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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House resumed sitting at 7 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

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

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

In life, there is very little control. No matter how much we pay for that ultra-control hair gel, we have no control. The only control we really do have is how we respond to events in our lives. In the highlights of the Alberta budget, the government starts with, "Alberta cannot control the international price of oil, but we can shape our response to this market volatility."

Madam Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I know we've had a long day already but the Speaker is having trouble hearing the hon. Member. I ask Members for their co-operation for the next couple of hours.

Thank you.

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

Madam Speaker, that is what budgets are all about, an assessment, a response, and a whole lot of choices and then a plan. Hopefully, that is all based on a certain set of solid values. What you ultimately believe is the role of government and how best to fulfil the social contract government has with its people.

Now, since April 14 we have heard people all over our fine Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in surprise, disbelief and anger, bemoan the fact that this government has broken its social contract with the people. The Liberals made very clear promises to the people during election time, no job cuts, no HST raise and a promise of a plan for diversification, and the people believed them. Why wouldn't they? Why wouldn't they believe them?

The litany of promises was echoed throughout the province by the new Premier, by the current Cabinet Members and all the MHAs. Why wouldn't people believe them? Why wouldn't they?

Here we are 2½ weeks since government has delivered its budget, a document that reflects their assessments, their plan, and ultimately their values and how they see their social contract with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is full of job cuts, an HST raise and no plan for diversification.

Madam Speaker, we all know the dire fiscal situation the province faces right now with both a debt of almost \$15 billion and a current deficit of \$1.8 billion on a budget of \$8.4 billion. We all know. We've heard it time and time again. We knew the situation before the election, and this present government, through the Premier and the Minister of Finance, have been echoing it throughout the province. We've heard it time and time and time again.

We have a tough budget, they say, and these are tough times. It is unprecedented. We are so sad and so sorry to deliver this budget. We've heard it again and again and again. I believe these words are echoing off the walls and the ceiling of this Chamber.

The minister continued to tell us how she went through the process line by line to find savings. I was astounded, because, Madam Speaker, that is what accountants or comptrollers do. I would think the role of government is to see the big picture, to design a plan to strengthen our people and our economy, to design a plan so we are not so dependent solely on oil; therefore, making us less vulnerable to this market volatility and to invest in our greatest resource, our people. To invest by ensuring we provide the best opportunities, by providing the best possible education, preventative health care, and ongoing health care, ensuring that we have jobs for everyone, strengthening our infrastructure, and protecting the public services that families count on. We got the opposite.

Cuts of over \$200 million in infrastructure spending, closures of schools and chipping away at our education system with doubling up of grades and reducing teaching positions. Cutting

recreational grants to low-income families. Cutting public sector jobs and causing the loss of many other jobs as a consequence. Closing libraries – Madam Speaker, yes, closing libraries and chipping away at our public resources.

After weakening our social infrastructure, government employed their P3 strategy of picking people's pockets. The raise in HST, increase in numerous fees, plus an additional 50 new fees – new fees created. Not only the increase of existing fees, but actually introducing 50 new fees. Putting tax on household and vehicle insurance, increase our gas by 16.5 cents a litre – which really will amount to 18 cents once you add on the increase in HST. Cancellation of the Adult Dental Program and over-the-counter drug program. Closures of courts and other public service offices, and the resulting job losses in rural communities.

Then there is the levy. Government keeps bragging about all the public engagement and consultation it did with people across the province. That's very interesting to hear, Madam Speaker, how government speaks so highly of all that pre-budget consultation they did. It was the epitome of public engagement. Everybody had a chance to be heard, either face to face at a public meeting – public sector workers had a chance to have input into government, people could phone in their ideas, mail in their ideas, email in their ideas. So everyone was invited to give their ideas on how to get the debt and the deficit under control.

Although, all they asked people was, what would you cut? Not what is important, not what do we need to be able to move forward, and not what do we need to strengthen our people and our economy; but, after all this consultation, no matter how much I searched, I could not find anyone suggesting this regressive, inane, unfair, draconian levy. I did not see it in any of the documents. I did not see it online. I did not hear it in any of the meetings I attended. I don't know where it came from. After all that consultation and engagement, I don't know where it came from.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. I'm finding it very hard to hear myself with the Minister of Service NL, but thank you for the protection.

On what values did this government base their budget? Rather than strengthen our economy and our people, government has presented a budget with only a plan to squeeze the life out of people. So on what values did they really base this plan? Because this plan has to be based on some set of values, or maybe it's not. It's hard to tell.

These plans, these measures that government has undertaken actually impoverish our people. Those who benefited the least from our prosperity, in fact, bear a heavier burden in this budget. So on what values did they base this? This budget demands too much from those with little or those with nothing. They carry the biggest burden.

Now the minister may flail and rant about her Income Supplement, but we've already seen that it really doesn't help once you factor in the levy, the extra fees, the sales taxes, et cetera. It really doesn't cover – everybody, for the most part, are in a negative position.

What should government have done? Alberta – and we all know that Alberta is going through a hard time themselves, and not to the same degree as Newfoundland and Labrador, we know that – has lost 60,000 jobs, well-paying jobs, really good jobs in the oil industry. They've lost 60,000 jobs in a very short period of time and they have a \$10 billion deficit, but we know they also don't carry the same level of debt that we do in Newfoundland and Labrador. We know that. So it's not exactly comparing apples to apples, but let's take a look at what they've done in their approach to the economic and fiscal situation they are facing.

Premier Rachel Notley said, "We're going to protect our core public services, understanding the key role they play in supporting Albertans and building our future.

"We're going to invest in our economy, to create jobs and to diversify our economy.

“And we’re going to manage public finances prudently and responsibly – without panicked measures that just make things worse.”

That’s what we would all hope for. That’s what we would hope for our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are going to manage public finances prudently – without panicked measures that just make things worse.

They call their budget The Alberta Jobs Plan, and it has 4 key pillars: Supporting families and communities; Investing in infrastructure; Diversifying our energy industry and our energy markets; Supporting Alberta businesses.

So what could we have done? What could we have done in Newfoundland and Labrador? What should we have done? Well, we could do things a little differently and this is what we would have done a little bit differently, Madam Speaker. We would have built a budget based on values and principles. We absolutely wouldn’t put everything on the table because not everything should be on the table.

We would build a budget around clearly articulated values and we would articulate those values clearly to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Because promises have to be honoured. Because governments have social contracts with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This government had a social contract with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and they broke that social contract.

We would do what the NDP did in Alberta. We would invest in our people. We would invest in Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We would invest in jobs because we know that every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, every person in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador knows how tough the situation is right now and are willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work and help work us through this. We know that, because we are a resilient people. We are a people who have experienced hardship before. We are willing to do that.

We would replace bogus consultations with meaningful debate and give citizens the info they need to make informed input, not just three questions: What would you cut? That’s not

informed debate. That’s not how you build a resilient economy.

We’d analyze the overall impact of the budget on people. We would use a gender lens. Obviously, this government hasn’t used a gender lens when you look at the hardship that this budget places on many women and children in Newfoundland and Labrador. There was no gender lens process applied to this budget. We would have applied a disability lens. We would have applied a youth lens.

A number of Members said: How would you like it if we pass on a greater debt to our children? Well, what we’re passing on is a jobless society through the attrition plan, through the cutting of jobs. We’re saying to our young people there will be no jobs here for you. There will be no public sector jobs. There is no future here for you.

We would have applied a youth lens. We would have said what does this budget mean for youth in terms of education, in terms of opportunities, but also in terms of future jobs for them. That’s what we would have looked at, and we would have applied a seniors’ lens.

What does this budget mean for our seniors who are struggling with the high cost of housing? We don’t see any increases in rent supplements to accommodate the high cost of housing and the stagnant income that many of our seniors face. Particularly, we know we have the highest percentage of seniors on GIS and OAS; most of them widowed women who didn’t have paid work in the labour force.

So we would have applied all of those lens. We would have said what are the rollouts? What are the effects of this budget on women, on people with disabilities, on young people, on seniors? Really, what is the real rollout and how does this affect our people?

And, we would have scrapped the levy. Do you know what? We wouldn’t have scrapped the levy; we wouldn’t have come up with the levy. What a draconian tax measure. What an unfair tax measure that is.

We would have incorporated needed revenue into our personal income tax and corporate

income tax platform. We would have seen a 1.5 per cent increase in corporate income tax. Bring it back to what it really should be and on par with the rest of Atlantic Canada. That would not have placed a hardship on our corporations, 1.5 per cent. They know that other corporations, that other provinces have a higher tax. We wouldn't have had to scrap the levy; we wouldn't have put it in the first place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: Where that came from, it certainly didn't come from any public engagement and consultation.

We would replace the doubling of the gas tax, which has disproportionate impact on rural people and communities with a measured carbon tax based on polluter pays principle and following a thorough public debate on options. That's what we would have done, and that's what we need to do. We need to look at our conservation measures. We need to look at our environmental measures. We need to do that. It's time to step up.

The minister announced a \$570 million infrastructure but didn't announce the \$138 million that was cut in that infrastructure budget. We'd reinstate that and we'd focus on green technologies, because we know that green technologies are a growing area. We know that our people, people who worked in the oil industry have the skills, pipefitters, electricians, plumbers; they have the skills to work in the area of green technologies. We know it takes less money to create jobs in that area than it does in the oil industry. So we would focus on that.

We would absolutely insist in stepping up on a fair tax review. Because it's time for us to have a fair tax review and it's been put on the backburner for too long. Before imposing any extra taxes, we would do a whole systematic, process-oriented fair tax review of our taxation system for the province. And we would review Muskrat Falls. We wouldn't lock in the \$1.3 billion with no questions asked. For Nalcor to ask for \$1.3 billion, have the money sent to them with absolutely no questions asked, we would not do that.

We would keep it simple, with our few core values at hand to guide us, to be the guiding principles for any decisions and any plans that are made. We wouldn't do a bombardment of tax measures; we would seriously streamline the approach because people are confused, people are worried, people are afraid, people are despondent and people feel that there is no hope. The role of government is to give people hope. The role of government is to ensure that people can participate fully in the economy.

As Rachel Notley said, Alberta cannot control the international price of oil, Newfoundland and Labrador cannot control the international price of oil, but what we can control and what we can shape is our response to this market volatility.

Madam Speaker, this budget is about choices. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador, we've all heard from them. We've heard from them on open line shows. We've heard from them at demonstrations. We've heard from them in our offices. We've heard from them by email. We've heard from them by petitions, all of us in this House. Every one of us in this House has heard the people of Newfoundland and Labrador say we do not like this budget. This budget is not in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They know that.

This budget has not been based on a solid core of values in bringing our province forward. It's been an accounting exercise. It has no vision. It has no plan for diversification. It has no guts. It has no creativity.

This budget is about choices. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador implore this government to go back to the drawing board and develop a budget based on values of ensuring that every person has access to the opportunity to become a contributing member of our community.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we are a resilient people. Some of us can tighten our belts. For some of us there is room; some of us can do that. All of us, though, are willing to roll up our sleeves and get to work, if only we had leadership, vision, hope and boldness to lead us on.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's an honour and a privilege for me to be able to stand here in my place on behalf of my constituents and make some further comments towards the budget. I wanted to share with all Members of the House of Assembly and anyone who happens to be watching the broadcast tonight that we all had a proud moment here in the House of Assembly in 2014.

That was when all Members of the House of Assembly stood here united behind the full-day kindergarten initiative. At the time CBC reported that educators in the province were applauding the provincial government's decision to bring in full-day kindergarten in 2016. That would be this coming September.

Newfoundland and Labrador is the only Atlantic province that doesn't have full-day kindergarten, and it's estimated that no less than 80 per cent of five year olds in Canada have access to it. It went on to quote individuals from the Jimmy Pratt Foundation and the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation, philanthropic organizations that have been advocating for Newfoundland and Labrador to take some leadership and finally catch up with the rest of the country.

That was a proud moment we had here in the House of Assembly. And ever since then, and ever since we came back after Christmas it has all started to unravel, which I find to be highly interesting because it was the Members opposite, the Official Opposition, that proposed full-day kindergarten after much lobbying; and, in fact, during the provincial election campaign, the Third Party had campaign literature out there alleging that the Liberal Party was backing off full-day kindergarten. There was no word of truth to that. It's one of the things that we're following through on.

Now that we have both of the Opposition parties backing off that commitment, basically, as far as I'm concerned, betraying people who through that this was going to be a reality in September

and throwing it all under the bus for political reasons. We have people contacting me and other Members of the House of Assembly and government and asking why we would proceed with full-day kindergarten.

Well, as I said in this House of Assembly several years ago, why would we not, because we can't afford to, considering the return on investment. People have said to me: Where is the evidence? Well if you go on to Google, there are more than 20,000 research and academic articles with empirical evidence that largely support the introduction of this.

