount Pearl North, move a sub-amendment to this budget, seconded by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, that the amendment that was previously presented, the non-confidence motion, be amended by changing the period at the end thereof to a comma, and by adding immediately thereafter the following words: and that this House also condemns the government for its failure to demonstrate sound leadership and compassion by addressing the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador's most vulnerable: its children, its youth, its seniors, its families, its communities, or its many others who are impacted by its approach.

Mr. Speaker, I so move, and I am pleased to present this sub-amendment today.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Order, please!

Is there a seconder to your –

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I did say initially it is seconded by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay, the House will take a few moments to review the amendment.

### Recess

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

We have reviewed the amendment as put forward by the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North and the amendment is found to be in order.

The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased that in your wisdom you've chosen to find our sub-amendment in order. For those that may be watching the debate this afternoon, there is some tradition that goes with the budget process. It's not uncommon for Opposition parties to lay down an amendment to the budget and then a sub-amendment. It is particularly important this year.

Our sub-amendment that we are now debating, as a result of it being found to be in order, is challenging this budget. It's highlighting the devastating impact that this budget will have on seniors and families and every individual living in this province. Not to mention the fact that it will stifle our economy as well.

I'm pleased to get another opportunity to rise and speak to it because in my first time this afternoon, I didn't get an opportunity to go through some of the budget highlights from my perspective which now I'll have the opportunity to do, so I'm grateful for that.

Again, as I was saying before time ran out previously, we really do need to keep this fact based. I think then it will be more informative for the people of the province. It will be more productive. Given the amount of upset people out there, it's very easy for us to scream and shout and get people further riled up and upset. I don't think that's necessary in this instance. I don't think it's productive in any instance.

I'd rather talk about some of the facts. Sometimes it's hard to know what's fact and what's not in this hon. House. I do want to pick up on something that was mentioned in Question Period today by the Minister of Health and Community Services in response to one of my questions and then I will move along and talk specifically about some of the initiatives that are mentioned or killed through this budget.

He talked about work being cancelled or put off at the Health Sciences Centre. Now, Mr. Speaker, all I can tell you is that there are millions and millions of dollars' worth of work needed at the Health Sciences Centre. I know

there are a lot of people particularly in this region of the province who think of the Health Sciences Centre as the new hospital. Mr. Speaker, the Health Sciences Centre opened before I was born. It has been serving this province for something like 40, 41 years. I am not suggesting it hasn't been well maintained but given the changes and the advances that have happened in health care in the last four decades, any facility that is 40 years old would be showing its age.

Now, it's not the most urgent health infrastructure need in this region, given the state of the Waterford Hospital that we're all familiar with; but there's no doubt that given how important the Health Science Centre is to everybody in the province, no matter what region you live in, there's work that needs to be done there. I actually attended a news conference – I don't know if it was in the fall or over the summer – to highlight some of the work we were approving in capital improvements at the Health Sciences Centre in repairs and renovations.

I suspect if we were able to have a more sensible and productive conversation about it that the minister would agree that the Health Sciences site is in need of redevelopment. In there may lie part of the solution for the Waterford Hospital as well, so there are some, at least, elements of it. I do want to clarify that there were new dollars committed to work at the Health Sciences Centre last year.

I had the unfortunate experience very briefly early last year of being a patient at the Health Sciences Centre. I went for something that I thought was very routine and I ended up more or less being held captive. I spent two or three days in the hospital for something really minor. I have to say I received incredibly excellent care from the staff working in our health care system. I have to applaud particularly the nursing staff for the amazing work that they do each and every day.

Anyway, the point I want to make is that it felt a little bit like *Undercover Boss* at the time. I got to see first-hand – and I never had an opportunity as Health minister to really share this experience so I'll share it very quickly now. I had the opportunity first-hand to see what the

facility was like, how it was operating and what some of the challenges were. It was a really glimpse obviously, so you can't make decisions or form solid opinions based on a really brief glimpse.

What was clear is that there's major infrastructure investment needed. That's true at the Health Sciences Centre; it's true at St. Clare's. The Waterford Hospital simply needs to be replaced. Again, as I think the Health Minister would acknowledge, it's not simply about replacing the bricks and mortar as it exists today; it's about putting a facility in place and programs in place that will meet the needs of the community and of the province well into the future.

I look forward to some of those conversations. I realize that it's tough to have those kinds of conversations in these fiscal times, but you have to start somewhere and you have to have a long-term plan. Some of those financial decisions can be figured out over multiple years and need to be figured out over multiple years. We were absolutely committed to making investments at the Health Sciences Centre and we did.

Mr. Speaker, we've had lots to say about government's Government Renewal Initiative which gets mentioned daily in this hon. House. I support public consultation and I support meaningful engagement with the public. So I can't frown on a process that gives citizens the opportunity, a chance to have a more meaningful say in the province's finances. That as a concept is a really good thing; however, what's done with that information and how it's used and whether citizens are truly engaged is part of the question.

The initiative took place, lots of feedback was gathered. It's apparently going to go on for 15 months. There's going to be more decisions on budget number two this fall. Then I guess further decisions next spring when the 15-month period comes to an end. I recognize you can't do everything in one budget, obviously.

One of the questions I have for Members opposite, and I hope will be answered through the course of this budget debate. Beyond the input that's been gathered through the formal process so far, will the input that's now rolling

in be considered as part of that government renewal initiative as well? Because hundreds of citizens participated and that's great, but now on a daily basis we're all hearing from hundreds of citizens.

I brought down with me a folder of emails. I haven't printed them all, just the emails that I've chosen to print to me personally from the past week from people who are not just expressing concern, and there's a lot of that – and it's valid, and I appreciate it and I empathize – but beyond that, people are also making suggestions on alternatives. Now some of the alternatives are easy to throw out there and perhaps not even practical and perhaps not even fair. One of the popular ones is cut everybody's salary in here. Because the suggestion is that maybe we're not all working hard enough to deal with this situation.

Well I know that Members of this House, no matter where you sit, are working quite hard. I know the Cabinet ministers who have presented this budget must have been working around the clock. I don't agree with the decisions they've made. I believe there are better choices to be made, but I have no doubt about the level of work that's being done in challenging times like this. If you're a Cabinet minister, the work is constant.

Beyond those kinds of situations that tend to be randomly thrown around every time there's a financial challenge to deal with, there have been lots of constructive meaningful suggestions made about other alternatives. Some of them are alternatives that we had considered. Some of them are alternatives that we had actually proposed in our blueprint last fall, or in our previous budget or in our five-year sustainability plan.

Beyond that, there are new and innovative suggestions being made by residents around the province about what else could be done to tackle the province's financial situation. Because taking the drastic measures that this Liberal government is taking, which will affect everybody in the province and force people to actually have to – maybe not even contemplate, but actually have to move away.

There is a better way forward, Mr. Speaker. While I have no doubt that the choices we face are tough, we face them. I know that based on where the financial situation is now, the choices are even that much tougher. I respectfully acknowledge all of that, but there is a better way forward. I hope during this debate there's an opportunity to highlight some of that as well.

I don't want to spend my time in the budget debate simply quoting constituents that have written, although that is important, but I'm just going to give you a sampling, just for a minute or two, of the kinds of things that are being said. There is a consistent theme along the way.

One of the things, though, that is bothersome – and some of it is directed at Members on this side of the House, but most of it is directed at Members opposite. I find the personal attacks really hard to take because I've been there, Mr. Speaker. For people to personally attack, whether it's the Finance Minister or the Premier or other Members of Cabinet or other local MHAs, in a personal way, I think that's rather unfortunate.

I understand people are angry. I think we have a job to do to make ourselves available to hear that feedback and empathize and truly hear what constituents are having to say. I would ask all constituents and all people in the province to be human about it and to be respectful about it because we're all human beings. I'm sure as Members have said, and as I said earlier, there's nobody on the government side that can be excited about what they're proposing to do to the people of the province. So let's be respectful in the discourse.

There's language in some of these emails that I can't read in this hon. House, first of all because it's unparliamentary; and secondly, because it's just unfair and it's disrespectful. I am angry. I am outraged by this budget. I think that terrible choices have been made by this government. I feel that people of the province have a right to feel that they've been misled because so many promises have been broken. Despite that, there's no need for personal attacks, whether they be aimed at the Premier, the Finance Minister or MHAs.

That has to be particularly troubling for new MHAs who are coming into the job for the first time and have not necessarily been through rough waters like this, and hopefully won't ever be again. It's got to be particularly troubling for those MHAs. I know there are probably people who are listening who are saying, well, that's what you get elected to do, so suck it up, and don't be whining about people being aggressive or nasty. You can be upset, you can be angry, you can express concern and you can be outraged, but let's not attack people and their families and make this personal, even though every decision that's being proposed in this budget is personal. It will affect my family personally, it will affect my children, and it will affect my parents. That's true for the Members opposite as well and it's true for everybody else in this province. So let's just try and be a bit respectful as we go through the next number of weeks of debate about this budget.

So, Madam Speaker, welcome. Just to give you some sense of the kinds of messages I'm seeing I'll say on an hourly basis, and I think Members opposite would agree that's not an exaggeration: The budget recently announced is a travesty and will not only hurt employment and the economy, but will devastate families who were thought to be making pretty good money. There are a lot of working families, good taxpayers, middle-class families who are making decent living and would legitimately feel that while they don't have a lot of money left over, they're getting by and they're making a contribution to the economy and to society.

I'll just go on. Between mortgages, child care, heat, food and transportation, there's not a lot left. Whether you're an MHA or whether you're a public servant, or whether you're working in the private sector or in the community sector, that's true for most of us. There are those on the extreme end who are making much, much more money than any of us are making, who may have a different set of challenges to deal, but for the vast majority those struggles to make ends meet are real.

Your budget has taken this from them and essentially left them with nothing. So many people were already living paycheque to paycheque and trying to decide what bill they could pay this pay period or what food they

could buy for their children. I don't know how these people will survive your budget.

This Liberal government has sucker-punched the people of the province – and there's language then that goes on that I won't read in this hon. House, Madam Speaker.

So I understand those sentiments. In fact, when I tended the protest at noon with Members of our PC caucus and also Members of the New Democratic Party who spoke well at that protest this afternoon, I knew our presence wasn't extremely well received, and I understand that. I understand some of the anger people are feeling right now is directed at the past administration as well, and that conversation needs to be had. We need to take responsibility for the decisions we made and for the plan we presented and for the promises we campaigned on. But it doesn't change the fact we're not governing today and we aren't the ones that can now make the decisions that will affect families and affect the future.

I talked to one of my constituents who were on the steps who I hadn't seen in quite some time. She expressed outrage and she witnessed the reception that our leader and others received today, and it was mixed, but it was also quite obvious that there were some people that were upset. Her comment was that's not necessarily productive. We need to focus on the issues of today.

That's not to say we can deny what's gone on in the past, and we do need to have the conversation about the decisions that we've made, what our plan was and what we were prepared to do. We did have a plan and unfortunately people didn't like it. I respect the decisions that the people have made.