To give you just a few examples – and I don't have much time, so I'll try to do the best that I can. The research shows that full-day kindergarten is associated with improved literacy, improved numeracy, smoother transitions to grade one, and even it has been suggested increased post-secondary graduation rates, long after; helps to build a generation of learners who are self-motivated, more successful, healthier, happier children; builds better social regulation; helps them to regulate their behaviour, to focus their attention, to follow instructions, to co-operate with teachers and other children and remember the things they know they need to do; leads to better emotional self-regulation; helps children control aggression in social situations, what to be aware of and able to respond to the feelings of others, to have empathy for others.

All of these data were collected from classroom observations, from focus groups with children, from focus groups with teachers, from focus groups with parents, from report card information, from parent surveys and from achievement test scores. None of this is made up; it's all fact.

The research shows that children who participate in full-day kindergarten get a solid foundation for their future learning. You get a stronger start in school and on and on and on. More time with classmates during the day to help them to be able to socialize with other children, to develop the academic and social skills necessary for future success.

The trend has grown. The trend in implementing full-day kindergarten has resulted in both

societal changes and educational concerns; greater numbers of single parents and dual income families in the workforce – the very individuals and families that the Opposition claims that they're representing, when they're throwing full-day kindergarten under the bus.

Researchers have found that most teachers also prefer full-day kindergarten programs. Teachers in this province, hundreds of them, have participated in professional development and are basically at the moment, hundreds of them, participating in face-to-face training in the area of full-day kindergarten to bring them up to speed on what is required on a curriculum that has been around for years because the completely kindergarten curriculum is not new. And I hear Members saying things like the curriculum haven't been ironed out. Well, the curriculum was ironed out long ago.

There was \$30 million set aside two years ago for this initiative. Much of the planning for it was underway by the time the November 30 election rolled around. We felt a responsibility to implement the program for parents and for children, and we're not walking away from it. We're not walking away from it because we know there are positive academic and social benefits for children, especially children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, those children whose parents have low levels of literacy.

We've seen that children who attend full-day kindergarten scored higher on standardized tests. They had fewer grade retentions. They had fewer failures. They have scored higher on achievement tests than those even in the half-day programs on every single item tested. The children enrolled in all-day kindergarten programs had higher attendance rates. They went to school more frequently. Reading comprehension scores were somewhat higher in later grades. Mathematic scores were significantly higher in later grades.

Teachers reported significantly greater progress for full-day kindergarten in literacy, in math, in general learning skills. There are social and behavioural effects of full-day kindergarten that demonstrate the return on investment in our children is worth it.

If you look at the research, we know that 85 per cent of brain development has happened by the time children are hitting school at the age of five. We are trying to catch up with the rest of the country. Many provinces in Canada not only have full-day kindergarten for five year olds, they have full-day kindergarten for four year olds. And we're far away from that. We have an opportunity to move our children ahead, to improve their achievement scores in school, and the Opposition should not be turning their back on those children now.

There is strong support for the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten in terms of children's classroom behaviour. One landmark study looked at the relationship between the kindergarten schedule and children's classroom behaviour. The children in full-day kindergarten demonstrated more originality, more independent learning, more involvement in classroom activities, more productivity with peers, more intellectual independence, less failure, less anxiety, more reflectiveness, less holding back, less withdrawn, more approach to teachers, more initiative.

No dimension of children's classroom behaviour was more positive in the half-day program than it was in the full-day program in many of these studies. When you compare the half-day kindergarten program to the full-day program, the evidence is clear. The evidence on socialization is clear. Full-day kindergarten programs encourage children to have more peer-to-peer, child-to-child interactions that are more positive. And God knows what we've seen the last few weeks; we need more positive interactions between people in our society.

Significantly greater progress in learning social skills that children need; improved attitudes towards education; and beyond academic achievement, other aspects of children's, teachers', families' and parent's lives are all affected by full-day kindergarten.

Parents of children in full-day kindergarten were satisfied with the programs, on the whole. They believe that their children were better prepared for the first grade, and by and large all the research shows that after a full day of kindergarten children are better prepared for the first grade.

Parents reported that all-day kindergarten teachers gave more suggestions for home activities. And we're not talking homework; we're talking play-based learning at home. Parents also felt that their children benefited socially from full-day kindergarten.

Parents reported a preference for it, citing advantages such as a more relaxed atmosphere. We have a tremendous issue with anxiety amongst children in schools today, and there is evidence to suggest that this would help to ameliorate that. So why would we throw full-day kindergarten under a bus now when we have an opportunity to invest in children who have special needs or might develop anxiety issues later?

More opportunities for children to choose activities and develop their own interest; more time for creative activities, et cetera, et cetera; teacher attitudes, parent attitudes, curriculum outcomes, on and on and on. I could go on, but these are the facts and I encourage Members of the Opposition to remember the facts because it wasn't very long ago that we were having an election campaign and they were all committed to it as well. Let's all keep our eye on the ball.

Another thing I just want to say, because I'm running out of time, I observed the Opposition critic, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, telling me about their new-found appreciation for maintaining teacher units and more teachers at schools and so on. I will just correct one thing he said in Question Period, or in response to a Ministerial Statement today, it says no investment in inclusion in this budget – absolutely false.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. KIRBY: He said no investment in inclusion in this budget – absolutely false. In the Department of Education alone –

AN HON. MEMBER: Get him to stand up (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: – he should stand up and basically withdraw that statement – there are 27 new positions for special education teachers in this budget, and 115 additional student assistant hours every day for children; millions of dollars

of investment in inclusive education practices in schools in this budget. So that's completely wrong.

He also remembers what happened here just a short time ago. *Budget 2013*, does anybody remember that? That was a budget where they threw the four school districts together – remember that – without any consultation with anybody, other than a handful of people. Amalgamated the school districts with no consultation; increases in fees; increases in tobacco; increases to admission to historic sites, the soothsayers of our culture, our history and our language; increases to fees for ferries; and the 10 per cent reduction in registration for vehicles that you got by going online to do it was removed.

So the Official Opposition are certainly no strangers to fee increases either. Then cuts to positions: 485 jobs cut from the core public service.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. KIRBY: Four hundred and eighty-five jobs cut from the core public service; another 450 positions going from health care, from school boards, from the College of the North Atlantic; about 142 positions removed from education; 142 teacher positions eliminated in that budget, plus –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: – 18 additional positions were lost due to declining enrolment.

This year, we kept 27 positions that would have been lost due to declining enrolment and we're keeping them for inclusive education. They did not keep those positions. So a total of 160 teacher positions were cut in the 2013 budget.

Now, the great soothsayers of our education system, fast forward to *Budget 2015*, a further 77.5 positions cut. So between two budgets, this previous administration managed to cut no less than 238 teacher positions from the system – almost 240 teacher units cut by the previous administration over the course of two budgets.

The net reduction in this budget is 73. And I will never stand here in the House of Assembly and pretend that's a good thing, like the previous administration did when they were cutting 238 positions from our schools. Absolutely, stood here and said that it would not cause any hardship whatsoever. It was a great thing. Well, I don't think reducing any is a great thing, but we're in a difficult position as a result of the complete and utter mess that we find ourselves in today.

Back to the 2103 budget, another 250 vacant positions were also eliminated. That gets underreported as well. So well, well, well over 1,000 positions, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of positions reduced. And in recent days, we've also heard their new-found interest in literacy. They had none in it when they were on this side of the House of Assembly. Now they are on that side of the House of Assembly, it's a big-ticket item for them.

After failing to invest in libraries when they were there, they basically oversaw the reduction, reduction and reduction in funding for public libraries. They can deny it if they want. We ended up in a situation where we had twice as many libraries as comparable jurisdictions in Canada did, with 50 per cent less funding. And in that 2013 budget there was \$1.3 million cut from public library funding –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. KIRBY: There was \$1.3 million cut by the previous administration, the Progressive Conservatives, in 2013 from the provincial library budget. They also cut a great many different teaching positions in that same budget, and it's something that ought to be remembered because it's not a road that we choose to go down. There were positions cut for specialist teachers of all matters. They cut administrative positions –

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. KIRBY: They cut administrative positions; they cut specialist positions –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the minister to direct his comments to the Speaker.

MR. KIRBY: Sorry, I thought I was talking to the Minister of Service NL for a second there. I got carried away.

In any case, the case I'm trying to make here is that there were a great many positions cut, previously, from literacy. There were library positions cut. There were public librarian positions cut, as well, in the midst of all of that.

It's being thrown back at us in the face of this exceptionally embarrassing and low literacy rate that we have amongst the adult population in this province. It does concern every Member of the House of Assembly, but what did the previous administration do? T

They cut Adult Basic Education from the College of the North Atlantic – they removed that all together. They cut specialist learning resource teachers in the schools, in addition to cutting the public library funding. They backtracked on their promise to increase access to the Comprehensive Arts and Science Transition program at College of the North Atlantic. Most importantly, I think we want to remember that the long-standing promise to introduce a strategic adult literacy plan, which the previous administration committed to way back in 2007, was never honoured. In the beep, beep, beep budget of 2014, the one where the government tried to back up on everything it had done, they recommitted to it.

I just want to close off again on the full-day kindergarten because I think there is an onus on all Members of the House of Assembly to get behind this initiative.

Almost 50 years ago, Dr. Phil Warren carried out the Royal Commission on Education and Youth in the late 1960s. One of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission on Education and Youth was the introduction of a kindergarten program in this province – 50 years ago. We're trying to get caught up with 50 years of educational change in North America.

We need to do better for early years education. This is not glorified babysitting at any far stretch of your imagination. This is probably one of the

most valuable investments in this budget, because when we invest in those tiniest of our children, our students in our schools, we're putting them on the right path for their lives. All of the research demonstrates that is true, is a fact and there is no exaggeration at all.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the Member his time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

It's certainly a privilege for me to rise in this hon. House. I've enjoyed listening to the speeches of my colleagues tonight, particularly the Member for St. John's South. I found her discussion – St. John's Centre – in the debate very interesting and informative, Madam Speaker.

I have to say, listening to some of the other speeches proves to be still very frustrating. I just listened to the Minister of Education for 20 minutes and as I was listening I was boggled at how many times he contradicted himself. On one hand he was saying you guys did nothing, on the next hand he said you guys are no strangers to fee increases.

I'd like to bring his memory back to the time – yes, in 2013. We do very much remember that budget and it was nothing like the budget we are experiencing here in Newfoundland and Labrador today. What did we hear from Members opposite at that time? I think the Member opposite was an NDPer at the time. We had screams coming across the floor –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: – at the House to us, Madam Speaker, because they were saying: Oh, my goodness, how can you cut this, how can you cut that? Yet, today their spin-doctors try to portray it as a spending problem or that it was brought on by our administration. So, so frustrating, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: If only in 2013, when we tried to make the corrections that were required, we had received support perhaps then we wouldn't be in this predicament today. It is a challenge, I'd say to that. I could go for hours.

I'm going to move back into things I was planning on discussing but before I do, the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue also talked about spend, spend, spend in his speech and talked about \$25 billion. I'm going to say every single day that we came into the House, Madam Speaker, when we were in government they wanted more, more, more. In fact, they demanded more, stomped their feet. Smoke came out of their ears sometimes.

Whatever program or initiative we undertook it was never, never enough; yet, here in the House today they pontificate, oh boy, you should have put the brakes on. It's a very interesting place to be here in the House of Assembly. I'm sure if we can – to prove my case I guess, just take a look at the petitions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. PERRY: Madam Speaker, I'm going to ask for your protection. I'm getting a lot of heckling from across the way.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: Check the petitions when the Liberals were in Opposition. How many times did they present a petition to decrease spending? Not once, never seen it, Madam Speaker, not once in this House.

Actually, I arrived late back to the House today because I stayed in my district yesterday for three very important events that took place. I

could not help, as I attended the first one, thinking, my gosh, how many of our community organizations and how many individuals will suffer over the course of the next year because of the fact we have less money in our pockets to donate to those in need and to charities.

The first event I attended was for a local person who requires medical treatment that he can't avail of in Canada and is doing some fundraising to go to the States for stem cell treatment. Everybody came out to participate. This time next year, though, I fear we're not going to have that extra \$5 or that extra \$10 in our pocket. The tax man is going to have it and we're not going to be seeing the benefits of it, Madam Speaker.

The next event I went to yesterday afternoon was a protest in Harbour Breton. I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, it was one of the largest protests I've ever attended in my region. A very peaceful demonstration but people are very, very upset. We had devastating news in my rural area last week. Madam Speaker, mine is not a rural area on the decline; mine is a rural area that is growing.

We have seen over 1,000 new jobs created because of the leadership and diversification efforts of the Progressive Conservative government over the last 10 years; 1,000 new jobs in an area the size of the Connaigre Peninsula on the Coast of Bays, Bay d'Espoir area is quite phenomenal. In direct and indirect because it's not just the direct jobs on the farm sites. It's the people working in the gas stations. It's the restaurants which are booming. It's the hotels which are increasing. It is the convenience stores, Madam Speaker. Everyone is seeing a difference and an improvement in the way of life because of the investments in diversification that have taken place. Along with those investments and diversification, our government improved the social well-being of the area.

I say to Members opposite, I certainly do not consider paving the Bay d'Espoir Highway a waste of money. I consider that a strong investment in the future. We now have over \$200 million worth of product coming up over that road, Madam Speaker, and that volume and size of that industry is going to continue to grow

in the years to come. So it's certainly not a waste of money.

Is providing health care to seniors who are over two hours away from a regional hub a waste of money? Absolutely not! Was establishing dialysis in a rural, remote area so people could continue to reside at home a waste of money? Absolutely not!

People are so very upset. We lost in our district dialysis. We're closing down a clinic in a community the size of Hermitage. Now, Madam Speaker, to put that in perspective, our roads in Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune are not like the TCH. They are RLU 80 standard, alder growth very close to the sides of the roads, narrow roads, very small shoulders and a high increase in the volume of tractor-trailer traffic. Now we're shutting down a clinic. We're telling people that they have to – so you're in McCallum, you're not feeling well, you have to catch a ferry, an hour and a half ride to Hermitage before you can get off the ferry. And guess what? When you get in Hermitage, there is no taxi service.

If you don't have a friend to call or a buddy to rely upon, I don't even know how you're getting to Harbour Breton to get to the doctor. Right now, the situation we're facing with the closure of the Hermitage clinic is 600 people from surrounding areas like Gaultois and McCallum, Hermitage, Seal Cove, Sandyville will now have to travel 45 minutes, on a good day – that's when there's no fog which is very, very common down there, Madam Speaker.

We can go 40, 50 days straight in the summertime and you can't see two feet in front of you. In the wintertime, there is no snow clearing after 5 o'clock. These people will be forced to somehow find a way to Hermitage – and I don't know how. A lot of them are seniors on fixed incomes. Find a way from Hermitage to Harbour Breton to see a doctor. At the same time in Harbour Breton they're losing two nurses, and they're expected to handle 600 to 800 – the volume is going to increase by 600 to 800.

The locals yesterday were telling me, who live in Harbour Breton, we call now and we can't get in to see the doctor for two or three weeks, so

what's going to happen when everybody from Hermitage and Gaultois and Rencontre and everyone is coming? Rencontre East, Madam Speaker, they have to catch the ferry to Pool's Cove and get a ride to Harbour Breton. I really don't know how it's going to happen.

These decisions really need to be revisited. And part of what my people said yesterday when they got together in the protest is we're going to continue to fight this. This just doesn't make any sense. You're tearing the guts, as I said last time I spoke, out of rural Newfoundland and Labrador. The things that matter most are health care and education. If we want to have a decent quality of life in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, education and health care are fundamental, which leads me to the closures of libraries.

Four libraries in my district and 22 communities. I asked a question last week and I think the Minister of Business responded: No libraries going to be cut if it's within 30 minutes. Well, Madam Speaker, the library in St. Alban's, which has the largest usage out of all four in the entire region, 4,300 people in statistics – the highest stats in the entire region – the doors are being shut. Guess how long it takes us to get to the next closest library? It is 102 kilometres, one hour and 15 minutes later. You tell me how a single mother is going to get her preschooler to a library program in Harbour Breton on a daily basis, or once a week. It's not going to happen, Madam Speaker, and these decisions really need to be reversed.

If you're serious that you're having regional clusters, then understand your regions. In the Coast of Bays, the distance between Harbour Breton and Bay d'Espoir is 102 kilometres. If you're having something within a half an hour, we need to see some restoration of these services.

In Hermitage, Madam Speaker, you took their clinic and you took their library. Again, I said where else do the children have to go in communities like Gaultois and Hermitage other than the library? I, myself, will say I still remember my very first librarian. When I see the lady who was our librarian when I was a little girl, because the library was my favourite place

and, you know, my nieces and my great-nieces I have today, it's their favourite place.

You can look on Facebook at any given day and you see all the little kids who are all excited, and their moms are taking pictures of them because they are on their way to story time at the library, Madam Speaker. It is a part of our social hub, a part of our vibrancy.

The minister got up and talked about how important all-day kindergarten was. Well, I would like to think he feels those same sentiments for the importance of preschool education which he has now effectively torn away from the young ones in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker. It is something that I strongly implore they take a second look at because it is absolutely devastating to rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Then, of course, I finished my day yesterday with the telethon. All of the fire departments in my region have telethons. It's very important to their continued ongoing operations. I say where are we going to find the donations to keep these community groups going when out of our pockets is anywhere from – depending on what amount of money you make – \$500 to \$5,000 additional taxes you're going to be paying this year? It is certainly a devastating time for the people of this province.

It's very disheartening, Madam Speaker. I'm not going to have nowhere near enough time to discuss things I wanted to talk about again today. But I had someone say to me yesterday, so what is it they want anyway? If we don't live in a mansion, we're not good enough. Do they think we all have to drive around in Cadillacs? Because let me tell you, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador we don't want the hospital with all the PET scanners and all the fancy gadgets. We want to be able to go see a doctor, get stabilized, have our life saved if we're having a heart attack, get a diagnosis, be able to get a prescription for flu, be able to get our blood thinners, be able to get our blood work done. We're not asking for Cadillacs in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

We're asking for basic services to get us to the next regional centre of excellence, Madam

Speaker. Those basic services are being stripped away so that we can all be sent to a Cadillac in Gander or Grand Falls. Not good enough, Madam Speaker, for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Our people definitely deserve better and we at least, at the very least, deserve basic health care, and that is being quickly eroded under the new Liberal government.

I want to talk about the Williams government for a while. I want to bring us back in time. We have all this anger and your spin doctors of the government are trying to say this was all his fault. We never felt so good, as a people. I would venture to say even you guys as Members opposite, as Liberals, felt a pride of place in who you were. You felt good about the potential of this province and that confidence we had in ourselves. You were able to walk around and hold your head up high because you knew your leader had confidence in you and you had confidence in yourself.

All that's gone today. In a few short months, since the Liberals have taken government, people are walking around depressed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: What a change in our psyche as a people, Madam Speaker.

People say that money was wasted. Like Members opposite, in one hand the Minister of Education said money was wasted and in the next hand, he praised up some initiatives. Like I said, I'm constantly scratching my head because they're speaking out of both sides of their mouth all the time and it's really hard to follow.

Class sizes, Madam Speaker, under our administration were capped. Surgery wait times were shortened. More medications were covered for more people. Dialysis was provided closer to home. Tuition fees were frozen. Child poverty was reduced from Canada's highest to Canada's lowest. Those are the types of things that the Liberals are calling a waste of money. Things like pavement to the Coast of Bays region that they got up and screamed for in the House of Assembly when they were Opposition, they're

now standing up and saying what a waste of money. What did you spend that for?

Well, I can certainly tell you I will stand up in this House every day and advocate for my region. We want our libraries back, Madam Speaker. We want our clinic back in Hermitage. We want to see dialysis restored. In time, with the right government, we're going to see that kind of growth happen again. I pray it's not too long away and that we can survive the tenure that we're currently experiencing.

There are those who talk about a heritage fund, and looking at Norway as an example. That's a bit ironic because we're doing what Norway did. If you look at Norway and the whole history of it, they had been a poor region of Scandinavia when they struck oil several decades ago. They chose to invest first in infrastructure and services to raise their standard of living. Then, 25 years later, they started saving a heritage fund. Madam Speaker, we had 10 years of trying to rebuild our infrastructure, some of which is not done.

I'll mention the Corner Brook hospital. Some infrastructure pieces still need to be done, and I truly hope the Liberals honour that commitment. You have to acknowledge infrastructure needs are very real. You can't just suddenly stop spending on infrastructure. I would challenge that a budget like we have this year, which increases taxes, freezes your economy in a time when we should be trying to create more jobs and probably investing more in infrastructure to do some stimulation, like your federal cousins in Ottawa are doing, Madam Speaker.

History will show that because of the investments our government has made over the past decade and a half, we are a stronger people. Our people are better cared for, and our children are better educated than they were before.

When the world went into a recession in 2009, we weathered that storm by staying on course. The Governor of the Bank of Canada at the time, Mark Carney, even praised our province as the example that other provinces should follow. We emerged from the recession strong and growing while other provinces struggled. That happened, Madam Speaker, because of the leadership and the vision of our government. I fear the results

of this budget will be vastly different and tragically so.

Our plan was not about spending recklessly. It was about restraint, but not reckless restraint. As I said when I started out, every time we did try to exercise some restraint, like the HST, the outcry was unbelievable. Now look where we are.

We were focused, strategic and progressive. There was a credible fiscal and economic plan, and after it was delivered in April 2015 there was no public outrage or panic. There was from Members opposite, but nothing like we're seeing today from the public at large.

This is really hitting people in their pocketbooks. This has people unable to sleep at night. This is going to have a devastating impact – I would venture to say – on our mental health and well-being. It's something we're going to need very closely monitored because I'm seeing it already and only two weeks have passed. Wait until that money actually is out of their homes. Then they're really going to feel it. Then it's not going to be worry, then it's going to be starvation.

Our economy did not go into a freefall last year. Confidence remained consistently high. The bond-rating agencies accepted our plan and took no action to downgrade our credit rating, even as oil prices continued to fall. Our government was facing the challenge head on and dealing with it responsibly. We took the middle path between doing too little to make a difference and doing so much that it would crush people in our economy, which is where I believe we are today.

We warned that doing nothing was not an option and we also warned that cutting deep would do more harm than good. We said that reckless cutting could actually cost the province tens of thousands of jobs. That is why we chose to take the middle path to avoid the consequences of that.

The Liberal Party, on the other hand, took the opposite approach, even though everyone could see oil prices were continuing to decline and every party knew the impact. They rolled out a very costly plan anyway. They promised to reverse tax increases. While we were reducing

positions through attrition, they promised to protect positions saying jobs are safe. They promised to spend enormous amounts of money immediately on major new projects across the province. They said they had a new LEAP economic plan to pay for all of this.

The Telegram and others at the time called their plan magic and fantasy, but people were willing to give the Liberals a chance to deliver and are now very, very disheartened and scared because they've done so. Hindsight is 20/20, Madam Speaker. Instead of delivering on what they promised, the Liberals have delivered exactly the opposite. They did not reverse tax increases but went much, much further in raising taxes and fees. They created new taxes which we're all still in complete shock about yet.

They did not protect jobs but announced layoffs and closures. They did not deliver a credible long-term plan. As a consequence, the three bond-rating agencies stepped in and downgraded the province in January of this year citing lack of a plan as one of the factors, Madam Speaker. That downgrade has raised the cost of borrowing which means more of the money we take in as revenue has to go towards paying on the interest on what the province is borrowing.

The Liberals haven't even finished rolling out their cuts. More are planned in the fall and 2017.

I haven't said half of what I wanted to discuss here tonight, but I'm telling you the people of this province have spoken loudly. I think we all have a responsibility to listen to them. You guys, as a Liberal caucus, do have the ability to negotiate with your executive. I call upon you, please, do what you can to make this budget different and better.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon Member her time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. B. DAVIS: Madam Speaker, I'm excited to stand here today. First of all, I'd like to say to the hon. Member across the way, the truth will set you free, my dear. The truth will set you free.

I've had a difficult time standing here today because of the situation we've been dealt. I could blame the previous administration and spend a significant amount of time addressing their poor decisions. I feel for each and every person, not only in my district, but the entire province that is affected by the difficult choices we had to make with this budget as a result of the financial mess the province has had to endure through the total mismanagement, Madam Speaker, by the previous administration.

No one in this House is excited about this budget. I know I'm not. I don't agree with all aspects of the budget. We have to take decisive action to stabilize the future so that our children and grandchildren will not be burdened by the debt incurred by the previous administration's recklessness.

We could not continue to move in the direction of the previous administration. That approach was unsustainable. We have all been receiving calls and emails, and I am endeavouring to reach back to everyone in my district. I have listened to your concerns and ideas. I've heard these concerns expressed with respect to the temporary levy and the fairness associated with this initiative. No one loves the situation we are in.

I brought these concerns forward to our caucus and ensure that the residents who contacted me have their voices heard. The levy is a temporary measure designed to help us clean the financial disaster that the previous government wilfully pursued. In fact, it is interesting to note, only 38 per cent of the taxpayers will not pay the temporary levy, as well as 42.8 per cent of those remaining will pay less than \$340 on this temporary levy.