The point she ultimately made, beyond expressing some sympathy and some appreciation for the fact that we did stand and be counted today, she said, the choice I have to make is about when I can buy groceries for my kids. She said, I work for the provincial government. I have a reasonable job in the provincial government. It's not high paying.

If government was to formalize a sunshine list, which has been the subject of much public

discussion recently, it would show that there are lots of people who work for the government that are not making huge salaries in this day and age. The vast majority of public servants work very hard every day to earn that money.

The point she made, she said, I'm trying to make a go of it on my own. I have two children and it is a struggle, even now, to meet the basic needs, to buy the groceries that we need from week to week. We have tough choices to make in that regard. She said I have no idea when July 1 comes – I don't know what I'm going to do.

When this Liberal levy comes into play and I'm hit harder and I'm taking home less money every two weeks, on top of all of the other charges that we're going to face – people are going to pay more sales tax, people are going to pay more personal income tax, people are going to pay more for gas, they're going to pay more for insurance; everything is going to be taxed or increased with something like 300 new fees. That's going to be devastating for not just our lowest income earners – and we've invested heavily over the last decade in social programs to support our lowest income earners – but it's going to have a devastating impact on middle-class families as well.

So to hear first-hand from that constituent of mine today who was on the steps of Confederation Building – which took a lot of courage when you're a public servant – to express anger, to express outrage, and to pose some tough questions to me as well about our record, our contribution and the questions that I should answer as her MHA, those aren't easy conversations to have but they need to be had. Again, all I ask is that people try and do that in a respectful and constructive way.

One of the things we need to demonstrate to the people of the province, and to Members opposite when their time comes to stand and be counted, is that there is a better way. We need to be specific about what that might look, despite the very difficult choices that government must make at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, I don't have much time left. I'm very concerned about rural communities. I know I'll often get heckled by Members in this House when I talk about rural development

because I live in Mount Pearl, but do you know what? There are a lot of people who live in Mount Pearl who come from all kinds of small communities in every single corner of this province and beyond. They have families, they have loved ones, they have friends living in those communities. Most of us, even if we now find ourselves living in an urban setting, have had some experience and some background and some connection to rural life in this province.

When I see offices being closed and services being removed, whether we're talking about health care in the Central Region or whether we're talking about the closure of Advanced Education and Skills offices that provide programs and services to those in need across the province, that does affect the sustainability of rural communities. Within the Office of Public Engagement and our Rural Secretariat, our provincial councils and our regional councils are now being eliminated, which eliminates a rural voice within the government sector that needs to be heard as well.

I hope as this debate rages on, Madam Speaker, that I'll have more opportunity to delve into some of those issues and some of the other issues that affect my constituents and constituents throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I look forward to a productive debate. I look forward to a respectful debate.

I know the choices we face as a people, as a province, aren't easy but I do believe, Madam Speaker, there is a better way and there are better choices to be made. The choices that this government is making after making all kinds of promises to the people, those choices are the wrong choices, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster):** Order, please!

I remind the Member his time has expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I do want to take a moment and thank my colleagues in the House today. As they would have been aware, I wasn't here for Question Period. I was attending a funeral, and I appreciate the support of the Members opposite and the Members on this side of the House for allowing me to do that with my family today.

Madam Speaker, over the last week I've had the opportunity to listen to the debate that has been happening not only in this Chamber but also in the community about this budget. Madam Speaker, I think one of the things I'd like to do with the 20 minutes that I have today, and I look forward to speaking more to this budget over the next coming weeks, Madam Speaker, is to address some of the things Members opposite have been saying, and also work to make sure the right facts and the correct facts and the real facts are getting out to the people of the province.

Quite frankly I don't think it's any surprise, certainly to those of us on this side, or to people in the province that there are Members opposite, particularly in the Official Opposition, who continue their habit of telling half-stories and half-truths. That's exactly what they've been doing for a week, and it's time for this side of the House and for those of us in the public to put a stop to it.

Madam Speaker, Members opposite have said a number of things as part of this debate this week, and they've talked about this budget in terms of the decisions we had to make. I think it is really important for those people at home to understand that many of the difficult choices that came to us as part of the decisions to make, to cut, and make decisions to save money, save taxpayers' money so it can be invested in critical public services were placed in front of the former government. They would have had the same information that we would have had.

Now they will say they would make decisions differently, and I can certainly understand why after spending over 130-plus days digging through what are the real facts of what's going on. It was obvious when I listened to the Member opposite, the Member for Ferryland,

talking about how we're spending \$400 million more than they did last year. He tells that story in the context of how we've let spending grow, how we've let it expand.

Well, Madam Speaker, for clarity, the budget would have been, based on their numbers, \$620 million more, and the reason it is \$400 million more is first and foremost there was \$300 million, which includes a one-time \$222 million increase in pension expenses due to the pension reform. That's one reason. The second reason is \$320 million increased in debt expenses due to the increasing deficit. So the \$620 million that would have been the budget this year, had we not done anything, comes from those two items, Madam Speaker. What we were able to do was to take a number of expenses out.

Now the dialogue about the budget over the last number of days has focused around the taxes. Madam Speaker, it may come as a surprise to those listening at home, but it won't come to a surprise to the Members on this side of the House when we say things like we are competitive in Atlantic Canada and based on taxes for a variety of rates, which I'm happy to table in this House and showcase the competitiveness of the current personal income tax, I'm prepared to table that document and let the Members opposite be reminded of the full story they're going to have to be accountable to telling the people of the province.

Madam Speaker, there is one story they're not telling, and that is the journey this province has been on when it comes to personal income tax. In 2001, the highest tax earners in this province – 2001 – were being taxed at a rate of over 18 per cent.

In 2007, the former administration lowered taxes and everybody celebrated about the lower taxes. I'll remind people in this House, that was when peak oil production was forecast. The top earners were moved down from 18 per cent to 16.5 per cent.

In 2008, they again reduced taxes, and what did they do? They reduced it to 15.5 per cent for the top earners. Then in 2010, they again dropped taxes. Now having dealt with – peak oil production had passed, peak oil price had passed, there was a significant shift in revenue,

and they dropped the taxes on the highest paid earners down to 13.3 per cent.

Now, Madam Speaker, when I listen to the Members opposite speak about the tax increases we made and the difficult choices we made, and I say they like to pick and choose the stories they tell, that's a story that needs to be told.

Madam Speaker, I think it would be important for the Members of this House to also understand that between 2008 – in the 2008 tax reduction and in the 2010 tax reduction when they were dropping the taxes for high-income people, Members opposite, when they were in government did not adjust the tax rate for the first bracket, for the lowest income earners in our province.

They sit here and they go out in public and they talk about these increases and they only want to tell half-truths. It's the same pattern of behaviour they had in the dying days of their government when they only wanted to tell half-truths to the people of this province, Madam Speaker. I can tell you that Members on this side of the House are not going to tolerate half-truths out there in the population.

Our tax increases, even last year when they moved – the minister last year spoke about introducing two tax brackets and they were going to go after the high-income earners. They only moved them to 15.3 per cent. They didn't even go back to 2007 levels. They kept the rates low on those high-income earners.

What we've done, Madam Speaker, is we have moved the taxes in 2007 on the highest bracket to 18.3 per cent. So let nobody misunderstand that this government and the decisions we made are based on fairness and are based on being responsible, based on the facts that we're faced with.

Now the Members in the Third Party like to talk about all of the things in the budget that we're cutting. Madam Speaker, this temporary deficit levy that we're going to have and that we've introduced – and we've publicly put ourselves on the record to say that amount of money will stop and be phased out as part of 2018-19's budget. Members opposite in the Third Party like to talk about it in the context of just that

amount and not in the entire amount of taxes. I would also be prepared to table a document that speaks very clearly. With the personal income taxes that we have changed and the deficit levy, every single tax bracket is paying less than they were under the Tories.

Madam Speaker, I understand and I have said repeatedly since January that this issue of the deficit that we're facing is a very difficult one.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** When we spend 12 to 13 – and increasing – cents on debt expenses, we have to take action. The Official Opposition in government wouldn't make the choices. They wouldn't communicate with the people of the province. They wouldn't give them the facts. The Third Party believes that there is a pool of money somewhere that's going to show up – they have the same thinking that somehow money is going to show up somewhere to pay for things.

Madam Speaker, when we launched our budget last week, I was very clear with the people of the province that we had a clear plan to get back to surplus because, quite frankly, that's what the people of the province expect us to do. They also expect us to make sure that we are investing money to make sure that those people who are most vulnerable in our province are taken care of.

We've done three things, Madam Speaker, as part of this budget that the Members opposite don't want to talk about. They don't want to talk about it. The three things would include the introduction of the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, an increased amount of money that allows us to mitigate many of the tax increases that people in low incomes are going to be faced. It was a priority for this government and it is going to continue to be a priority for us to continue to invest where we know people in vulnerable situations are having struggles.

Madam Speaker, the other thing we did was to make sure that those individuals on income support who may be affected by the discontinuation of the Home Heating Rebate

under the previous government – what we did is we implemented a new pot of money to make sure that those individuals are not disadvantaged. The Members opposite don't want to talk about that. They don't want to get those facts out to the people of the province.

The third item we did was to make sure that those people in our community, those seniors –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. C. BENNETT:** The Member opposite wants to continue to heckle me while I'm talking. She can continue to do that, Madam Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Madam Speaker, we've also invested in enhancing the Seniors' Benefit so seniors will be able to get more money to offset the implications of the consumption tax increase, and also to offset implications of the Home Heating Rebate reduction.

The Members opposite, I understand, they want to play politics with this. If I was sitting on that side of the House, I'd be pretty ashamed to go out to a protest as well. I'd be pretty ashamed to show my face as well when the people of the province watched them justify investments and justify things without having financial accountability to today.

They talked about, for years, that the motherlode was coming; the big money was coming. Madam Speaker, our government is not prepared to not take action, and we will continue to make decisions that are in the best interests of the province.

Now, you know what, there is absolutely no way any government, any government, any Tory government, any NDP government, or the current government could look to increase revenue and not impact people. It's impossible, but what we can do is to make sure when we make those difficult decisions on revenue that we invest in protecting the most vulnerable in our community and make sure they are taken care of.



The other thing we can do is to be open and transparent about when we intend to bring this province not only back to surplus, but when we intend to move off temporary taxes. But for Members opposite, particularly in the Official Opposition, to talk about the deficit levy as something that is giving high-rollers a free ride, I would remind them of the free ride they gave high-rollers in 2007, 2008, 2010 and in 2015, Madam Speaker.

You know what – I'm happy to listen to the debate, but when Members opposite get up and stand up and talk about things like we had a five-year plan; it was a balanced plan. Well, Madam Speaker, I think it would be really important for the Members of this House to understand that in their plan last year they budgeted all of the things they were going to spend money on, and then they decided let's throw \$150 million in there that we hope to save, and wish for good luck.

That is unacceptable when it comes to openness and transparency. It's unacceptable when it comes to the responsibility they had to be transparent about the budget. That is not a seven-year plan; that's sticking in a number and making something work in an election year.