I, like everyone else in this House, am not excited that we are instituting a temporary levy but I will continue to work to remove it as quickly as we possibly can. I understand my constituent's concerns. I, too, am concerned that people will be affected; however, we have worked very, very hard on this side of the House

to provide the support to the most vulnerable in our community. These individuals need our support.

A resident called me last week. He earns a total of \$12,000 a year on Income Support. He was very nervous about the changes we announced in our budget. Madam Speaker, I explained to him how the budget would affect him personally. There will be no personal income tax. He would have to pay no temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. Our government will not ask the most vulnerable in our society to pay for the mess of the previous administration.

Depending on his personal consumption, and that varies from person to person, the increases in HST and gas tax would equate to approximately \$200 a year. However, with the introduction of the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, he will be receiving \$210 in October and then two payments of \$105; one in January and one in April 2017. As well, he will be eligible for an additional fuel allowance of \$250. He would actually have \$230 more than he did last year at that time. Although it is not much of an increase he was pleased, and I am pleased that others in the situation will be better off.

Madam Speaker, as well, a senior couple, one 68 years old and the other 70 years old, gave me a call a couple of days ago. They wanted to know what they would receive from the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and the enhanced Seniors' Benefit. Between them they earn \$26,000 a year which would leave them about \$13,000 in taxable income each. They will not pay the income tax; they will not be charged the temporary levy. Again, depending on their consumption for HST and gas tax, it would equate to about \$450.

Because of this change in benefits, this couple receives \$710 in a newly created Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and they will also receive an enhanced Seniors' Benefit of \$1,313. This is up from the previous \$1,000 approximately. They were surprised they had received these increases in amounts of money. This is much different than what they were expecting, considering the information Opposition Parties have been communicating.

Madam Speaker, in October of this year, this couple will receive a double payment of \$1,011.50 with an additional payment of \$505.75 in both January 2017 and April 2017. Our government provided these additional supports to soften any impact that the most vulnerable seniors and low-income families would face. Just to be clear for the Members on the opposite side of the House, this senior couple that called me a couple of days ago will actually be \$310 better off than they were in the last budget. That, to me, is a win. In the financial situation we're in, that's a win.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. B. DAVIS: You had your time to speak.

They were both relieved and pleased to hear this. They also mentioned that they would tell their friends as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. B. DAVIS: Thank you for the protection, Madam Speaker.

This government is committed to ensuring that the brunt of the measures taken in this budget does not fall to the most vulnerable in our province, as the Opposition continues to forecast. That is why, in this budget, our government has put forward a series of measures designed to bolster supports and resources for both seniors and vulnerable members of our population. We have announced \$3.5 million in support for placement for select individuals with enhanced-care needs for personal care homes.

Madam Speaker, we invested \$250,000 in a new seniors' advocate office, with an annual budget of \$500,000 beginning in 2017-2018. Despite the fact the hon. Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune sees this office as a luxury, on this side of the House we do not agree. I believe this is a great investment to help seniors in our communities. A seniors' advocate will help identify ways to better assist seniors as we face the reality of providing care and services to an aging population.

We are providing \$300,000 to the Seniors Resource Centre to enhance its information and referral system; \$300,000 for age-friendly transportation services; a new director of adult protection to reduce risks for adults; \$100,000 to support continued development of age-friendly communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. These measures will go some way towards ensuring that the seniors are protected during this tough economic climate.

Is it enough? Absolutely not. We must do more to ensure seniors, who have given so much to our communities, receive their much-needed support. One of the policies I'm most excited about is our home first policy. This encourages support to let seniors age at home where they are more comfortable, both physically and emotionally, but it's also an opportunity to ensure people are receiving the best possible care where and when they need it.

Another measure that will work specifically to protect seniors in this tough economic climate is the enhanced Seniors' Benefit I mentioned earlier. This is a \$12.7 million investment by our government to ensure seniors get a steady, reliable income that will help them continue to contribute to society.

We must also protect the low-income earners and families who struggle to make ends meet. That is why we have created the NL Income Supplement. We have an obligation to put in place revenue measures to address the deficit, but we also have to ensure the most vulnerable in our society receive the help they need.

The NLIS will come into effect on July 1, around the same time as the revenue measures outlined in the budget will come into effect. As mentioned earlier, the first quarterly payment will be disbursed in October and it will be a double payment. This supplement will be automatically applied to individuals whose income is below the threshold of \$40,000. The only requirement is that you have filed your income tax return. This greatly reduces the stress of having to navigate through additional layers of red tape.

Madam Speaker, there has been much misinformation spread around this budget. Take for instance the adult dental plan. This plan is

very much comparable to plans in other provinces. The plan was, and still is, available to those individuals eligible under the Foundation Plan. In addition, those individuals that are currently working through the system prior to April 14, just so everyone understands – they will be covered. It is a manual system. It takes time to go through. We are working through this process.

Madam Speaker, two key features of our plan to stabilize the economy are economic diversification, which my colleagues across the way continue to talk about, and selling government lands to raise revenues. We have huge parcels of lands that are Crown of course, standing vacant and unused. This land can be put into work for the economic betterment of the individuals and communities across our province.

There are significant opportunities out there right now for diversification of our economy. Divesting these lands for the betterment of the public, whether it be schools that are no longer being used or agricultural spaces, it takes time and we're going to move on it as quick as we possibly can, but it has to be done right. That is why the hon. Minister of Transportation and Works is developing a real estate optimization plan which will determine which parcels of land and buildings are the best assets for the government to sell. This plan, if done correctly, will be done for the long-term viability for the province.

Already, within my district I've had entrepreneurs looking at purchasing land and assets to develop farming operations in Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, which will bring much-needed revenues to the province, as well as employment opportunities.

Increasing the number of farming operations in our province makes good sense for a number of reasons; obviously, it helps diversify and strengthen the economy, but also helps shore up some food security issues that we face living on an island.

Madam Speaker, I'm confident that we can facilitate some innovative, excellent projects in my district in the near future, and I'm very excited about this prospect.

The Minister of Finance announced a few weeks ago that our government is committed to maintaining core funding for community groups in this budget; this equates to \$70 million. Community groups are vital to our province's health and well-being. The community sector makes an immense contribution to our society. Our government recognizes this and provides support.

Community groups work in tandem with government to effectively and efficiently provide services for our communities. These are groups that can help people on the front lines in ways government organizations simply can't. As a former executive director of a not for profit, I can attest to the outstanding impact these groups can make.

Community groups need dependable sources of funding, and this is exactly what our government is committing to do. Providing dependable sources of funding to community group means that they are able to develop long-term strategies and goals for helping communities, rather than spending more of their time and energies identifying additional operating sources of funding. I encourage not for profits to keep up the great advocacy work in our community that makes the lives of our families each and every day much better.

The Minister of Finance so eloquently mentioned the importance of continuing to find efficiencies within the operations of these organizations and groups so that they can maximize the impact they have on the communities. I believe that these groups will be creative and open to working with us to find those efficiencies and to provide that first-class service that they're known to do. We need to ensure that the money is delivered as quickly and as efficiently as possible to those groups so that they can continue the excellent work they produce to the citizens of our province.

Madam Speaker, I would like to speak for a second about Virginia Park Elementary. The government has issued a public tender, as we all know, for construction on the site on March 31 of this year and the project is progressing nicely. We have held a meeting of the stakeholders for the project and it was extremely positive. We'll be processing the organizations; we'll be doing

another stakeholder meeting as soon as we get the information on the successful bidder, when that is announced. That will come in the next few weeks I'm sure.

The residents of Virginia Park have been waiting for a new elementary school since 2009. The location of the school and site is the former dump on the old Fort Pepperrell army base which was in operation from 1940 to 1961. The decision to put the school here was made by the previous administration who consistently decided to ignore stakeholders in keeping them in the dark about when and how the project will be completed.

Madam Speaker, our administration is open and transparent, and committed to engaging stakeholders at every step in this process. I'm working closely with the Department of Transportation and Works, the Department of Education, the Department of Environment and Conservation as well as the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the school council from Virginia Park Elementary to ensure that Virginia Park Elementary gets completed as quickly and as safely as possible.

Keeping the children of Virginia Park Elementary safe and healthy is my number one priority. The new school will be a positive impact to school-aged children in the community for years to come and it will benefit the entire community. We want the high-quality facility to match the high quality of teaching by the wonderful faculty and staff, but it must be safe for all. I'm excited to see the continual progress on this project and I look forward to being able to cut the ribbon on this new building in September 2017.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to the long-term health and sustainability of the residents in our province. We have invested in infrastructure to allow us to finally fill vital gaps in our province's health care system. This includes investing \$8.5 million in support for continued planning and design for the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital and \$2.6 million for the completion of a PET scanner at the Health Sciences complex expected to be completed this year. Having the PET scanner as part of our medical infrastructure will greatly benefit the long term since we will have no

longer to wait for transportation of isotopes out of province. Wait times for our patients will get shorter.

Madam Speaker, \$2 million in new funding for the plan for long-term care in both Central and Western regions and \$2.5 million for support in further planning the design for the facility to replace the Waterford, this investment will ensure that we can continue to deliver high-quality health care to residents in our province.

Government has heard loud and clear about the challenges people living with mental health and addictions face. The All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions has also had the privilege of hearing from many people with lived experience, their loved ones, passionate advocacy groups, front-line health care providers and administrators from the Waterford. I visited the Waterford Hospital a couple of months ago and the need for replacement was never more clear to me then.

We have listened and we have seen the need ourselves. Despite the harsh financial situation we inherited, we have provided \$2.5 million to move forward on the planning for the replacement of the Waterford. *Budget 2016* recognizes the importance of ensuring proper infrastructure and supports are in place to provide people with high-quality treatment and care they deserve.

Mental health and addictions were a key priority for our Liberal platform. Replacement of the Waterford Hospital represents an important piece of infrastructure and an important way forward for those who require mental health services and treatment within our province. Individuals with mental health and addiction issues who require hospitalization cannot wait, despite the current fiscal challenges. We stepped up to the plate and found the resources needed to support this project. Is it enough? No, but it's a start in the right direction.

While physical infrastructure in the Waterford Hospital is in need of replacement, patients will continue to receive high-quality care from dedicated and highly trained professionals at the current facility. We will work to continue to address the health and safety concerns at the Waterford as they arise – no different than we do

in any of our other facilities – to ensure the ability to deliver high-quality care is not comprised.

Madam Speaker, as my time comes to an end, I would like to continue to explore innovative ideas and solutions to meet the needs of the people living with mental illness and addictions in our community, both in the acute care system and just our community. Building a new Waterford Hospital is not a want, it's a need.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I was impressed with the oratory over the weeks from various sides of the House. I really just took some notes because one of the things that have struck me is the level of fog and obfuscation that seems to have been generated in discussions around this budget.

Rather than go through it thematically, I'm actually going to go through it chronologically with some notes from comments from Members opposite. Two of the Members of the Opposition front bench were kind enough to offer to educate me at various stages and I take that in the spirit in which it was given.

Starting chronologically, I thought I'd go through some of the comments from Members Opposite and kind of put a slightly different spin on some of them. The theme that's come out of all of this is that there has been a somewhat selective reinterpretation of what came about on the afternoon of April 14 and the 14,000 words, some of which they choose to listen to in the budget and others they, kind of, cast off.

The Member for Ferryland kicked off things with talk of the taxation as a disincentive. It was a wonderful exercise in hyperbole in actual fact. He did fail to mention that the taxation levels we had proposed in *Budget 2016* would still make us competitive with every other Mainland

province. We weren't some dreadful outlier that no one would want to come and work in or live here. We weren't some pariah.

It took me back to the fact that the comment was the taxation levels, as a package, went back to 2006 levels. When I did a little bit of research – and I admit to being a bit geeky about these things – 2006 was the year of peak oil production. Even I knew that as a surgeon and I wasn't involved in politics at that time. The other thing that struck me was that *Budget 2006* was the initial lowering of taxes and it was a budget immediately prior to a general election.

So 2007 rolled around. Peak oil prices came and went. The next major tax drop was in the 2010 budget. *Budget 2010* also coincidentally happened to be a pre-election budget. There was a general election shortly afterwards. 2014 rolled around and there were some more reductions. But if you look at our tax package, essentially, we have gone back to 2006-07 levels and are still competitive with other jurisdictions. There's nothing in our taxation scheme that is off the wall compared with other jurisdictions in terms of personal tax.

The other thing that my colleague for Stephenville – Port au Port was astute enough to discover was the Auditor General's report from 2014 which showed a 54 per cent increase in government expenditure over that period of 10 years. So at the time as they've lost oil revenue, oil volumes, reduction in royalties, they have cut taxes and increased expenditure. Really and honestly, I think that actually has to be taken into context as the flip side of some of his comments. He also failed to mention that even with the increase in HST and the temporary gasoline tax we would still have gasoline prices that were comparable with just over a year ago.