The Members opposite spoke about, as I said, the two new personal income tax rates, two new income tax brackets they brought in. As I've said before, they brought them in, and the highest earner was 15.3 per cent, the second-highest earners were 14.3 per cent. I remind the people of this House and the Members home who are listening that we've moved that rate up in 2017 to 18.3 per cent.

Madam Speaker, the Members opposite talk about things like this to scare people. They say the HST went up and there's no rebate, but they don't want to talk about the Newfoundland Income Supplement, which is actually even more money than what would have been the HST rebate that hasn't been adjusted or changed since 1997 that this government did, this government took leadership on –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** – this government changed to make sure that those people on low income

had much more money in their pockets than the previous government.

Madam Speaker, we talk about infrastructure and investment. The Members opposite in their debate so far talked a lot about infrastructure investment. I want the people of the province today to understand that our government, through investments, is leveraging and spending \$570 million and that doesn't include any large-scale projects. That's \$570 million invested in infrastructure that's going to create 1,000 jobs a year for the next four years.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Madam Speaker, when that comes to looking and investing in the economy, I think that's something that our government, considering that we're faced with a \$1.8 billion deficit, can be really proud.

The Members opposite want to talk about the budget in the context of pieces of it that they want to talk about for their own purposes. I understand that. I understand having been in the House now for a little over a year and a half. I've seen how they operate. I understand that their choice is to talk about things in terms that get the people fanned up.

Madam Speaker, do you know what? When we find out things as part of our budget process, like one-time decisions that the former administration made that saw money, fire trucks and others go into Tory districts 19 out of 20 times, I think the people of the province need to understand that.

I'm quite prepared, and Members on this side of the House are quite prepared, to work with our constituents and all of the people in the province to make the decisions over the next four years, through our mandate, to get our province back on fiscal ground that is solid so that we can ensure that we have efficient services for the people of the province. What we won't do is we won't sit idly by and watch the Members of the Opposition – both Opposition parties – cherry-pick the things they want to go out and create in the community even more anxiety.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Order, please!

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Madam Speaker, I look forward to participating in this debate; I look forward to continuing to participate in this debate and explain to the people of the province the amount of priority we have put into low-income individuals and the money we're investment back through the Newfoundland income tax credit and the temporary nature of the deficit.

I look forward to the Members opposite standing up in this House and explaining to us the things they would like to see cut in their districts and in other districts that would save them money from the Deficit Reduction Levy. I would look forward to that conversation.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I stand today to speak to the budget. This is my first time speaking to the budget in this session: *Restoring Fiscal Confidence and Accountability*.

Madam Speaker, I would imagine that many people who voted for the Liberals in our last provincial election in November did so based on the very concrete promises the Premier and his team made to the people of the province: no public sector layoffs, no HST increase, a strong plan for diversification, a stronger future. The Premier and his team loudly, boldly and unequivocally made those promises to the people Newfoundland and Labrador a mere four-and-a-half months ago.

The people of the province believed them. They trusted them. Why wouldn't they? The Liberals so clearly and earnestly guaranteed them no job cuts, no HST increase, a great plan for

diversification – which we so desperately need because of the previous administration's addiction to oil revenues. The hard-working, honest and innovative people of Newfoundland and Labrador were ready to roll up their sleeves to work together to pull us out of this financial mess facing our province. Everyone was ready. They were willing to take hits, to take sacrifices and to roll up our sleeves saying, okay, we know how tough this fiscal situation is, we are willing to be part of the solution. That's what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador relied on. That's what they believed this government was bringing to them.

Instead, what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador got was a budget without vision, a budget with no hope, a budget full of tax hikes, extra fees, layoffs, levies and reductions in services and no signs. There is not a single sign in this budget that's called *Restoring Fiscal Confidence and Accountability* – because that's all it's about.

There is no sign of hope. There is no sign of a stronger future. That's what the people of this province were relying on from this government. They were relying on the fact that this government was promising to work with them so we could all haul ourselves out of this fiscal mess. A budget that hits hard-working people, families, students, seniors, the arts community, rural communities, First Nations people.

This budget, Madam Speaker, hits hardest those who did not share equally in the prosperity, but who will now bear the greatest burden in this budget of austerity. It hits hardest those who did not share equally in the prosperity, but who will be hit the hardest and bear the greatest burden in this austerity. We don't even know yet what the full rollouts, the full effects of this budget will be.

For instance, we know right now in the Adult Dental Program there hasn't been any dentures approved for people who were eligible for that program since last November. We also know that 1,600 – not 16, not 160, but 1,600 people requiring dentures in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador alone are on a wait-list. Yet, this program has been cut to the bone; 1,600 people waiting since last year for dentures. Is that prosperity? Is that a stronger

future? I don't think so. Do you know what? The people of Newfoundland and Labrador don't think so either.

The Minister of Finance just said people are not going to be hit as hard as they think they are. Do you know what? They're adding it up. They're adding up how they're going to be hit by the increase in taxes, the increase in fees, this levy – this Muskrat folly levy, this Muskrat folly tax – that's being placed on them.

This is not even a budget. It's not a plan for economic recovery for the province. There is nothing bold or innovative in this budget, none whatsoever. Instead, government is acting like accountants rather than as a government. As government, their task was to design a plan to create jobs, increase opportunity by stimulating the economy and leading and helping to develop sustainable diversification. There's no plan for any new revenues. That was the role of government.

This budget is a missed opportunity. We know that budgets are all about choices, they don't just happen on their own. This is about choices. Every single paragraph in this Budget Speech represents a choice this government made.

They talk about the Government Renewal Initiative. I'm calling it the Government Renewal Initiative movement. It's grim. What they have done is grim – nothing short of grim.

Instead of creating a budget, instead of taking leadership that would bring us to economic recovery, instead they took a red pen and went line by line cutting. As the Minister of Finance so proudly, so often said in the House, they took a pen and went line by line cutting. So proudly announcing time and time again that they went line by line.

That's what accountants do. That's not what governments with a vision for prosperity, with a vision for economic recovery, with a vision of getting the people – the people who were so ready knowing, because our people are not stupid. They knew the fiscal situation we were in, but everybody was willing to do their part, to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Just like accountants, not like a government leading us out of this mess, how very, very short sighted.

This was their opportunity to turn things around for our Newfoundland and Labrador. For our Newfoundland and Labrador this was the opportunity and they failed miserably.

The minister and the Premier both said how sad and sorry they were to present this budget when instead – it's because they went line by line. They were so sad and sorry to present this budget when instead they should have proudly and confidently presented a plan for economic recovery for the province, a plan that would get our hard-working, resilient people pulling together. That's what they should have accomplished, not something they were sad and sorry to present to the people of the province, but something they were so proud – because they should have presented something, that they have a plan that would get us all working, a plan that would point to a stronger future. It's a sad, sorry state of affairs indeed because they fail so miserably.

We all knew how tough our fiscal situation was in Newfoundland and Labrador. How the past government squandered our prosperity by not investing in long-term programs, by shackling us with the enormous cost of a huge, huge megaproject, Muskrat Falls – Muskrat folly – which probably should never have been greenlighted because there were too many outstanding questions. Now this government has squandered the opportunity to start to turn things around. Again, this budget is without vision. This is a budget without hope.

They had the opportunity to be bold. This situation we face required boldness, it required innovation. They had that opportunity to be bold and innovative, and instead they nicked and dimed departments and are squeezing every possible penny they can out of the pockets of the people with fees and inequitable taxes rather than working toward real diversification, rather than using our incredible hard-working innovative people and creating jobs. No, instead they have chosen to choke out every bit of life of our own people. This is not a budget, but rather it's a scheme to pickpocket the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. And to what end?

A job loss is not a move forward. Real strategies for diversification and real job creation, now that's a plan for moving forward. I thought

perhaps, in spite of all the posturing of doom and gloom, they'd come up with something, anything that would propel us forward, because we were told again and again and again about the doom and gloom. We were all warned, but I thought some of that was theatrics. That maybe, though, they were going to pull it out. That they were going to pull out a plan that really compelled us forward.

In November, so many people had put their trust in this government to help steer us through these tough times. Instead, they have stalled in their tracks, paralysed, unable to lead us one step forward. This was an opportunity. This was an opportunity to propel the province forward. This was an opportunity for economic recovery. This was an opportunity for bold and innovative plans for diversification. This was an opportunity to make people's lives better and they failed. They failed miserably. They failed the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Greece, Ireland, UK: all who face such incredible economic challenges. Leading economists the world over all knows that you cannot cut your way to prosperity. We know that. Those are hard-learned lessons. These countries have proven, and leading economists the world over have proven, that austerity budgets do not work, but rather they stifle and they stagnate economies.

Look at Alberta. I know the situation is not the same. I know they do not have a huge debt. I know they have a much larger population to work with. I know that. The people in this House know that. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador know that. With over a \$10 billion deficit and a loss of over 60,000 jobs in the oil and gas sector, rather than punishing their people, they are investing in their people. They are doing leadership. They are investing in diversification and creating jobs. They are investing in infrastructure, putting their people to work with a clear plan to move towards recovery. They know that you cannot cut your way to prosperity.

The only employment plan by this Liberal government is a plan of job losses. That is their employment plan: a plan of job losses. We look at what they're targeting. After promising no layoffs, when we look at what they're targeting

in the public sector – this is a plan. Their job plan is a plan for job losses. They have no long-term plan for recovery. They haven't created a single job, except we all know that there are more job cuts on the horizon. They have no plan for diversification. There's not a single plan for diversification in the budget. In fact, they are shrinking our economy.

They admitted themselves in their own Budget Speech that the economy will be in decline by over 15 per cent over the next five years due to their provincial deficit reduction measures. It's here on page 5 of the Budget Speech. It is quite surprising that this government admits that because of their provincial deficit reduction measures, in fact, the economy is going to stall; it is going to shrink, rather than grow the economy, rather than pull us out of this mess.

Their recovery plan? Well, I believe the recovery plan of this government is the Premier and the minister are crossing their fingers hoping the price of oil will go up, because there is no other plan – unless they have something they're not telling us about, and one would hope to God they do have something, but so far they haven't told us about it. All we know is they're crossing their fingers hoping the price of oil. The Deficit Reduction Levy, the Muskrat Falls tax, the Muskrat folly tax, taking \$300 from people earning \$20,000 a year; what is that? What is that all about?

**MS. C. BENNETT:** That is not true.

**MS. ROGERS:** Madam Speaker, working for less than minimum wage, people living below the poverty line – well, the minister is telling me that's not true, and I sure hope – I'd love to see that in black and white.

For instance, though, let's take a look – there we go, we see it in black and white – what happens with a family, two people in the household, each working, each earning \$50,000 a year. So let's look at a household like that. We have two earners in the household, each making \$50,000 a year. Each of those earners will pay \$600 for the levy.

That means that household, with two earners making only \$50,000 a year each, probably paying a student loan, probably paying a

mortgage, probably paying a car payment, probably paying more on their insurance now as well, maybe trying to get child care. So each of those earners, \$50,000 each, one household, two earners, \$600 each – that household will pay \$1,200. That's what's going to come out of that household.