To those people on the other side of the House who will say, well, ferry costs are going to go up, it will cost more to deliver food; I have noticed ferrying costs go down since the price of gasoline went down. So I really can't see that there should be any material change there.

Moving along, he then acknowledged there were challenges in health care to access. He said – and I quote – you can't have everything here. I'd just like you to hold that phrase for later on. He

then went on to talk about long-term care and how they would have operated these RFP partnership ones directly. But in actual fact, he obviously hadn't read the RFP, which specifically precluded direct operation by government of long-term care. It was totally out in the private sector. There was no thought about any compromise or where the value for money might lie in that process. They simply had a knee-jerk reaction.

The other interesting thing is that in the process of generating that RFP they ignored an EY report in Central which had a perfectly workable solution for long-term care in that region, and they gutted the plans for Western Memorial Regional Hospital redesign and rebuild which further added to delays and costs there. I can come back to that because, as I say, this is kind of chronological.

He then went on to talk about training the workforce for today. On the face of it that might actually sound to be very sensible, but really and honestly if you then think about how long it takes to train somebody, there's a lead time. What you really need and what is a fundamental gap, which our side of the House are working towards, is what the needs are going to be tomorrow.

We have so often simply replicated what we have today and hoped it would work in the future and it hasn't. So what we really need to do is not do what we've always done, but to actually plan for the future, make an educated estimate of what it's going to be and train for tomorrow, not for today.

Again, chronologically – and this might be a bit eclectic. The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune castigated me for changes to the Breast Screening Program for low-risk women. What I would like to do is to turn around and say why it was that government, knowing for five years that this was of no benefit to women under the age of 50 – no benefit at all, documented in the literature from the Canadian Task Force on Preventative Health amongst others – why did they keep funding it. Why did they keep pouring money, for five years, into a program that gained nobody anything and generated the worried well? That wasn't answered. That wasn't answered at all.

So then we had the Member for Mount Pearl – North?

AN HON. MEMBER: North.

MR. HAGGIE: North, yes. His catch phrase was we cannot frown on consultations. This was kind of ironic given it was the 21st of April and we had spent three weeks listening to: Will you stop consulting and come up with a plan? Will you stop talking to people? Get off your backsides and do something. You're chickening out.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who said that?

MR. HAGGIE: The Member for Mount Pearl North, the backrest over there. We were beaten up for consulting and the proposal to keep consulting. So he cannot frown on it. Keep that in mind.

Okay, there we go. Where do we go to now?

The Member for Topsail North – Topsail – Paradise, I got my north and Paradise confused – he was enthused in his listing of the woes of the economic downturn where this wasn't predictable and these were circumstances beyond their control. Really and honestly, it is the responsibility of government, and this side of the House acknowledges that, to plan for contingencies. There was no planning in the budgets on the opposite side of the House which gave us any opportunity to have any degree of financial resilience.

The money came in and not only did they spend like drunken sailors, they borrowed in addition on top of it, dug us into a hole. They gave up \$4 billion in tax, they gave up \$25 billion in oil revenue and we are in a hole the magnitude of which is absolutely astounding. I still think nobody on the opposite side of the House actually gets how bad it is.

We are the worst in Canada of any jurisdiction at any time in history in terms of per capita debt. As my learned colleague here said, if we don't deal with this and deal with it now, it'll be my grandson, Easton, who will be paying the bills in Lewisporte in 30 years' time and I ain't going to do that. It's not about the votes; it's about doing

the right thing, as someone not too far away from me said before.

Scrolling down this piece of paper here – aha, yes – takes me to the topic of dialysis from the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. Now then, some years ago it was decided to put a dialysis unit in Harbour Breton, the cost of that, \$3 million conservatively. The people who were in the Department of Health at that time know perfectly well that to have institutional-based dialysis, you need a critical mass of people to support the services and for the services to be able to support them. That critical mass, as far as I can tell, never existed, yet it was put there anyway.

AN HON. MEMBER: Really?

MR. HAGGIE: Yes. For \$3 million you can actually buy home dialysis for 100 patients – 100 patients. The dialysis unit in Harbour Breton has struggled to get four patients through the doors in two years.

Now then, a very insightful comment, dialysis should be as close to home as possible. Mr. Speaker, I would put it to you, there is no place closer to home for dialysis than home dialysis. Really and honestly, that has been the goal standard for new dialysis for 12 years – 12 years. It can be done safely, it can be done cheaply.

The patients love it by comparison, and we can have one dialysis nurse supervise anywhere from 15 to 20 patients. It is by far the way to do it; yet, there has been on evidence, not one shred of evidence that there has been any significant effort by the previous government, by previous ministers of Health, to do anything with home dialysis. It sat there for 12 years; 12 years. We could have saved a fortune and redeployed it.

What the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune also forgets is that by redeploying the space from this dialysis unit she'll get the six, long-term care beds she was moaning about on budget day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: She also referenced addition of new drugs. Yes, there have been new drugs

added to the formulary and that is important. There's \$2.6 million in this year's budget to do just that on an ongoing basis. What the previous government never did was looked at taking the damn things off when they were no good anymore. They just sat there and the pot got bigger. The pot got bigger. The only people who benefited from that are the drug companies, and that's it, nobody else.

So we mentioned long-term care and we mentioned Western Memorial. I have my pieces of paper out of order.

The Member for Mount Pearl North made comments about the design of Western Memorial Regional Hospital and why we hadn't moved on it. Well, I'll tell you why. Since the original proposal, we have had \$20 million spent on a design, a redesign, a redrafting of that design and a redesign because they decided to pull long-term care out for an RFP that wouldn't fit the bill for anywhere, let alone Western. So now we've gone back and put it in.

The interesting thing about that is not only did they waste all that money, at the same time they were doing this shell game with designs and redesigns, there was a digger on what is the most expensive dump park in Canada and a minister saying we've started, the hospital is being built, it'll be done.

How many people, ministers of the Crown from the previous government, have stood in Corner Brook and said: see, it's moving. We've spent \$22 million on a hole in the ground with a few wires and some sewage pipes, and that's all we have to show for it. This government is going to complete the design work on Western Memorial Regional Hospital based on an institution that will serve the needs of the people of the West Coast and will be done in a timely way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: I haven't quite used my time, but I've kind of –

AN HON. MEMBER: Keep going.

MR. HAGGIE: Sorry?

AN HON. MEMBER: Keep going.

MR. HAGGIE: Oh, keep going? All right, fair enough.

The Members opposite talked about vision and how there was no vision in this budget, as if the only people who are allowed to have vision are the Members of the Third Party. I wrote some notes about that somewhere. Where was it? Never mind.

The bottom line is we are in damage control. Our vision is to stop the bleeding of money, is to stabilize and repay the debt and to get us back to a situation where it is entirely reasonable that we will actually have some money to spend on programs that we need and programs that we want.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: At the moment, we're barely managing with the programs that we need. It's all right for them to sit there and write cheques they're never going to have to cash. You can ask for the world, but realistically speaking, you've got to ask for something that's realistic.

It's not their job to provide solutions. It's their job to oppose and pick holes and challenges, and make us stand up and make us defend our budget. That's what we're doing.

You've got to offer things that are reasonable. The Opposition haven't offered anything except holes. The Third Party, they had a Harry Potter moment as well. I mean this stuff just will not fly. It's totally economically unreasonable in the situation at the moment when you're spending \$980 million this next year on debt servicing alone because of the hole that we've been dug. We're only spending less than \$900 million on education.

Yes, there are all sorts of things we'd like to do, but the thing is we have to keep the lights on and we have to keep the services at a reasonable level, given what we can afford. Until and unless someone recognizes that we are in a hole the magnitude of which there is not the like in any jurisdiction in Canada at any time, that failure of comprehension prevents them from really seeing what the problem is and what these solutions represent. These solutions are a package. They've cherry-picked bits off it because it suits

them. They don't have an answer. They don't have any answer. They don't have a realistic answer. So the bottom line is this is a package. It works.

They talk about how the taxation system isn't progressive. It is. That's your deficit levy. Okay? Progressive, all the way up: \$250,000, \$350,000. There are not that many people in this province who earn more than \$250,000. I think there are about 6,000. There isn't enough money they've got to clear our deficit. So you have to do it. There is no separation – like the Third Party would like us to have – between government and the people. The people put the government in. Unfortunately, they have to cash the cheques they wrote with an empty bank account.

So, Mr. Speaker, really and honestly, that's my go at attempting to correct some of the fog and obfuscation that's been dumped on the people of this province.

On that, I'll give them another two minutes, if they want it, or anybody else.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Lane): The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to rise in this hon. House to speak on behalf of the constituents in my home District of Exploits to *Budget 2016*. It's a difficult budget. It's full of tough choices and revenue actions we wish we didn't have to implement, but it's an important budget, albeit an unenviable one.

As difficult of this budget is it contains the necessary measures to begin the difficult process of correcting the province's financial course. The budget contains a credible plan to do so. I think it's important for us to remind the people of the province of some of the reasons we're in this predicament now.

Some of my other colleagues have spoken to this, but it bears repeating. The PCs delivered six deficits in 12 years. During their governing, oil reached an all-time peak at \$144 US a barrel. This is four times as high as the average we've seen this year at \$35 US. This year we expect only \$502 million from offshore royalties. There were some years during the PC rule where they raked in \$2.1 billion a year in royalties. Their government spending increased at a rate of 20 to 36 per cent per capita higher than other provinces. Why did they not save some of this enormous windfall for a rainy day?

If we hadn't to have taken immediate corrective actions, the debt would have soared to \$27.3 billion in less than a decade. With their mismanagement of funds, the deficit this year was projected to be \$2.7 billion. Thanks to the actions of our government and, yes, the hard choices made in this budget, that figure is reduced by a third to \$1.8 billion.

We are committed to reducing the debt. We have a built-in plan to return to a surplus position by 2023. In order to reduce the deficit and return to surplus, we have to be efficient. We have to eliminate government waste and reconsider the way we spend and borrow. We have to be fiscally responsible, as the PCs never were. Part of being fiscally responsible means not giving up on the people who need our help the most, the most vulnerable in our society, and our government has no intentions of giving up on them.

We are investing \$63.7 million annually in the delivery of benefits for those who are most vulnerable to the revenue measures contained in *Budget 2016*. These new benefits will collectively be referred as the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement. This plan exists because we do not want to burden low-income individuals and families in our province. These benefits will be extended to people most in need, such as low-income seniors, families and persons with disabilities.

The basis for eligibility will be determined by family net income and we've made sure that there are no additional barriers or red tape for the vulnerable to access these benefits. If they filed a tax return and their income is within the qualifying threshold, they will receive these

benefits. There is no extensive, additional paperwork. Nothing meant to discourage applicants.

These will be paid in quarterly installments and the amounts will vary depending on individual circumstances. The first batch of benefits will be paid out in October and, at that time, eligible individuals and their families will receive two quarterly installments at one time. It is through this new Income Supplement that we will demonstrate our commitment to the province's most vulnerable.

We know seniors are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society and many live on very tight budgets, with limited income levels. We are including provisions in the budget that will expand existing benefits for low-income seniors. Currently there are 90,000 seniors in our province, many of whom live in the District of Exploits. A full 5 per cent of that total is considered low income. These are the people we're intent on taking care of. This will also be paid in quarterly installments.

The total investment for taking care of the most vulnerable in our society is \$76.4 million. We are proud to be making this commitment to the people of the province. Other positive points, if you look at personal income tax rates, the increase in every tax bracket, combined with the additional tax measures, still add up to less than what people were paying in 2006-2007.

Don't misunderstand our meaning here; we do regret that these increases have to happen. But for media reports to claim that this is a completely unfair attack on Newfoundland and Labrador taxpayers, well, that's simply false. This budget contains \$570 million in infrastructure investments. Those are investments that will benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for years to come that will keep people working. Included in this is \$2 million in new funding to plan for long-term care in Western and Central regions of the province.

The temporary Deficit Reduction Levy will generate \$126 million per year while other measures are identified and we begin to see their benefits. This will begin to be phased out in 2018 or hopefully sooner. We are working to

eliminate the waste and excess spending in the public service so we can protect every single job possible. Our taxes are lower today than they were in 2006 and before. We have had to make the right choices, the hard choices. Making the right choices are not always easy choices, but they are necessary to put our province back on track.