However, their next door neighbour who's making \$900,000 and only one earner in that household, that household in fact will only pay \$900. So your neighbour who's making \$800,000-\$900,000 will pay \$900 for the levy, whereas in your household, where you're each making \$50,000, you will pay \$1,200 from your household. How does that make sense in anyone's calculations?

Now, I believe when government said they went all over the province and that a thousand people came to their town halls to give them ideas about how to make this better. I was concerned about the question – the government never asked people: What can we do, and what is it that we need to go forward? They asked, how can we cut?

Well, I believe they perhaps listened to a thousand people and maybe the thousands of recommendations on the website. I cannot imagine anybody made these recommendations. Who is this government listening to? Who in their wisdom came up with this? Who is this government listening to? They're not listening to the people who are out protesting in the streets right now, the people who are adding up, because the people know so far some of the effects this budget will have on them. A lot of people don't know yet what the rollout of the details of this budget will be and how it will affect their lives.

Selling off publicly-owned land and buildings is like selling off the house to pay the mortgage. I fear, Madam Speaker, what this government is going to do with some of the assets, with some of the valuable assets we own as a people of the province, whether it be land, whether it be buildings, because we won't be getting them back.

Closing courts and other public services in rural communities. The people out in Gambo losing their clinic. People who are losing jobs, who are

losing services. No comprehensive home care to keep people in their homes and out of expensive institutions. Cutting back on the Adult Dental Program, where there hasn't been an approval for dentures for people who need them since last November. Cutting grants to students, cutting the parental benefits, school closures, nothing to increase our population growth strategy.

There's not a darn thing in this budget that speaks to growth strategy. Nothing to help our young people to stay here. This government's recovery plan? Well, the Premier and minister have no recovery plan. Again, it's crossing their fingers, hoping that the price of oil will go up.

What a panicked, misguided mess this is. The people of this province feel blindsided. They are angry and they know they have been betrayed by false promises, by broken promises. They are writing letters, phoning, going on Open Line shows, signing petitions, speaking to their neighbours, marching in the streets. The people of Newfoundland are livid and they're not taking this lying down.

Madam Speaker, we need a plan that relies on and supports the hard-working, resilient, and smart people of our Newfoundland. Until this happens, I will not be voting to support this budget. A vote in favour of this budget is a vote against the people of Newfoundland. I have no confidence in this government to pull us out of this mess, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have no confidence whatsoever in this government to pull us out of this mess. Crossing your fingers and hoping that the price of oil goes up is not a plan for recovery.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I remind the Member her time has expired.

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. LETTO:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to stand today in my place to speak on Budget 2016. First of all, before I get into my comments, I want to express my appreciation to the Cabinet, to the Premier and to the Minister of Finance for all the hours they've put into preparing this document because I know, I've seen it. It's been long nights, long days. I know their job wasn't easy.

It's never easy when the province is in this position. I just start off by – I guess preface my remarks as well with the comments from the Member for Mount Pearl North who said, blaming it on the past is not productive and we need to focus on today. That's true. Maybe it's not productive, but it's the facts.

The last budget that we saw from the Opposition showed a \$1.1 billion, \$1.2 billion deficit, but we all know what the number was when we introduced the budget. It was \$2.7 billion. How do you address that without affecting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

We've created a plan.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. LETTO:** I'm sure they'll get a chance to stand in their place.

Drastic conditions, Madam Speaker, like the \$2.7 billion deficit requires drastic measures. We have to focus on today and make the tough decisions so that our children and our grandchildren will not be in debt for the rest of their lives if the deficit goes unchecked.

We take no pleasure in doing the measures that we've had to do. I take no pleasure. I'm sure the Cabinet didn't take any pleasure. We cannot let this province go into a position where it cannot find itself back out and that's where we are.

I've heard from constituents. I've gotten the emails. I've been attacked on social media. People are angry, and I fully understand that. I know that the court in Wabush is going to be cut back to a circuit court. I know that, but I'm willing to work and the Minister of Justice is willing to work with the community to mitigate the impact that would have on our justice system. We're prepared to work with the people.

It's been said by the Minister of Finance and by the Premier, given all the tax increases and fee increases that we see in this budget we are now at a taxation level of 2006, 2007. We all know what happened in '08, '09, '10, '11 with the peak oil production, peak oil prices, money galore. Unfortunately, it was all spent.

For all the bad news that people tend to highlight – the Opposition or Third Party – there is a lot of good news in this budget.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Oh yeah?

**MR. LETTO:** Yes, there is. There is good news in this budget.

I'm going to start my comments with the good news by going back to Estimates on Monday night when we had Estimates for Municipal Affairs. The Member for Cape St. Francis congratulated the minister and congratulated the members of Municipal Affairs for the good work they had done in the budget to help municipalities. So there is good news in the budget.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes, there is.

**MR. LETTO:** Thank you. So we have that on record, there is good news in the budget.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You're the one who said there was no good news.

**MR. LETTO:** I didn't say it.

Before I get into the good news for municipalities –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. LETTO:** – Madam Speaker, if I'm allowed, I want to recognize the people of L'Anse au Clair today. I want to recognize the people of L'Anse au Clair – my hometown, your district – for the terrible loss that they experienced just two days ago when they lost their town hall, their community centre and the lifeblood of their town. I wanted to recognize them.

Yes, despite all the bad news in the budget, we will be there to help the Town of L'Anse au Clair recover when the times comes.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Just like Bay de Verde.

**MR. LETTO:** Just like Bay de Verde, that's right.

We recognize as well, Madam Speaker, that there's only one taxpayer in this province. Whether it's federal tax or provincial tax or municipal tax, it's the same taxpayer that's paying it. To download the \$2.7 billion deficit onto municipalities just doesn't make any sense. If we did it to them, they would have to pass it on to the same taxpayer that we're leaning on.

So for that, we recognize services delivered at the local government level can have the greatest impact on the day-to-day lives of our residents. Yes, over the past number of years we've done some great, great work with MNL to put in place a Community Sustainability Partnership. We are prepared, as a government, to continue with that partnership and to enhance that partnership.

In budget 2016-2017, to look at some good news, there are no reductions in the Municipal Operating Grants. They will stay at \$22 million. There are no changes to the provincial-municipal cost-sharing ratios for municipal projects; they still stay at 90-10, 80-20, 70-30 – all good things.

All the initiatives announced as part of the Community Sustainability Partnership will be maintained, including the sharing of the provincial gas tax revenues, the partial HST rebate and the regional governance consultations. We will maintain all that.

I'll just go into a little bit more detail. The HST rebate: Rebates to municipalities and local service districts of 25 per cent increasing to 57.14 per cent in January, 2017, which will be \$11.4 million alone for the 2016-2017 fiscal year. So that's good revenue for municipalities.

We are also sharing provincial revenue from the gasoline tax with municipalities. As of April 1 this year, it increased to 0.75 cents per litre, providing \$5.3 million of funding to our municipalities this year. I know that we've

implemented – and I want to just mention here that as part of our temporary measures, the 16.5 cents that's being implemented as gasoline tax. This government has recognized that those communities living close to the Quebec border in this case would be disadvantaged if we were to impose that. Because of that, municipalities of Labrador City and Wabush – which I represent – and the municipalities of on The Straits area in Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair will get a 10 cent rebate on that. So we recognize those municipalities who would be adversely affected by that.

Combined with the \$22 million, these initiatives will provide over \$38 million to municipalities this year alone, but the Community Sustainability Partnership is more than just fiscal in nature, of course. It will enhance supports to our communities, strengthening their ability to deliver quality services to the people and businesses within them.

In addition, we will continue to provide funding for the three regional service boards to engage regional water and waste water operators with a pilot group of communities to help address their water and waste water infrastructure options. So we know this is very important going forward. Drinking water and waste water, given the regulations coming down from the federal government.

We will also continue to work with the Department of Environment and Conservation in the reduction of boil water advisories through the implementation of consultant recommendations. Again, positive for the municipalities.

Now we've heard a lot about infrastructure and what's needed in our province, whether it's in communities, whether it's on roads or wherever it is, and we recognize the demand out there for infrastructure is quite high. The need is quite high and it's going to get higher, especially in the waste water area where regulations are coming down. Many municipalities now are going through their flow meters and their tests to determine what category they fit into.

Over the next four years this government will invest about \$344 million for new and existing municipal infrastructure projects, which will

enable us to leverage over \$146 million in federal funding. So with the municipal contributions, their 10 per cent, 20 per cent or 30 per cent, whatever category they fall into, the result is a total of \$625 million in the next four years in municipal infrastructure. That translates into jobs, a thousand jobs.

Meanwhile, we are also, as you know, this past year one of the main issues in municipalities and certainly residents living in municipalities was the high assessments and how residents were impacted by the mill rates and by the high assessments. Immediately, with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, we're moving forward with a review of the Municipal Assessment Act to look at the timing of assessments, the criteria around assessments and the implementation of the mill rate. So we are looking at that, and we are going to move forward immediately.

We're also moving forward with the regionalization, the regional governance models, because municipalities today are asking for it. An advisory committee has been formed on that as well, and we are moving forward.

I just want to bring – because municipalities is I guess where a lot of us in this room have cut our front teeth in politics, whether we were mayors, councillors or even employees within municipalities. I stand here today because the Professional Municipal Administrators – of which my colleague, the Member for Fogo – Cape Freels was honoured last night for his involvement in that organization – are in town this week.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. LETTO:** They are in town this week for their annual convention. I will speak to them tomorrow night on behalf of the minister. We recognize the great work that they do.

Of course, we cannot forget our mayors and councillors who do a great job for us right across this province, and through their organization, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador.

Together, in partnership with these organizations and others, municipalities will continue to be sustainable. That's our goal because sustainable communities will lead to a sustainable province.

Before I sit down, I have a few minutes left. As you know, this province is a resource-driven province. We talk about oil and we talk about where the jobs are going to come from in the next few years.

Something I've worked a long time in, and very dear to my heart besides municipalities, is mining. I've heard the Member for St. John's Centre say we're counting on oil going up. Well, it is. It's \$46 a barrel today, Brent oil. There's another resource that's very, very important in this province – and this province has seen a drop in revenue because of the drop in the industry – and that's the iron ore industry.

This past December, iron ore was selling at \$38 a ton. We saw what happened with Wabush Mines. We saw the stories about IOC operating at risk. Well, guess what? I think we've turned a corner because today, whether it's sustainable or not, iron ore is selling at \$70 a ton.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. LETTO:** So the prices are going up, I say to the Member opposite. Do you know what that does? That makes mining sustainable. That makes Wabush Mines attractive. Guess what? It brings Alderon back into play. It brings Tata Steel into play. That's money into our coffers.

So there is hope in this province, Madam Speaker. There is hope in the resource sector. There is hope in mining. We just have to maintain that hope.

We always hear we're counting on hope. I've lived my whole life on hope, and I hope to live a lot longer. Maybe to some people's chagrin in this place, I don't know, but I hope to live a lot longer. And we have to live on hope, because there is hope in this province and there is hope in the resource sector.