As mentioned by one of my colleague mayors, former Mayor Letto, just to touch on a couple of things with regard to Municipal Affairs, there'll be no reduction in Municipal Operating Grants to municipalities – good news – and the change to provincial/municipal cost-sharing ratios and projects will be 90-10, 80-20, 70-30. Initiatives announced as part of the Community Sustainability Partnership will be maintained, including the sharing of provincial gas tax revenues, partial HST rebate and regional governance consultations.

Now, I would like to touch on some issues in the District of Exploits before I move on and conclude. Granted, the budget contains some distasteful items. No one disagrees with that, but in our district we've been able to find a way to continue on with some of the good work that was previously started with several different projects.

New infrastructure projects: long-term care central planning, Grand Falls-Windsor; municipal infrastructure carryover, road upgrading on Beaumont Heights and Hynes Road in Bishop's Falls; sewer treatment plant, Bishop's Falls; Harry Ivany Arena, upgrades, Botwood; road improvements, Citizens Drive and Higgins Avenue in Norris Arm; water main extension for Northern Arm; water systems improvement for Northern Arm; and, last but not least, the projected continuing of the major job with the Sir Robert Bond bridge, and that's located in the District of Exploits, just to name a few.

Earlier today my good friend, the MHA for St. John's East, mentioned mayors around the province and the feedback we were getting from those people and their councils on the budget. I've certainly been a sounding board for many of those people because I know quite a few of them. Granted, they have the same concerns that most people in the province have, in that –

again, the budget itself was one that all of us would have preferred not bringing forward to the people but we had to, okay.

With that being said, from mayors right on down to church groups, to individuals on the post office steps, I've taken a lot of abuse and a lot of criticism, and I know all my colleagues here have. I'm not making anything up when I tell everybody here that there are quite a few people out there, too, that realize we have to take that hard road.

They're disappointed in where we have come at this juncture, but they nod their heads when I say you know what, the pit is that deep right now, you have every right in the world to complain about the measures we have to take but if we leave it alone until three, four years out, it will be like that. The government of the day, whether it's this government or another government, will have to come forward with the news and the same people, and rightfully so, will be all over us and say why didn't you do something to prevent this when you had it there, as bad as here is.

I just want to make that point to everybody here tonight and anyone watching, and to the people of the province. Again, my colleague for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, I know she was bringing that forward today in a good, positive light.

I'm proud to be a former mayor and to be able to serve in this Legislature, and I'm proud to be serving with each and every one of you. Every time before I came here – and no offence to anyone else – when I got news that a sitting mayor had run for a political party for the government of the day or Opposition or whatever, and that person, he or she, got elected, it gladdened my heart because they're the front-line people.

This government and future governments – you've heard me say it before in front of TV cameras – don't go giving mayors and councillors lip service on the eve of an election just to be in their good graces in the hopes that it's going to benefit you. I've seen enough of it. Pay attention to the municipal leaderships, from the mayors right on down to their councillors. They're good people, the same as everybody

here is. They're there, it is municipal government and they do know, better than anyone else knows, what's good for the people in each and every town in this province.

I'll conclude my remarks. With regard to 24-hour snow clearing, libraries, and the list goes on, emergency services –the other thing I will say before I leave the mayor issue, is back in our district, Exploits and Grand Falls-Windsor, we've got a little bit of an overlap there in Grand Falls-Windsor with myself and Minister Hawkins' district.

For the people that have been thinking maybe we were hiding away on occasions and stuff like that, I never hid away from anything in my life. I can assure everybody here tonight, and people who are watching, that myself and Mayor Hawkins have championed the cause for both of our districts, inclusive of Grand Falls-Windsor that we share collectively, as well as for everybody in the province. We want to do good by everyone in this province and not leave anyone behind.

Again, I'm not hiding. You can visit me at my kitchen table in Botwood. My phone number is easy to get. Anyone that wants to chat with me, I'm available at any time. I'm not available on Facebook postings for personal attacks, but I will talk to anybody and deal with any issue in a civilized way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Now, on those issues. With regard to the snow clearing and with regard to libraries, and all the other stuff, and the Hugh Twomey Centre in Botwood with the unfortunate decision that we've been dealt with on 24-hour emergency services and stuff. The minister is involved on all those issues. I've been communicating with them, them with me. They're certainly open-minded and willing to meet again with any of the mayors and municipal leaders in both of our districts to chat at length about the logic behind all of these decisions, and open to all kinds of suggestions or feedback.

So we're not hiding from that either. I would encourage the municipal leadership to contact me. I'll go to bat and we'll arrange sessions if

we can with the ministers for each of those departments.

They say that when you find yourself digging a hole for yourself, you probably should throw the shovel away. In this case, I would suggest to the people of the province – again, sometimes you just end up on that lousy end of the stick, but in this case it wasn't a shovel that we had to throw away, it was an excavator.

I'll close by saying; sadly, none of us gathered here can bring forward a magic solution to our woes. Even if we solicited every resident in this province, in all likelihood the solution would still elude us. So in the absence of King Solomon's wisdom, we're left to second guess each other, which we've been doing, when what's really needed is collectively supporting one another to wrestle this beast to the ground.

I look forward to trying to resolve the concerns of our people with each and every one of you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to rise in this hon. House, Mr. Speaker, to have a few remarks to *Budget 2016*. I, too, will echo what my colleagues have been saying. This is not an easy budget; nobody expected it to be. It contains many difficult choices, but I do support the choices that we've made as a government and the challenges that are upon us as hon. Members in this House.

I support it, Mr. Speaker, because our deficit has increased so dramatically over the 12 years of Tory mismanagement. If we did nothing to curtail spending and to raise revenue, that deficit would be approaching \$3 billion for the year. By 2023, we'd nearly double our total debt.

As a former small business operator, I can tell you that failing to manage debt properly and failing to budget responsibly is a recipe for ruin, and that's exactly what has happened here, Mr.

Speaker. The former government have mortgaged Newfoundland and Labrador's future by implementing unwise, unsustainable tax cuts which went to benefit the wealthiest Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They increased government spending to levels that would make other provinces blush.

And why did they do this? Because they had the oil revenues pouring into our coffers and they never anticipated the commodity prices would ever drop. Well, we're on the other side of it now; we're all left with this after the PCs got through with things. It's a huge deficit and things look grim.

I want to go back, Mr. Speaker, to a couple of statements that I made in this House of Assembly in my maiden speech. I'd certainly ask for the Members of this House to keep it in mind. I said that we must all remember that we stand here in this place as common people, holding our province's common hopes, our common future and commission to build a better Newfoundland and Labrador.

The other part that I spoke to is that we must all embrace the spirit of what it means to be proud Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Our story is one of determination and resilience – something that we're faced with today – and often against the odds in realizing the economic and social potential of this province. We must believe in ourselves and we must plan together for the sustainable future. Mr. Speaker, there is no truer statement, what I believe, than what I just read to the people of this House.

Mr. Speaker, ever since the budget has been announced I've gone home – my home is in Springdale, the wonderful District of Baie Verte – Green Bay. I spent a lot of time actually debating the budget with myself while listening to the radio, enjoying the ride home and got six hours of lonely time. You think about reasons why you run, and why I ran. I ran on being open and honest with the people and the promise that I would be accessible and fair to all parts of my district.

As I spoke to my good friend, the Member for Cape St. Francis – we sit across from one another and I look attentively at him. I see his eyes over here, this way, making sure that I'm

paying attention because I talked to him about that. I really do; I pride myself on being a good listener, Mr. Speaker. I've listened to the people in my district for the last three weeks. I've had the opportunity to attend many events.

On the first weekend, I had the opportunity to go down to Middle Arm and sit in front of a bunch of hockey players who had just won a championship. I went to bring greetings and when I got there, I was asked if I would MC the entertainment that evening. Certainly I took the opportunity to do so. And yes, like us all, I took many cracks that evening, but, just like my good friend for the District of Exploits just talked about, I didn't back down either. I have nothing but utmost respect for the people that I represent and they are certainly welcome to their opinion, and opinions which I value.

Mr. Speaker, we've been in office for just 120 days and we've identified, through our caucus and through the Minister of Finance and our team, \$282 million in savings. That's just our first 120 days in office under the sound, fiscal management of the Minister of Finance and her officials. That's a very, very small dent in the deficit, no doubt, but it's the kind of action that is necessary to bring our financial house back in order.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the team that I sit here with and when I decided to put my hat in the ring. I looked around at some of the names. I was not sure if they were all going to get elected, but I looked around at the names of potential Liberals in this caucus and I was so impressed. We have a great deal of proud Members on this side and lots of experience, and the experience that I know that can carry us through.

The Premier for our province, Mr. Speaker, I have known that gentleman as well for a long time, and I certainly wanted to be a part of his team. I said it when I was going throughout my own district that he's a person that I can count on, and if there was ever someone that I believed could lead us out of the situation that we were in, I believed that it was our Premier of this province. I say that again today; I repeat that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: Our borrowing targets over the next seven-year period will require for us to take on some \$8.2 billion in new debt. That may sound like a lot, but if we had given no action, that figure would have been \$17.6 billion.

I think one of the most encouraging aspects of the budget is that it spells its way out of surplus. With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to my grandfather. I thought my grandfather was a very wise individual and ran our company for a number of years. There were two things that my grandfather mentioned, and it stuck with me to this day.

I raised two young girls and I made them think about that statement every day. That was: never put off for tomorrow what you can get done today; and look after the pennies, and the dollars will look after themselves. I've never forgotten those two statements that were made by grandfather. That's the type of leadership that he did show to me, and obviously I'd like to pass those on for all Members of this House to keep in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a couple of items with regard to issues that our friends across the way – like the hon. Member for Gander brought up. I noticed he was doing a lot of listening as well as to what was being said on the other side. The one thing I do agree – and again, it comes from my good friend, the Member for Cape St. Francis. I'm glad he recognized the pressure on MHAs in larger districts, because he did say that. I come from a district of 42 communities.

AN HON. MEMBER: Your BFF.

MR. WARR: He's my BFF.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. WARR: I come from a district that has 42 communities. There's a lot of pressure on MHAs in larger districts. I think of the 42 communities, I have 32 fire departments, 35 councils and then some local service districts. We have 42 series of roads going in and out of communities. Some of these roads, Mr. Speaker, haven't seen a whole lot of work in the last few years.

It is sad to say that some of them may have to be put off again this year. The Minister of Transportation has advised us that he has \$62 million for roads. That is not a whole lot of money when you look at the vast array around this province and lots of roadways. Again, Mr. Speaker, we'll have to make do. We've only got so much money and I don't want to see us in a worse situation.

I want to talk about the statement that was made from the Member for Topsail – Paradise. Mr. Speaker, that goes back to he talked about the reduction in 24-hour service. At that particular point in time, he was talking about the Outer Ring Road.

I say to my hon. friend that I sat as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Springdale and area Chamber of Commerce. For a number of years we sent letter, upon letter, upon letter to this government asking why a truck driver – if you give me a minute to explain – who is coming off a ferry in Port aux Basques has to leave Port aux Basques on, I'll call it a Tier 2 highway. He leaves Port aux Basques on a Tier 2 highway – and for those of you who don't know, a Tier 2 highway would receive 50 per cent salt, 50 per cent sand and reduced servicing, reduced time on our highways.

He goes from Port aux Basques to Corner Brook. All of a sudden he hits a roadway that gives him a Tier 1 highway. So from Corner Brook to Deer Lake, now he's getting 100 per cent sand, 100 per cent salt and 24-hour service. Then he leaves Deer Lake and he moves on as far as Grand Falls. He's on Tier 2 again, going back to the 50 per cent salt, 50 per cent sand and less maintenance. That goes right throughout the Island.

We were adamant as a business community who cared about the people who were travelling from my hometown, my home district, people of the Baie Verte Peninsula, travelling to Deer Lake on a continual basis and working in jobs in Alberta. Nobody cared about these people who were travelling on less-than-adequate highways until the hon. Member for Topsail – Paradise brings it up because the Outer Ring Road is not receiving 24-hour care now. Again, I say, Mr. Speaker, where was that care when we were sending letter

upon letter to this previous government asking for the same thing?

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit on the resettlement of the good people of Little Bay Islands. This is a community that was vibrant and had a wonderful fishing heritage. There was a time that it was probably one of the largest communities on the Island.

Little Bay Islanders are very proud of their heritage. Mr. Speaker, it was announced by this government that they were sending – and my good friend the Minister of Municipal Affairs would know this quite well. The former minister of Transportation was the former premier at the time and he went out to Little Bay Islands to make an announcement. They certainly thought it was a good-news announcement.

What it was, Mr. Speaker, he went out to Little Bay Islands and decided because it was a four-point system – it was Little Bay Islands to Shoal Arm to Long Island to Pilley's Island. From Little Bay Islands to Shoal Arm it's a very short run and a very short run for these people to run to Springdale which was a second home for them. It was the service centre of the area and that's where they went to shop.