Another mineral that's showing considerable improvement, and that's copper – now, you say, what do we do with copper? Well, Voisey's Bay has copper, and copper is a bellwether commodity of the mining industry. Copper was selling, not so very long ago, down around less than \$2 a pound. Well, guess what it is this morning? I checked; it was \$2.25 a pound.



**AN HON. MEMBER:** Ten per cent.

**MR. LETTO:** Ten per cent.

Iron ore increased, by the way; iron ore price increased 62 per cent since January 1 – 62 per cent. So there is hope for us, and we have other mines coming on. We have the gold out in Baie Verte, the Member for Baie Verte, the Rambler mine, the Anaconda mine – those prices are going up; the demand is going up. We have St. Lawrence fluorspar coming on-stream.

So to say there is no hope and there is no future in this province, people should be ashamed to say that. There is hope in this province; there is hope. We just got to believe in ourselves and we got to believe in the resources we have here.

The value of the provincial mineral shipments totalled \$2.9 billion in 2015 – a \$2.9 billion industry in 2015. That's only going to get better. We have to look at increasing our revenues. And as our revenues increase, that provides relief on our temporary measures we implemented to get ourselves back on an even keel. So the sooner these prices go up, the sooner these resources are developed, the better it is.

I'm not saying we're out of the woods. The markets continue to be challenging, but the outlook is good. The economists are all over the place. Some are saying we're going back to \$30 iron ore; some say we're going to \$100. So they're all over the place, but I'm confident things will get better in the resource sector.

I'll close my comments – I cannot sit down without having a few words on infrastructure when it comes to the Minister of Transportation and Works. It was only a couple of weeks ago – and I have to mention this because I was so angry – when a certain councillor from the City of St. John's managed to go on the radio and talk about twinning the highway from St. John's to Port aux Basques, right across Canada. I would love to see a twinned highway.

Do you know where he said to get the money? He said to take it from the Trans-Labrador Highway because a gravel road is good enough for the people of Labrador. Well, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, and you agree with me, a

gravel road is not good enough for the people of Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. LETTO:** A gravel road is not good enough for the people of Labrador and this government believes that a gravel road is not good enough for the people of Labrador. That's why the Minister of Transportation and Works has in this budget \$63.7 million for widening and paving of the Trans-Labrador Highway.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. LETTO:** That's what this government is about. We don't need to take lectures from people who live outside of Labrador who think that a gravel road is good enough for our people just because they went on it once and all they saw was a bit of dust. Well, I hope he saw the pictures that were going around two weeks ago. He would have said something different.

Madam Speaker, we can sit here and listen to the rhetoric from the other side that this budget is all bad news. Yes, there are some difficult decisions that were made in the budget. I don't like them any more than they do or the people of Newfoundland and Labrador do. I've been told many times that they're not acceptable. What's not acceptable is to encounter a \$2.7 billion deficit this year and allow that to continue on until it puts us out of sight and out of point of recovery.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the time. I look forward to speaking again.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I always do thank the wonderful people in Cape St. Francis for giving me the opportunity to be here – the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis for giving me the opportunity to be part of this debate. I'm not going to get up here today and say this is right, that's right and argue with the

opposite Member across the way and stuff like that. I will remind him that I agree with the Trans-Labrador Highway being done.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Our government invested \$550 million in it. That's a great investment. It's a great investment for people in the province. I hate when I see – I really do – somebody saying we shouldn't get it, somebody else. Don't put people against each other; I don't like that. I think that every project – I'd like to see twinning too between Whitbourne and Clarendville.

We have seen some wicked, horrific accidents that have been on our highway lately, and maybe that would have helped in any case at all. So I really believe we have to invest in Labrador, like we do have to invest on the Avalon or whether it's the Northern Peninsula, anywhere at all. I believe we have to be fair. That's what I'm about, is being fair. I think we have to be fair to the people of the province, and I think we have to be fair to our constituents and people that live here.

Now, I'm going to change – because the previous speaker, he mentioned a couple of things, and I'm just going to go there, then I'll go into the gist I wanted to talk about today. He spoke about Estimates the other night, and I was at Estimates the other night and I did congratulate the department because I know how hard municipal people work in this province. Being a former mayor in a small town, it's so important we know government supports us.

Over the last number of years, and part of it you'll hear rhetoric and you'll hear you squandered money. Well, I'll tell you one of the biggest investments I think this government did was in municipalities in this province, and it was a good investment. He talked about the ratios.

I can remember being the Mayor of the Town of Flatrock looking for a fire truck when we had to decide what we were going to do. It was a big decision to go get a fire truck because it was 50-50 funding at the time. Then we ended up, we decided to go for it, and it cost us a lot of money. It cost us \$135,000 to a small town with a population of about 1,200 people – which is a lot of money for a town like that. But the new

ratios came in and that year there were seven applications in for fire vehicles.

I asked a question the other night in Estimates, how many were in last year – I'm not sure, was it 72? I think it was 72. So that'll tell you what the investment of just changing the ratios did for people in Newfoundland and Labrador, did mainly for rural Newfoundland and Labrador, because towns with populations that are declining couldn't afford it. Towns with seniors there, people on fixed income, couldn't afford; the tax base was low.

But the 90-10, the 80-20 and the 70-30 was huge for municipalities. Listen, I'm so glad. I didn't say there was anything – I wanted to good news. I want to see good news. I want to see good things. It's your Minister of Finance that said there's nothing good in this budget – but I think that's good. I think that the sustainability plan that was put in place last year is a great thing.

When you go in this province and you look what our municipal leaders do, we're at one level; they're at another level. They deal with personal stuff every day, and they deal with people, whether it is houses, roads – and they're the volunteers in our communities. Most of them don't get paid; they volunteer.

I'm so glad you continued to do what we started and what we continued to do over the years and support them, because they're the backbone of all the towns. I really believe that. That's a good thing; that's a real good news story. When I came to Estimates the other night, I was really pleased to see the Department of Municipal Affairs didn't kill the towns.

I know in my district, I spoke to all my mayors. I go to a regular meeting on a regular time. As a matter of fact, every couple of months, I'll sit in on council meetings. I just don't tell them I'm coming and I'll just go in and sit on a council meeting and have a yarn afterwards, go inside and talk and whatever, just see what's on the go. There may be a couple of issues in the town they want to talk to me about, but I make myself available to them because I know how important they are to the people in their communities.

So that's what we got to do. Not cutting anything in Municipal Affairs is a great thing.

Those ratios, I'm glad of those ratios. Because they had a fear – talking to all my mayors, they were scared. They said: This budget coming, are they going to download services on us? I'm sure, I bet you every one of you over there heard that, that municipalities were concerned we were going to download services to them. I'm glad we didn't. Because listen, there's the federal government, there's us, and there's them – but guess what? There's only one taxpayer. No matter what we do, there's only one taxpayer. Whether it's the federal government, provincial government or municipal governments, we only have one taxpayer. That taxpayer is the one that's going to pay for it.

So there's a lot of good things in it – gas tax last year, that was a new program we brought in making sure there was money available. They do a lot of good things with it. There are a lot of good things.

I am a little bit concerned, and I said it the other night, about whether we're going to be ready in 2021 with waste water. I know two of the communities in my district are doing projects now and trying to get ready for the waste water and make sure they have – but we need to have money available.

I do believe and listened to the minister the other night – and just to explain a little bit. Say if something cost \$10 million and the feds come in and pay 50 per cent of it that means there's \$5 million left, and then we go to the 90-10. So the towns and municipalities are not really burdened too much with it. But that money has to be there to be able to do this. The federal government are going to come down by 2021 and make sure these projects are done. It's very important to the towns, and it should be done too. It really should be done.

I heard the Premier also say about the hard work the minister did. Listen, I saw what ministers did. I've been around here for eight years now and I see what ministers do. I tell you, you do work hard. I applaud every one of you that steps up and is a minister or a Member in this place. I know you work hard. You're running big departments and everything else.

That's it; that's what you sign up here to do. Some people say to me: Gee, Kev, how come

you got involved in that? What are you doing that for? Why would you put yourself – because do you know what? I grew up in a family where my father was into it all the time, and my mother, who was a public health nurse for 32 years, saw it all too. I think it was kind of inherited in me. I really believe that we're all here for the right reasons. All these new MHAs – I don't know most of you yet, but I'm sure you're here for the people who elected you, or else you wouldn't be here. People voted for you because they thought you'd be the best person to represent them. That's what we're doing here. We're representing people in our area.

Mr. Speaker, I look at our budget and I understand. Listen, we all understand that these are difficult times, these are very difficult times. I knocked on the doors in Cape St. Francis, and I can honestly say I think I got every one of them. The last day I was there, there was one road I had to do the last night and I got there and I knocked on the doors. I think I got them all.

When I knocked on the doors in the District of Cape St. Francis I made one promise. I made one promise and people would say, oh, a politician coming by. What are you going to promise now? What are you going to give me? I said, I'm not going to give you anything. All I'm going to tell you is, if you pick up the phone and make a phone call to me, I'll do my best to answer and advocate on your behalf. That's my job as an MHA.

I'm sure you guys and ladies over on the other side are in the same boat that I am. You advocate for the people who elected you. It's so important we realize that. We can get all on the go, whether it's PC, Liberal or NDP, the one person and the people that are our bosses are the people who elected us. We cannot forget that. We have to remember who put us here, because they are the key. They are the ones who I represent and you represent.

I'm not here today to criticize or say anything to anyone. I got phone calls over the last number of weeks – well, week now since the budget – from all kinds, everywhere in the province. I had one from Bonavista, I had one from Harbour Grace, I had Harbour Main. Listen, I make a point that I stay in my office and I return my calls, I return my emails and I listen to what the people say.

That's what we all have to do, because again, I said they're the people who got us here. It's so important.

Like I said, I made one promise and I'm going to keep my promise. I guarantee you, and I can guarantee the people of Cape St. Francis, that I will keep my promise to them. That I'll work hard on their behalf, I'll advocate on their behalf, and when they call me, I'll respond to them. I've received hundreds and hundreds of calls. I've received them from seniors. I've received them from young people. I've received them from all over the place.

I was around this weekend and I made a point to go all over my district to listen to people. I was in my neighbourhood, down talking to my neighbour who's an 80-year-old man that blows me away every day. He gets on his bike and goes in the woods and cuts wood. He got enough wood down there – I told him on Saturday, I said, b'y, you must have enough wood now for six years. I think he does, too; but he loves in the woods.

He's concerned. He said, Kevin, look at me, where am I going to get the extra \$3,000 or \$4,000? Him and his wife were there. They have, I think, four or five grandchildren that they absolutely idolize – their grandchildren. That's what they talked about, the things that we do with our grandchildren today. We help the little one in dancing or we help the little fellow go to hockey or whatever. The bit of extra money we had, this budget is going to take away. That's where we are. This budget is going to take away those few extra dollars.

I know there are supplements there and I know you did put some money back to those people. When you look at that gentleman – and he said to me the weekend, my house insurance is up, so now it's 15 per cent more. My car insurance, we're all paying – I don't know, I thought I heard yesterday that in the last three or four years car insurance has gone up by 25 per cent. So we're going to add another 15 per cent on that. We're adding it on to those people.

Like I said, we have to remember who put us here. We have to be fair to the people who put us here. Some people can pay, some people can't. I'm sure every one of you ladies and

gentlemen on the other side have gotten the same calls that I have. The calls that I'm getting are saying, listen, this has gone too far. I can't afford it. There's no way I'm going to be able to do it.

I had a family that I spoke to the weekend. The lady said, Kevin, we have two small children, we have two cars. There's no way we can afford to have one car. My husband works in the evening and I have to have a car in case the kids are around so that we have two small – she figured that all the increases and everything else is going to cost her about \$6,000 or \$7,000. That's what she figured.

She figured, you've got two car insurances, you've got your house insurance. Their income is around \$40,000 each a year. They make around \$100,000. You add it up. Maybe I don't know, maybe she doesn't know. Maybe you're the only ones who know the answers. Do you know what? She figured out how much it's going to cost. She said, what am I going to cut out? What will we cut out with our two children?

I know today we don't have families like we had years ago. I grew up and I played sports and everything all my life. It wasn't until I was 16 years old I finally got a new pair of skates, because they were all handed down to me. Today, things have changed big time. We have to remember, it is so important that we listen to the people who are emailing us and that we listen to the people who are calling us. We have to listen to them.

I saw a little clip last night on Facebook – I was just going through there – and it was the Premier. He was out in Grand Falls to a fundraiser or something. It looked like it was a dinner or something like that. The sign behind him said: people matter. Then I listened to what he had to say. What he said was: in order to lead, you have to listen – in order to lead, you have to listen.

I say to all the Members on the opposite side and the Members on this side, in order to represent the people in this House of Assembly properly, we have to listen. We have to listen to their concerns. I mean, we can all get up here and say, well, that's not going to happen, this is not going

to happen, but talk to the people that are in fear. This is fear that's happening to people. There's no one over there who can tell me that they're not hearing it because you've got to be hearing it.

People are nervous. People don't know if they're going to be able to put food on the table. They don't know whether they're going to be able to pay their light bill. I heard from people the weekend that told me I don't know if I'm going to be able to afford car insurance. That's sad. That's a sad thing.

The people are talking to us. The people are calling us. The people are emailing us. I listened to CBC the other morning and then I hear they don't understand; people don't understand. Don't think people don't understand; they do understand. They understand that all these fees – it's going to cost more to insure their car. It's going to cost more to license their car. It's going to cost more to go to a park.

There are things we had to do, there's no doubt. I'm not saying there are not things we had to do here. I know that, but we can't take money directly out of their pockets. Give them a choice. Don't be taking money directly out of their pockets. People have to have house insurance; people have to have car insurance. This levy – and I argued with you today when I got up and did my petition – is taking money out of people's pockets.

Just think about it. I understand the HST. The HST, if a person has a choice they'll buy something and it'll have to – but at least if you don't have to money to buy it, you can't do it. The other taxes that they're charging, people have to take it out of their pockets. I think that's the thing that you're missing; I really do. I really believe that's what you're missing because you're not listening to the people that elected you. That's where they're coming from. You talk to them. We all see the emails. We all know the emails and we know what people are saying.

One thing that really concerns me – and I heard the Minister of Finance today get up and do her speech and everything else and she talked about taxes. I'm not going to be shameful or ashamed of what – I wasn't here in 2007. Do you know what? People had more money back then. I

believe someone told me it was \$4 billion that was saved through reduction of taxes over the last number of years. That's not a bad thing. That's a real good thing. Do you know what that did? That gave people the ability to buy things, people to be able to put their children in dancing or hockey or whatever. That's a real good thing.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 this province was in hard shape, no doubt. We're in hard shape today. In 2003, when it came to poverty in this country, we were at the highest of the scale. Out of all the provinces, the hardest place to live, the more poverty than any other province in the country was here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Guess what happened? We did these things; we reduced the income tax people were paying. We brought in the Home Heating Rebate. We invested in our municipalities. We did all these things. Guess what it was last year? We went from the worst to the best. We were talked about everywhere else in Canada. How did you do it? Do you know how we did it? We invested in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, what is this budget going to do to the people in Newfoundland and Labrador? Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Finance was up today and said we're at the same rates we were in 2006 or 2005, whatever she mentioned. But because it was in 2005, is that a good thing? Going backwards is not a good thing. I'd like to see our people have more money to spend.

Again, we're living in a hard time. We depend a lot on oil. People will say squandering the money, and the Member got up and he talked about all the great municipal investments in municipalities, and I don't think that's squandering money at all.

I mean, we know there need to be schools built in the area. I got two schools – one getting built right now, and Holy Trinity that got built. I have renovations done on a school in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. We had renovations done – listen, I will never apologize for giving our kids better education. I'll never apologize for giving our children free school books. I'll never apologize for teachers telling me this the best they've ever seen the education system in this province.

I'm not going to apologize for making those investments, and they're not squandering \$25 billion, because they're investments in our youth. I'm not going to get up here and say that because we have the lowest tuition in all of Canada and every young Newfoundlander gets the opportunity to go to Memorial University or the College of the North Atlantic – I'm not apologizing for that. No, I'm not going to. I think they were great investments, and I think our young people are great investments.

Mr. Speaker, I just look at our seniors. I just came off an election, and the hardest thing on an election is when you knock on the door and a senior comes to the door and they want to talk to you. You feel like you're obligated to talk to them, because they love politics. They really do love politics. A lot of them came from times when times were pretty rough, and they'll tell you the story about how we grew up on this and how we had to take the roll of sticks to school with them. I mean, my father used to be telling us stories all the time – half the time I didn't believe him. He was a great storyteller, but he could tell the stories about how they were back then.

When you talk to the seniors and see what they did for us and know that we're going to do something back for them, whether it's a program that's run through the Department of Health that makes them more active, whether it's a Home Heating Rebate that gives them a few dollars back on their heating.

Mr. Speaker, the seniors with this budget are nervous. They believe – and all you people again – that this is an attack on them, and it is. It's an attack on the poor, it's an attack on the working class and it's an attack on the middle class.

You need to make hard choices. No doubt about it, you need to make hard choices, but I think your choices are just too hard. I really believe they're too hard. I ask all of you to just reconsider some of it. I really don't believe in that levy at all. I think that's way too harsh on the middle class and people in our province.

What it's going to do is take money out of people's pockets. When you take money out of people's pockets, what do you do? I talked to a business owner this week – a business owner

that has a small restaurant. He said, Kevin, I'm just barely making it. Now with all these taxes it's just as well for me to close down my business.

You close down that business and how many other small businesses before and we're going to put people on the unemployment line. We're going to have young people who are working in restaurants to try to help subsidize some of the way they get through school. They're not going to get a job anymore.

Look what you're doing to the people of the province; you're attacking the wrong people. You're attacking the middle class, the young and the seniors. I just ask that you reconsider some of these costs that you're putting on the poor people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER (Lane):** Order, please!

The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KIRBY:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand and have an opportunity to participate in the first round of discussion on the budget. Before I get into some of the information I want to share, I just want to say thanks to the Wigmore Seniors Association. I was over there on Saturday. They had a turkey soup lunch.

We recognized a number of volunteers there including Ms. Pearl Power, Ms. Gertrude Holwell and Mr. Ralph Power for their contributions to the community. There are so many people who actually help out with the association that you could do a 20-minute speech naming them all. I also wanted to single out Debbie Hanlon who has been great support to the association and gives freely of her time to support the people who live over there.

I was able to have a good discussion with the people about the budget. There's no doubt it's a

difficult budget. We all have acknowledged that here in the House of Assembly. The amount of misinformation that's being spread about the budget is astounding. This is my fifth year in the House of Assembly, but I haven't really seen anything quite like this, the way that it's circulating on social media and so on.

The Member just got up from Cape St. Francis and talked about how somebody is going to – I don't know, middle-income earner or somebody was going to have a \$6,000 increase in taxes. I don't know where he's getting that, but if that's the sort of information he's giving out to people I suggest he get people to contact the Department of Finance and get the correct information, because you don't want to be at that.

The Members opposite have been talking about the blame game, the blame game. The former Minister of Health, the Member for Mount Pearl North, got up and talked about how he's more than willing to take responsibility. Well, a couple of weeks ago – maybe you want to take responsibility before this session of the House is over for this. A couple of weeks ago there was a story circulating in the media about how kids at the Janeway had stickers taken away from them. Immediately Members opposite, and their surrogates on social media, are pinning this all on the current government. So we went back to see what happened.

The decision to take stickers away from children, sick kids at the Janeway, was made in November when that Member was Minister of Health. He said he didn't know anything about it. Ignorance is no defence. He was the minister responsible for Health. It was made before the election, so he was still the Minister of Health. So he should take responsibility for something that happened on his watch, instead of taking it to social media to try to pin it on somebody else.

Now I wanted to say something else about social media as well, Mr. Speaker. The Member talks about personal attacks on social media. I had somebody contact me today, somebody who's not involved – actually, it was yesterday – in politics very much. They said they'd been watching some of the budget debate on Twitter.

There's a researcher who works in the office of the Official Opposition, he's the former Member for Terra Nova. The person said to me, he said: the person has attacked almost exclusively the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, the Member for Harbour Main, the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, the Minister of Health. She said, why would women get involved in politics? You've got this sort of political misogyny that infects our political system. It's absolutely shameful.

Then some of the image that Sandy Collins has been out there spreading across, it's absolutely beneath any Member of the House of Assembly, current, former or future. I mean, it's absolutely sad.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KIRBY:** To be targeting female Members of our caucus, I think is absolutely ridiculous. That needs to stop. People need to show more respect for one another if we're going to have a civilized conversation about the problems that we have in this province.

I remind the Members opposite as well that David Cochrane wrote a piece on CBC the other day – a piece on the website. I encourage him to go read it. Yes, people are angry about the decisions in the budget, there's no doubt about that, but it certainly goes a long ways to explaining – which is what we're trying to do – how we got into this problem to begin with. It wasn't just oil; it was reckless spending. Don't take it from me; take it from journalists in the province who know what the truth of the matter is.

The Members over there are talking about oh, we need a free vote. They've been getting more emails than they ever got. Actually I've been getting emails, but I've never gotten any emails like I got when those Members were whipped into voting for Bill 29. I haven't gotten any emails like I got when those Members were whipped into voting for Muskrat Falls. I don't know if those Members didn't check their email in previous budgets –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** – but their budgets I got lots of emails from the public, in every budget, every time we’ve been in here.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** The fact that we’re getting emails – yes, we’re getting emails. People are rightly angry and we respect that. There’s no question about that.

I wanted to say a couple of other things. The Member for St. John’s Centre said something about the people – what about the people making \$900,000 a year? First of all, if you go to look at Statistic Canada’s income breakdown for this province, there aren’t a whole lot of people making \$900,000 a year in this province. There are probably 1,000 people in the province.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. KIRBY:** Yeah, not a lot of people making more than either. There are not a lot of mystery millionaires out there to solve this problem that the province has been thrown into. If somebody –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. KIRBY:** Incidentally, I don’t know why the Member is heckling constantly over there.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Each Member of the House is going to have their turn to speak in debate. I have recognized the Minister of Education to speak and I wish to hear the Minister of Education speak and no others.