What the former premier did, or former minister of Transportation at the time, he went out and made the announcement they were cancelling out the four-point system and they were taking Shoal Arm out of it, causing the people from Little Bay Islands to head over to Pilley's Island, which was a longer ferry ride and then not a 15-minute run to Springdale. We're talking about a 45- to 50-minute run to Springdale. This is where the resettlement issue came from, Mr. Speaker, because I will say had that four-point system never been taken from the people of Little Bay Islands, resettlement would have never raised its ugly head.

Here we are today with a community that I have a lot of admiration and respect for, Mr. Speaker, that is in uproar, it is in turmoil, there are neighbours not talking to one another anymore and it's just completely, completely a shamble. So we've taken it upon ourselves, as this government, to revisit the resettlement policy and come back to the good people of Little Bay

Islands with a new resettlement policy a little further down the road.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk again about my children, and it's all about the legacy. I talked about I hope they are going to be proud of the good work that their dad does here in the House of Assembly. And I mean that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: I will take a stand in saying that I want to leave a legacy that I'm proud of, and that this government is proud of. I don't want the legacy of someone saying the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale and his team had the opportunity to fix this mess, but they didn't. I don't want that legacy, Mr. Speaker.

One of my former school teachers was the hon. premier of the province, A. Brian Peckford. Mr. Peckford did a lot of good things for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the two legacy's he is left is the Atlantic Accord – which is what he should be remembered for – and then there was the Sprung Greenhouse. It's unfortunate that the negativity in that legacy about Sprung outweighs the support of the Atlantic Accord.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that the things we have – I just want to go to my district for a second and say that we've lost some things deferred, and as my time gets closer I'll probably leave those things. I'm just not going to have enough time to get into that, but I certainly encourage all my friends here to get on board and support the initiatives of this government.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a pleasure here to stand for the first time and speak to this budget, and I look forward to many more times.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have an opportunity to rise in this hon. House today to talk about *Budget 2016* and

to the tremendous work presently being done by the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development under this government.

First, to my constituents in the District of Placentia – St. Mary’s, and Trinity South, this is a difficult time. I know some of you are angry, while some of you understand what is happening. It is okay to be angry. The resources we acquired were seriously mismanaged. I’m angry that the roads in our district are deplorable, while the neighbouring District of Ferryland has some great roads. I’m angry that some of the projects managed by the previous government in my district went seriously over budget.

To the seniors and low-income earners in my district, the Newfoundland and Labrador supplement will help you get through this difficult time. Come October, when you receive your first supplement, you will understand what I mean. The Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development has dedicated focus and efforts to the areas of seniors, adult protection, wellness, recreation and sport, poverty reduction and the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

For 2016-17, the department has a dedicated budget of over \$20 million, and a total of 41 full-time employees. With these resources, the department will be taking a proactive, preventative and integrated approach to healthy living. We want to help people live healthier, more equitable and inclusive lives by addressing social and economic factors from the earliest stages of life across the lifespan.

Mr. Speaker, in the years ahead under this budget, we will advance a number of important initiatives, both through the department directly and through funding and otherwise, supporting community organizations to deliver programs within the community. We will work with community organizations, Mr. Speaker. After all, community organizations are on the ground with the people every day.

In advancing these initiatives, we will be guided by my mandate letter from the Premier. We are already taking steps towards fulfilling specific initiatives contained in that letter. Planning work has already begun on the development of the healthy promotion and healthy living strategy.

This year, we will work in collaboration with the Department of Health and Community Services towards this strategy. The strategy will include implements and elements supporting health promotion, healthy living programs and early intervention initiatives. Part of my mandate is to implement programs to facilitate healthy lifestyles and youth wellness, including promotion of healthy eating habits, offering wellness coaching in schools and implementing anti-smoking programs.

We will do that under this budget, Mr. Speaker. These are key areas of focus. *Budget 2016* provides funding that will allow non-profit, community-based organizations to provide services in these areas, in addition to programs and services that our department currently provides or will develop.

To support healthy living activities in the year ahead, \$5.9 million in this budget is provided for community-based organizations and agencies that are advocates for health and healthy living. I will give you some examples, Mr. Speaker.

The Kids Eat Smart Foundation, which receives just over \$1 million in annual funding to support Kids Eat Smart Clubs throughout the province. Kids Eat Smart Clubs provide breakfast and/or snacks in 226 schools and in 21 community centres across Newfoundland and Labrador. Each and every school day, these clubs provide over 23,000 meals to school-age children every school day with the assistance of more than 6,000 volunteers and nine full-time staff, Mr. Speaker.

We are providing funding to Food First NL to work with communities and organizations to find solutions and advance access to healthy food. We are providing additional funding to Food First NL to support the healthy eating online resource centre which was launched in March of 2016 under this budget, Mr. Speaker. This is a user-friendly inventory of up-to-date and reliable healthy eating resources.

Mr. Speaker, we will also provide funding to support the Newfoundland and Labrador Injury Prevention Coalition which provides information and education to promote safety and prevent injuries.

Budget 2016 provides for other healthy living initiatives. Through Recreation NL, we support the Eat Great and Participate program, which promotes healthy eating habits among children and youth in recreation, sport and community settings. Through this program, healthy eating policies have already been implemented in five provincial sport organizations. Eat Great and Participate continues to work with another 13 provincial sport organizations that are in the process of developing and implementing similar policies.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2016* provides many funds. *Budget 2016* provides \$1.84 million for the Community Healthy Living Fund, which will support initiatives, programs and projects focused on healthy living, recreation, physical activity and wellness at the community level. This fund provides support for the development of active and healthy living environments. Funding is available to retrofit and renovate existing facilities that are used for recreation and sport.

In this budget, we are also available to fund small infrastructure costs that increase use, lower operating costs, improve safety and increase accessibility. The purchase of small equipment that promotes physical activity and initiatives that promote healthy eating are also eligible under this program.

In *Budget 2016*, more than \$1 million will support initiatives for healthy living and increase physical activities in school-age children. Participation of over 200 schools in Participation Nation programs, which are non-competitive physical activity after-school programs offered to school-age children.

It also includes support for the continued promotion and implementation of the Healthy School Planner by schools and their stakeholders; and, in particular, the completion of the physical activity module which will help schools identify gaps and opportunities to increase physical activity levels of their students in the school environment. And it includes funding to support ongoing communication and resources to raise awareness in education on the importance of daily physical activity. There are many positive things in *Budget 2016*, Mr. Speaker.

Smoking cessation; to support our overarching goal of healthy living, we are placing a more significant focus on smoking prevention and cessation programs; \$250,000 of new funding in this budget is provided through the Seniors, Wellness and Social Development to help individuals quit smoking. This is in addition to funding provided through the Department of Health and Community Services for smoking cessation efforts aimed at people with a low income. This year, new funding will help to expand and enhance programs.

During the election, we committed to implementing anti-smoking actions and providing support for organizations that offer smoking cessation programs. Mr. Speaker, over the years, significant progress has been made in the area of tobacco control in Newfoundland and Labrador. For example, smoking rates have declined for various age groups, in particular, the youth, Mr. Speaker. Second-hand smoke bans in public places are extensive. Retail compliance rates restricting the sale of tobacco products to underage youth are high. The display and promotion bans of tobacco products at retail decrease the visibility in advertising of tobacco to youth.

Despite these successes, however, Newfoundland and Labrador continues to have one of the highest smoking rates in the country, with approximately over 100,000 people continuing to use tobacco. Youth are still experimenting with tobacco and starting to smoke, and many individuals continue to be addicted to tobacco, costing our health care system millions of dollars annually.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that tobacco use remains the most preventable cause of disease and premature death. For that reason, our government is committed to protecting people, particularly children and youth, from the proven health risk of tobacco use. This rationale of such a priority is very clear, Mr. Speaker.

Further action is required to prevent and reduce tobacco use in our province. Mr. Speaker, we intend to fund actions that will be based on evidence, provincial data, research, best practices, monitoring trends and emerging issues.

Sport and recreation: Mr. Speaker, this is a difficult time, but we remain committed to supporting our province's athletes as we encourage every citizen in the province to choose a healthy, active lifestyle. This provincial government will continue to support our athletes through several initiatives, including the Athletic Excellence Fund, coaching, Canada Games funding and annual grants to provincial sport organizations. Investment in our athletes and in recreational opportunities for all citizens is indeed worthwhile, Mr. Speaker; we need that investment for our physical well-being and our mental well-being.

Sport and recreation opportunities provide valuable life lessons and skills, particularly for our young people. Leadership, teamwork, these are valuable skills and values that sport and recreation activities can help to instill in our young people, that they can use throughout their lives and working careers. Mr. Speaker, our government, we identify these needs.

Mr. Speaker, by 2025, 25 per cent of our population will be seniors. We will work to ensure that we are meeting current demands and prepare for our rapidly aging population. One of our election commitments was to establish an office of the seniors' advocate. The need to establish a seniors' advocate office has been broadly identified as we campaigned throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, from individual members of the public, seniors' organizations such as the Seniors Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador and the 50+ Federation.

Since taking on this role as the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, I have met with these organizations and my provincial advisory council to confirm what we heard. These groups also raise the need for awareness and education of existing resources available to seniors in this province. *Budget 2016* has committed \$250,000 in 2016-17 to establish an independent office of the seniors' advocate, with an annual budget of \$500,000 beginning in 2017-18.

Of this year's funding, \$100,000 will go toward increasing public awareness of the programs and services which currently exist for seniors. Mr. Speaker, seniors asked for this initiative, and we

are listening to them by delivering it. Mr. Speaker, the seniors' advocate will be a strong, independent voice for Newfoundland and Labrador seniors as we look to address system-wide issues which impact older adults.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: It's a luxury.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: It is not a luxury.

This year's budget also provides funding of \$300,000 for the Seniors Resource Centre to enhance its information and referral system for seniors and their families. We will work in partnership with the Seniors Resource Centre.

We remain committed to working with communities to improve transportation options for seniors so they can not only access health care services more readily but participate more fully in their communities. A three-year pilot project involving five projects, which began in June 2012, has been completed. The pilot is currently being evaluated, with a view to informing future programming in this area.

Three hundred thousand dollars from this budget has been provided this year for age-friendly transportation services while this evaluation is ongoing. A hundred thousand dollars in *Budget 2016* will support continued development of age-friendly communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Budget 2016 also provides funding for a new director of adult protection who will be responsible for the well-being of adults in need of protection under the *Adult Protection Act* and the ongoing development, implementation and monitoring of adult protection, regulations and policy.

Mr. Speaker, as the mother of 20-year-old, non-verbal son, I personally understand the importance and value of this role. The *Adult Protection Act* legislation impacts all adults, regardless of living arrangements, who lack capacity to understand and appreciate risk and may be abused and/or neglected.

The act also includes an outline of the role and responsibilities of a provincial director of adult protection. The provincial director of adult protection is responsible for the care and custody

of adults who lack capacity and are abused or neglected, as well as having responsibility for the consultation on reports, evaluations and investigations and overall administration of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the director of aging and seniors originally assumed the role of the director of adult protection; however, during the first 12 months of implementation of the *Adult Protection Act* there were 258 reports, with 22 proceeding to investigation.

Responsibilities related to the *Adult Protection Act* have increased over the past two years. They are expected to further increase as the population ages and the legislation continues to raise awareness and increase accountabilities at the regional level. In addition, we are seeing more complex cases which require substantial assessment and attention.

Mr. Speaker, the establishment of the director of adult protection position will provide better protection and it will reduce risks to adults who may be or are in need of protection. Other Atlantic provinces have a full-time provincial director responsible for adult protection. This will bring us in line with other comparable jurisdictions.

The Budget Speech also highlighted the fact that as a province we must foster a supportive and inclusive environment which ensures all residents are able to live, work and participate in their communities. Mr. Speaker, there are numerous barriers for an inclusive environment. As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I will not knowingly speak at a venue that is not accessible.

This government will lead by example. Our aim is to enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society, including access to economic, social and cultural opportunities on an equal basis with others. Our government is firmly committed to supporting, promoting and encouraging a fully inclusive society whereby everyone has an equal opportunity for a successful, productive life.

Part of my mandate is to work with organizations and community stakeholders to achieve a more inclusive Newfoundland and

Labrador. Our work is ongoing as we review existing legislation and regulations in this province and move towards enacting a new inclusion-based disabilities act. We expect to have this provincial inclusion-based disability act within four years. Legislation that mandates standards for customer service, communication, information-built environment, transportation, employment and products is already in place in some other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, our focus will be on finding the best solution for our province, a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador legislation that addresses what is best for our communities and our province. We are allocating in this budget \$450,000 for capacity grants for inclusion resources and training and improved accessibility, as well as \$400,000 to help individuals in the taxi industry acquire or adapt vehicles for accessibility.