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

**MR. KIRBY:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I didn’t yell across the way at the Member for St. John’s Centre when she got up to speak, so I’d appreciate the same courtesy.

If there are actually people – that thousand people or so – who are making \$900,000, they’re taxed at 18.3 per cent as a result of this budget. I don’t know if the Member thinks the person should be paying more than whatever it is, \$150,000 worth of income tax. That seems like a large sum of money.

We’ve increased taxes the highest on the highest income earners. There are thousands and thousands and thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands of additional dollars coming from higher income earners. So this business about how all the low-income and middle-income earners are taking all the brunt is nothing more than somebody’s concocted fantasy. They can legitimately oppose the budget. That’s part of the parliamentary process, but to be out there spreading this sort of information, getting people worked up based on nonsense makes absolutely no sense.

Not only that, I just say to the Members of the Third Party caucus, if you read the document here, *The Economy, Budget 2016*, it says – and I won’t go too far into this – “The oil and gas industry (including support activities) is the largest contributor to provincial GDP.” Three point six per cent of total employment. It goes on to explain the contribution of the oil and gas industry to this province.

Now, the Members’ political party had a meeting in Alberta there a couple of weeks ago where they decided that they’re going to now look at getting rid of fossil fuel use in the country altogether. What would that do to our oil and gas industry in this Province? I don’t know; I haven’t heard any clear answers. Were they talking about getting rid of it altogether?

The irony in this, Jerry Dias, who is probably one of the greatest union leaders in Canada today, came out and he said, you know, those members who flew up to Edmonton to go to the conference, they didn’t go on a solar-powered 737, because those things don’t exist. So there was some jet fuel involved in that. So I mean there’s hypocrisy and then there’s that, Mr. Speaker. So spare me the sanctimony.



Again, the blame game, we've had everyone from the former premier to all the other Members of the Official Opposition saying you're blaming us, you're blaming us. Well, of course we're blaming you.

It's bizarre to hear them complain the way they did. I went back and I looked at speeches given by the Members opposite and some of the ones that aren't there anymore the last time we met in the House of Assembly. You can go back and look in Hansard, April 21, 2015, the Member for Humber – Bay of Islands got up and he said when they gave the Speech from the Throne, the Premier started criticising the Liberals from 2003. Nearly every day we came in the House of Assembly here in the dying days of the last administration and they talked about stuff that went on 12 years ago, that nobody here – I don't even think the Member for Humber – Bay of Islands was in the House of Assembly at the time. The former premier said on June 8: If you layoff large numbers of people like the Liberals did back in the early 1990s, that's what you do, you cut it; you just cut, et cetera, et cetera.

Derrick Dalley, Mr. Pollard, Sandy Collins, Felix Collins, Clayton Forsey, Ray Hunter, all these Members day after day after day, including the Members present who were here in the House of Assembly, getting up over and over again criticizing a government that was in office over a decade before. This idea that somehow the current administration blaming the previous for the most recent horrific mess that they created with the Treasury of this province, that this is somehow out of line or unusual, is absolutely not the case.

I'll now move to some specific things about the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development because there's been a significant amount of misinformation that's been spread about changes in my department. I don't know if Members just haven't looked at the Estimates document or reviewed any of the supplementary materials. We will have Estimates here on Tuesday and Members will have an opportunity to ask questions if they so choose.

One of the big problems we have in Newfoundland and Labrador today is a declining population. It didn't start happening on November 30, I say to the Members opposite. So

before you start heckling and cajoling over there and blaming us for that, you were there for 12 years, use your imagination.

Student population has a steady decline from about 80,000 students in 2004 to about 67,000 in 2015. So we've had a significant reduction in the student population. This year there were supposed to be a number of positions removed from the system, I believe it was 36, because of declining enrolment. Instead of letting those positions go, we decided to keep 27 of them and deploy them for inclusive education.

We have 27 more teachers for special education now than we did – well, we will once the budget passes. There is also additional support for children with special education needs in the form of 115 additional hours a day for student assistant time. People will say that's not enough. People can say that's not enough. That's a legitimate argument. I agree with them, but we're doing what we can with the mess that we inherit. It's really that simple.

There's some suggestion out there that school supplies were reduced in the budget. There was a line, and it's just simply a line in Estimates. It's just the way I guess folks who deal with the finances of the province categorize things. There's no reduction in classroom supplies to teachers or students in this budget. All that's going on here is there is a delay in the implementation of a new course. That falls under the curriculum materials center, that's part of school supplies.

**MS. MICHAEL:** (Inaudible) class sizes.

**MR. KIRBY:** I'll get to class sizes, but I don't know why the co-leader of the NDP keeps yelling across the House of Assembly. You'll have your opportunity to get up and speak just the same as me. There's no reason to heckle across the way.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** You'll have an opportunity if you want to talk about class size.

School infrastructure, the Member for Carbonear – Harbour –

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

**MR. KIRBY:** Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, I'll get it right eventually – is rightly concerned that Coley's Point Elementary has been delayed. I went back, I spoke to the previous Member, Roland Butler, for the area a few nights ago and he was advocating for that when he was here in the House of Assembly.

I went back and I dug up a consultant's report that was buried by the then Education Minister at the time, that was basically buried – Joan Burke was her name. So this was buried, but back then, 2007, it was demonstrated that school should have been replaced. There's 12 schools in the province right now that are over 60 years old and they probably all should be replaced, but we can only do what we can do with the mess we've inherited.

There's been no acknowledgement whatsoever that there's a \$106 million investment in school infrastructure projects in this budget. None at all, and the ironic thing about this is most of the new schools that are being built are in the districts of the Opposition Members. How ironic, that all the schools, that are basically all the schools – just like the fire trucks –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** – are all being built in Opposition Members' districts.

When I came into office I started getting inquiries from these Members saying: When's my school going to be built, when's my school going to be built? Now, I'll tell you something, Mr. Speaker, how long do you think it takes to build a school? I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker. On average, it takes 24 months to build a school in this province. I guess it's our weather and a combination of factors, et cetera, start to finish.

These Members went out, ministers went out and sent out press releases and gave schedules of school construction that were far more

aggressive than anyone in the Department of Transportation and Works ever advised them to do. They were going to build these schools in 14 months. Can you even build a house in 14 months? They were going to build an entire school in 16 months and 18 months.

All these schools are now behind schedule and I have the Members bellyaching to me, getting their constituents all worked up and sending to me because their school is delayed. We had nothing to do with it. They picked schools that they wanted to be built in their own districts, they gave out misinformation about how quickly they could be built, and now they're over there complaining they're not being built fast enough.

One of the Members over there was the minister of Transportation and Works. Now he's out there and he said I pretty well guarantee that this school – I'm convinced this school is going to be built and be ready for September. That school is not going to be ready for September. We'll be lucky if that school is going to be ready for January. That's a significant disruption for people who were told the opposite. I was actually at a public meeting where he said that basic thing. People are complaining about that, and there's no acknowledgement of the amount of money that's being put into this.

Another thing, you have the Member for Mount Pearl North over getting people worked up about St. Peter's Primary. I don't know where he's getting all of his information from, but he's getting people worked up about that. We know there's a problem. Do you know what? We're building an extension. Government is continuing the previous government's commitment to build an extension to St. Peter's Primary in Mount Pearl. It was only in April 2015, a year ago, that this government put anything in place to address that by way of extension.

Do you know how long, Mr. Speaker, it takes to build that extension? Two years. If the Member for Mount Pearl North who was the deputy premier, he was a Cabinet minister, he was in the front bench there – I suppose he had some influence. If he wanted that extension built sooner, why didn't they have it announced in 2014? Why didn't he have it announced a year before?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** They made the decision and now he's complaining about it and, like I said, whipping people up and sending people in. I think it's really unfortunate too, Mr. Speaker, because that government brought in full-day kindergarten and we all supported it. We all supported it because we know the return on investment is significant and our kids deserve the best start they can get in life.

We have Members of both Opposition parties out there suggesting that we postpone the program now, postpone the program, after we spent well over \$10 million, close to \$20 million, I would say, if not over that, on preparations, on extensions, on modulars, on all sorts of work that we have in play right now, professional development, preparation in terms of purchase of curriculum materials. Now they want it all put on hold to the detriment of our children, and I think it's absolutely shameful to put our kids out there and use that as some sort of – and it's a small amount of money, by the way, the investment overall is anyways. You would never solve the colossal mess you created by getting rid of full-day kindergarten.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I got to say, I was glad the clock finally ran out. After 20 minutes of listening to that, now, I'll correct him on one, he couldn't name me, because I wasn't in the House the last session. He named everyone else. I believe he went back 10 or 12 years on naming members. He's even naming people who are not in the House who work for us. We got a good bunch and I'd like to remind him – Sandy, we're going to keep him

for a while, because I know you'd like to have him with you, but he does good work.

**MR. JOYCE:** (Inaudible) political appointment.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** Eddie, give it up; Eddie, you're at it again.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** It's a great honour to stand in this House, Mr. Speaker, and speak on the budget.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that Members of the House are to be referred to by district or title.

**MR. PETTEN:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JOYCE:** (Inaudible) not Eddie.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** It's an honour to stand in House and speak on the budget. I'd like it to be better, I'd like to be speaking on a better document, but as we heard recently it is what it is and I guess we have to live with what we got.

Mr. Speaker, the point that was just said by the hon. Minister of Education, he called it nonsense, we're getting on with nonsense, and I heard the other day we were creating an element of fear. I welcome anyone, if they want to read the emails and the messages I've gotten and my colleagues I'm sure most of them have gotten in the last week, it's a lot of heart-wrenching stories there.

One is a lady, she has five children, she's in a basement apartment and she's struggling to survive. She doesn't know how she's going to do it. I got others, a single parent that's a single-income family; they got a child that has a serious illness. They are struggling now to make ends meet; they don't know how they're going to do it.

These people are not saying the Liberals are horrible or this or that; they're just saying we don't know what we're going to do. We don't know. We're desperate. It is pretty heart wrenching. So I just want to remind the Minister of Education that is not nonsense, and you're welcome to read any email I got here. If you want to call that nonsense, I'll tell every single one of them in my emails the Minister of Education thinks it is nonsense. Maybe all of you think it is nonsense. I don't.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. PETTEN:** Mr. Speaker, we talk a lot and see the protesters today and it seems to be one common theme: the tax levy. I heard Members opposite say that we're wrong on our calculations. My colleague showed the table for the tax levy. We're being told by Members opposite we don't know how to calculate it. Well, we are only reading what's on the piece of paper. You know better than us; you understand it better than us. There are only 31 of you or the 30 of you, whatever, the rest of the province don't understand it.

We're reading from a piece of paper as they are. If we're wrong, I'd love for you to tell the people – and I seriously say that in all honesty; I do. I think the public needs to know that because what we're calculating, we're coming up with – recently it was on Facebook. We saw this guy and he was doing his own personal situation. He comes up with about \$6,000 for his family.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Good source of information: Facebook.

**MR. PETTEN:** Yes, well these come from real people, Mr. Speaker. They are real people. They are not just in here living in a bubble; they are real people. They are out on the street; they are hard-working families.

You can go 15 per cent on your insurance, that's going to bring most people – I'll use my own home. That's \$1,000 extra out of my pocket and I'm not living in the lavish lifestyle. I have a few things around me. Add the levy on, add the gas on –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** All of a sudden you have \$5,000 or \$6,000; that's not hard to come by, Mr. Speaker – it is hard to come by, but it's not hard to add up to.

If you want to break that down and break it into real dollars that the general public understands, that's \$400 to \$500 a month. That's a car payment. That's light and heat for a lot of homes. That's a half a mortgage payment.

I'll refer back once again, how anyone could refer to those complaints and those concerns as nonsense, it appalls me. It does. Honest to God, it's terrible. I couldn't believe I was listening to it. I'll refer back to that every time because these people are not on the front of this building because they want to be. They are not all emailing me 11:30 in the night with tears – telling me they are crying as they are writing the email because they want to be.

I'll be honest, we can get in here and have our banter back and forth. When I respond to emails, I'm not into this partisan – I don't bash people; I just tell them my honest opinion. That is true and you're welcome to read my emails, Mr. Speaker.

Like I said, it bothers me to no end. When you get real people coming out and doing protests, they're crying out for help, and we're just being told (inaudible) this is the only solution.

I don't think it is the only solution. I think there were lots of other things we could have done. A levy to me, it's the better form of a head tax, a cover charge. It's temporary, but like we said earlier, income tax was brought in 100 years ago to be temporary, and as we know that's still here.

Another note on the budget, too, a lot of people feel like they've lost their hope, they've lost their way. As someone told me the other day, we did have a bit of a bounce in our step. We felt good as a people. We felt good where we were. They feel all that's gone.

I hear – it's really sad – people want to leave the province. They don't want to come home anymore. Being a Newfoundlander and

Labradorian, this is where everyone's heart is. No one wants to leave this place. It's in their blood. They go away and they always find their way back, and to hear people saying that on a regular basis, it is bothersome, Mr. Speaker. That does pull at my heart strings.

The only thing I'll say, based on the feedback I've gotten from my constituents, I understand Members opposite are in a difficult situation, I really do. The people who elected them – the people who elected all of us for that matter there in the district, they obviously – we live in different areas of the province, but I'm sure the same issues are in all the Member's districts. We all hear the same thing. They're going to be faced with a tough decision.

I understand party politics. I understand you toe the party line and you vote with government, and I get that. I understand it, but the type of anger I've heard on the streets over this time – we've had other budgets over the years where there has been some slash back, but there's a lot of anger. That's the only way to describe it. People have said it to me, there's fear and anger out on the street. As much as we were accused, we're not the ones who are conjuring this up. It's real, it's there and it's troubling.

Like I said, Members opposite, I respect the situation they're in and I know they are faced with tough decisions. They'll vote for the people who put them there. They will vote for your party. So that's a different situation. It's one they're going to have to answer to.

I know on this side of the House – I told someone the other day, actually I told my colleagues, if that was brought down by our government, that budget, I would be kicked out of my party because I would never have been able to vote for it. That's a very honest – and anyone can quote me. I can be quoted forever and a day. That's a true statement. I would sit as an Independent if it meant me having to vote for that budget.

To listen to what my constituents tell me, I couldn't do it in a clear conscience. Anyone can quote me. I don't know how long I'm going to be in this House. You can quote me and you can bring it up to me down the road if you want, but that's an honest statement, Mr. Speaker. I've

told my constituents that and I will state it here in this House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. PETTEN:** We hear lots of broken promises and stuff, but during the election I was going door to door and we knew –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** We knew the outcome was – the Liberals were doing well.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** I went door to door and people bought into this. They said they're going to diversify the economy; they're going to put the HST back. There are not going to be any layoffs in the public service.

Any given day when you go back and look at your Blackberry, you see tweets coming in from candidates and they were backing this up. Who am I to say they're wrong? I'm like, yes, very good. That's their platform, good on them. That was November 30 and here we are in April – five months, four months – not even five months and we know that wasn't as accurate as we had thought.

I'll say to the Members opposite, this is something they're going to have to face with their own constituents. I do sympathize with them. I really do and I honestly do. I can't stress that enough because it seems like everywhere you turn people that don't even talk politics want to get their two cents worth on the budget.

My neighbours across the way, we have a great relationship but we never talk politics. They couldn't wait to get to me to talk. They were like how do you do this? What do we do about this? There's a process. How does this vote work? I explained how it worked. Most of the time you go, it's not a free vote, you vote with your party and if you don't, there are consequences to pay.

It's only now – if you ever notice, you follow it around and there's a big movement out there in the social media world. People never really realized; they never paid attention to the process. It's interesting, I suppose, people have educated themselves. I've always followed politics, I always knew about the free vote, the party vote and the Whip vote, we'll call it. Now the general public has caught on – hold on a second, 40 MHAs vote for this budget, or 39 in case of tie or however that works. People don't get that. The public doesn't get that. Now they do. They're all of a sudden it's a revelation to them, which is kind of sad, but we all know everyone don't follow politics like we do.

It's a pretty interesting time we're living in now, Mr. Speaker, and it seems like you can never get away from the conversation of the budget. Members opposite, like I said, this is something they're going to have to focus on and make their own decisions, and I wish them well.

Mr. Speaker, in the remaining time I have left, I hear all the time – and I know I've spoken in Interim Supply – the waste of money and all that – well, fair enough. I think I said it then, and I'll say it again. I don't there is any government that is ever going to go in power that is not going to waste some money. There's not a household that doesn't waste some money.

You say \$25 billion. Ten of that \$25 billion were equalization payments we used to receive. We lost equalization, so really, in fact, there was \$15 billion, new dollars. That's never, ever put in there.

Just a few of the investments that are considered to be a waste of money: in infrastructure there was \$6.28 billion spent since 2003; \$1.5 billion in health care; \$560 million in transportation infrastructure; \$1.27 billion in municipal infrastructure; \$1.8 billion in roads and buildings; \$1.06 billion in education infrastructure.

There's nothing in that list, to me, that's a waste of money. Maybe it may be, but I don't see a waste of money there. Grenfell Arts and Science extension, \$27 million; College of the North Atlantic, Lab West campus, \$21 million, almost \$22 million; Labrador Straights Academy, \$15.6 million; Placentia lift bridge, \$52 million –

that's a waste of money. Does anyone see a waste of money yet? No.

Trans-Labrador Highway \$565.7 million – boy, another waste of money, I guess. Carbonear long-term care facility– \$108.2 million; Bonavista community care residence, \$2.6 million; Labrador West Health Centre, \$90 million.

Now we're into health care – Minister Haggie will appreciate this. Dialysis equipment, we doubled –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** Oh sorry, sorry, sorry.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I remind the hon. Member to refer to members by district or title.

**MR. PETTEN:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The number of dialysis sites in the Province has doubled since 20013; \$8.2 million in dialysis; \$10.5 million in MRI equipment; \$10.5 million in X-ray machinery; \$13.8 in mammography equipment; \$14.7 million in ultrasound equipment; \$20.8 million, CT scanners; four dedicated treatment centres, Mr. Speaker.

What else do we have here? The list is just too long. I'm skipping through it. I'm just only reading out the big stuff; water treatment facilities in Marystown and Corner Brook, \$65.6 million.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. PETTEN:** I'll give you a copy of that.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** Recreation facilities, \$26 million; Corner Brook city hall, \$23 million; Provincial Parks, \$10.7 million – I do enjoy reading this, Mr. Speaker – water bombers, \$150 million. Has anyone found a waste of money yet? I'm asking honestly, is there a waste of money?

Did you hear a waste of money?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No.

**MR. PETTEN:** No. We've got more yet.

The tax adjustments the Minister of Finance so politely told us that it was a waste, terrible, that put \$4.2 billion back into taxpayers' pockets, Mr. Speaker – \$4.2 billion. Over \$625 million was – when you do the scale for 11 years, it totals \$4.2 billion. That's back in your pocket.

Like I said, I can keep going through these lists. I enjoy going through them actually.

Like my colleague for Cape St. Francis mentioned, we eliminated standard school fees. That was a \$62 million cost; free textbooks, \$22 million; the Cultural Connections program, \$20 million; the Centre for Distance Learning, \$70 million; new schools, \$731 million, including infrastructure spending. Mr. Speaker, 15 new schools, 10 more schools being constructed or in planning, 31 major extensions and renovation projects have been completed, nine more renovation projects underway and 1,930 repairs and maintenance projects. I'm at a loss. Is there any frivolous spending here yet? I don't think.

What else do we have here? The Minister of Advanced Education and Skills – \$120 million to keep Corner Brook Pulp and Paper alive; investment in wait times, \$160 million; mental health and addictions initiatives, \$60 million; Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, \$1.6 billion since 2004. There's going to be less than that this year because of this budget. We have some cutbacks.

Oh, wait now, the Provincial Solid Waste Management Strategy, \$160 million.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It was all (inaudible).

**MR. PETTEN:** What? Oh wait now b'y, we have more. Watch this: From 2008 to 2015 the provincial government invested approximately \$800 million more in 1,200 water, waste water and recreation municipal infrastructure projects. It's incredible, Mr. Speaker.

I enjoy doing that. I can get up another time, probably, at another opportunity I get. I only have a portion of it read yet, so I'll share the rest with the House. I don't think you can say we

wasted any money there, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure they're going to –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** I'm sure they're going to try. I know they don't like to hear that because they like to tell the public how we wasted money. I think if you shared that around the public would probably say we could have probably spent a little bit less but when you look at it, no, we never wasted money. It wasn't frivolous spending. I don't think it was anything –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** It wasn't anything obscene, Mr. Speaker.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** Mr. Speaker, I'm coming to the end of what I have to say. The clock is getting close to five.

One thing I'd just like to close on saying here, Mr. Speaker, it pretty well sums up what I've said about the budget. People are concerned. The public are crying out for answers. They are looking to our new government to provide those answers, to show leadership, to explain the situation to them.

If we don't understand what's in the budget, well, I ask the government, in all due respect, to tell the public what's in the budget because what we're seeing – it's not what we're seeing. They're telling us, we don't see it. Tell us so we can tell our constituents what's not in the budget that we're missing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, given the hour of the day, I would move, seconded by the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, that the House do now adjourn.

Prior to doing that, if I could also, just for the attention of the House, the next committee of the Estimates will not be this Monday with the holiday. It will be actually Tuesday, April 26, at 9 a.m. It will be Education and Early Childhood Development.

Tuesday, April 26, at 6 p.m. will be the Estimates for the Government Services Committee for Service Newfoundland and Labrador and Government Purchasing Agency.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those against, ‘nay.’

This House now stands adjourned until tomorrow, Monday, at 1:30 – Tuesday, Monday being a holiday, at 1:30.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.