To help provide greater access to activities that support healthy living, \$150,000 is provided to continue recreation sport development initiatives for persons with disabilities.

Poverty reduction: As was noted in the Budget Speech, our government aims to ensure the impact of the fiscal reality is lessened on the most vulnerable. Our government is committed to supporting measures to prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty. *Budget 2016* invests over \$240 million in initiatives to support people with low income – \$240 million.

New investments include \$76.4 million annualized in a new Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, a new disability benefit and enhancements to the Seniors' Benefit. These benefits are paid directly to low-income individuals and families and are designed to mitigate tax increases; \$2.5 million to address homelessness by increasing the budget of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing's Supportive Living Program to \$7.6 million; \$3 million to increasing the monthly fuel allowance for eligible Income Support clients. We are analyzing income and other data as well as information from the community about people in low income to identify gaps in programs and services and priority areas for future focus.

Mr. Speaker, I, along with the executive and the staff of the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development are strongly committed to addressing some of the very important social issues we face in society today. As a minister and the MHA for the District of Placentia – St. Mary's, and Trinity South, I am working with my staff to ensure that all people in the province are equal, included, supported and empowered to achieve their full potential and well-being. We cannot and we will not kick this deficit into the future. It is our children and our children's children who will suffer if we do not govern. We will work towards a stronger tomorrow.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and Seniors' Benefit will help individuals and families with lower incomes get through this difficult time in Newfoundland and Labrador. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are making history. We are in a financial situation never seen before in history for a population of just over 500,000 people. We will learn from these errors made by the previous administration, and we will save for the future. The children and youth of this province should have an opportunity to grow, thrive and succeed right here at home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, other than doing a few Member's statements, this is my first opportunity to address the people of Newfoundland and Labrador through this medium. I would like to congratulate all hon. Members who have been re-elected and continue to serve this great province. And to a few of those who are like myself, serving this district and the province for the first time, I look forward to working with each of you during our term in office. It is a great privilege to be here in this hon. House of Assembly as the Member for the beautiful and scenic District of Lewisporte – Twillingate.

Before I speak on the budget, I would like to begin by thanking my entire campaign team, all the volunteers who worked so diligently with me during my election. To my family, friends and supporters throughout the district that took the time to go out and vote, I'd like to offer my heartfelt appreciation. You have trusted me to represent you as your Member in the House of Assembly and I'll do everything possible to fulfill your expectations and represent you to the best of my ability.

It gives me great pleasure to stand here tonight to speak on *Budget 2016*. First of all, I want to express my appreciation to the Cabinet ministers, our Premier, the Minister of Finance and her entire team for all of the hours they have put into preparing this document. I'm sure there have been many long days and nights. I know your job wasn't easy.

Mr. Speaker, over the past couple of weeks I've had the opportunity to review and study the budget, listen to the debates and the opinions of people throughout the province. I'm not happy about raising taxes, fee increases or cutting services. I'm sure no one on this side of the House is happy about those things. However, I believe we are on the right course of action for our province. I do not want to continue to lead this province to financial ruin, or leave a financial burden for my children and future generations to deal with.

Currently, 11.6, almost \$1 billion of our total expenditures are going into interest payments on our debt. I do not want to be responsible for being a part of any government that allows this deficit to snowball out of control. I'm glad to serve in a government that has the courage to take the necessary steps to deal with the problems, address the issues, even if some decisions are unpopular.

No tax increase, loss of service or layoff is ever popular; our government is committed to tackling the challenges head-on. *Budget 2016* contains difficult measures and tough choices but doing nothing was not an option, not when you're faced with a potential deficit of \$2.7 billion this year.

Like my colleagues on both sides of the House, I've heard from my constituents. I've been

receiving emails, telephone calls, Facebook messages and personal business from constituents throughout the district. People are angry and upset with this budget. They have addressed their concerns about the tax levy and the fee increases, and I'm sure you have all seen the same distress.

Business owners in Twillingate-New World Island are concerned of the potential impact that a gas tax may have on the tourism industry, the largest industry in this region of the district. However, based on current rates, combined with the gas tax, you will still be paying less for fuel than you did last summer.

I have expressed these concerns to Cabinet members and our caucus. I am committed to working with the people of my district and our government to get us through these tough times. Over this past weekend I had a lengthy conversation with two ladies who worked at the Advanced Education and Skills office in Twillingate. The office closed Friday past. Fortunately, employees will be able to exercise their bumping rights and will be employed in other offices throughout Central Newfoundland. Although the workers are troubled by the longer commutes to work, they were more concerned with the loss of service to the area and the impact it will have on the people who they worked with over the past number of years.

Local residents have built a relationship of trust and confidence with these client services officers and were comforted in knowing that their needs were being addressed. I, too, share these concerns; however, I am confident that arrangements are being made to assist the people in need of services.

In addition to the recent news of the library closures, one will affect a community in my district. The Town of Summerford's public library is scheduled to close next season. The residents of that community have my commitment that if the town is interested in keeping the books, furniture and continuing with the service, I will work with community's leaders and volunteers to maintain this service within their community.

To further add to the concern in my district, in March of 2015, the fish plant in Cottlesville was

destroyed by fire and, sadly, it will not be rebuilt. This has resulted in a huge economic blow to the entire region. I am working closely with the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. They have assured me there is money allotted in the budget to assist these workers affected by the devastating fire. I will continue to work with the Town of Cottlesville to expedite this process so that the displaced workers will gain employment while we explore options of diversification for our economy and retrain the people affected.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend Minister Bennett for giving each MHA the opportunity to meet one-on-one to discuss the issues they are facing in their districts, and for clarifying items in the budget so we can provide accurate information and reduce the misleading comments that are being made. Although *Budget 2016* does result in tax increases and some closures, it's not all doom and gloom. The 2016 budget also contains a lot of good things as well.

Before being elected in November, I worked with the Town of Lewisporte for the past 25 years. My professional background in recreation, tourism and municipal infrastructure has given me a great knowledge of community development, especially in rural communities.

Both the recreation and tourism industry have a tremendous, positive impact on our communities. There are a number of commitments in this budget that are very encouraging from my perspective. There is \$1.84 million for programs and projects focused on recreation, active living and wellness. There's over \$1 million allocated to support initiatives that encourage healthy living, physical activity among school-age children.

There's close to \$500,000 committed for programs that focus on health eating, physical activity and mental health promotions. There's \$350,000 in the budget that supports smoking cessation programs and services. An additional \$0.5 million allocated for community-based organizations and agencies that provide healthy living programs and services.

Through my work with the Town of Lewisporte, and also serving as president of Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador, I have personally

seen the benefits of these programs. I have worked closely with my community and the region to promote healthy eating and physical activity. I encourage all hon. Members to promote these initiatives throughout their own districts.

I firmly believe that if we all do a little more to get our children and youth more physically active, set good examples and instill in them the joy and benefits of being physically active, if we can get them to continue this throughout their lives it will greatly reduce our high rates of obesity, heart disease and mental illness, in addition to reducing the stress and increasing costs on our medical services.

Mr. Speaker, this government realized the importance of inclusion and making our communities more accessible. There's funding in this budget for the upgrading and the accessibility at our Arts and Culture Centres. This will enable residents, regardless of ability or impairment, to be able to enjoy the great performances of our talented musicians and actors. There is funding for recreation and sport development initiatives for persons in our province with disabilities.

Almost \$220 million is allocated in major capital costs for tourism, culture and recreation. This may not be all new money, but it reinforces our government's commitment to these projects; \$4.2 million for the construction of a new pool house at Bowring Park. We are continuing on the commitment of \$38.5 million to build a recreation facility to replace the existing Wedgewood Park facility. This will include a lap pool, a leisure pool, a gym, community rooms, a senior centre and more. This facility is scheduled for completion this year. There is \$2.4 million allocated for a sports centre expansion which includes a 7,000-square-foot area to accommodate active start programs for preschool-age children.

These commitments affirm that our government takes health and recreation seriously. We recognize its value in strengthening and promoting healthy communities. The programs and services help to ensure that residents of all ages have the opportunity to be physically and mentally active in a safe environment.

This budget also provides significant support to our seniors; \$250,000 to establish an office of the seniors' advocate. This was a commitment we made during the campaign because we believe our seniors deserve an independent voice in government. A seniors' advocate is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

There is an additional \$300,000 allocated for the Seniors Resource Centre, aimed at enhancing its information and referral systems so that seniors will have a place to visit or call if they have any issues or concerns, or if they would like to see what is happening within our province.

There's \$3.5 million in the budget that will support placing selected individuals with enhanced care needs into personal care homes. We have another \$300,000 set aside for age-friendly transportation services. These funds will provide seniors with the opportunity to attend medical appointments, do their shopping or just socialize with family and friends.

We recognize seniors in our province are living on very low incomes and we recognize that the fee increases and revenue measures in this budget may impact these individuals more severely. That's why there are increases to our Seniors' Benefit and why there is a new quarterly Income Supplement. Eligible seniors will receive benefits from both of these programs.

Mr. Speaker, our government is investing close to \$600 million in infrastructure spending in this budget. Infrastructure is an investment that benefits Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for years, even decades to come. Work will include: \$63.7 million for the widening and paving of the Trans-Labrador Highway –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: – \$13.5 million for vessel retrofit; \$61.6 million for heavy equipment and ice control, along with many other projects that will benefit communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, if we did nothing to address the deficit, a deficit that would expand into \$2.7 billion this year alone, Newfoundland and

Labrador's future would be very grim – \$2.7 billion.

If interest payments became the largest expenditure in this budget, that means there's less money to take care of our seniors, less money to fund recreation programs, less money to spend on educating our children and less money to put into our health care. Revenue measures ensure that we do not have to face that day when interest fees cause further cutbacks in these important services. There is a clear and credible plan for our province to return to a surplus position in less than a decade. Being back into surplus position means we will be able to invest more in our province and more into our province's future.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, none of us, not one single Member sitting on this side of the hon. House, is taking this budget lightly. None of us, if we had a choice, would ever want to make the decisions that are being made. Unfortunately, some tough decisions have to be made. We all, no matter what political party you represent, we have to work together for the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I hope and I encourage people in my district to go online and read the budget. Feel free to contact my constituency assistant, Brent or myself, about the budget and let's talk about it.

Debate on the budget will continue over the next number of days and weeks. We talk about the budget so everybody has a full understanding of what's in it and why we do the things we have to do, but it also gives us the opportunity to address the concerns of our constituents and provides opportunity for amendments if deemed necessary.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I know part of this budget is not popular with many people in my district, and I respect each and everyone's opinions. The budget is not about votes or popularity. It's about what's best for our province.

I stand with the understanding and the reassurance from our government that when passed the tax levy will begin to be phased out no later than 2018. That the gas tax will be

reviewed on a regular basis so it can be reduced and that these revenue generators, along with other cost-saving initiatives, will help to reduce or eliminate the loss of other services. Reducing the deficit is the first critical step in returning Newfoundland and Labrador to a path of prosperity and sustainability, instead of leaving our children with a financial mess that we are facing today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to speak on the budget, but before I do, I think I should note I had a meeting this past weekend down in one of my districts in the community who are facing a cut. I talked to the people there. I told them I spent 30 years of my life leading up to this point, doing the best I could, doing everything I could for the people in my area.

I was the fire chief, the recreation director and an avid volunteer in the community. So I'd like to think for 30 years I did so much to help so many people around our area, and then we get into this budget where you would hope to do more. We're not really placed in a position where we're going to do a lot more to help people financially because we're faced with almost a \$2 billion deficit. But hopefully, over the course of time, we can make this a little better.

I, like many others, will be facing cutbacks in the coming weeks and months for our districts, and we're going to face a lot more of that. We're going to get this budget and we're going to get through it, but we have to clean up this financial mess.

All of the things I've worked so hard for I feel got torn down. I really got to thank the Members opposite for giving me the opportunity to get to the bottom of the barrel and try to find my way

back up, because of the over spending and everything else that has left us in this position. Right now, let's just hope and look forward – and this is the path to leading forward.

Under the leadership of our Premier and our Finance Minister, let's hope we get in the right direction. Contrary to a lot of beliefs, we offer competitive rates in this province. Our seniors and low-income workers will come out better off at the end of the day with a cheque coming in every three months.

I'm going to back up, because I come from a background in municipal financing and a town in which we were required to do a balanced budget. If only the government legislated us to have a balanced budget. It's too bad legislation wasn't there to force the governments before us to have a balanced budget because we'd never be in this situation today.

Last year, if you remember, everybody just about lost their minds over the assessed values of their properties and how they went up so fast. A lot of towns will tell you it's a great opportunity for a quick chance for taxes, and people were saying it's too high. There was that much upheaval over it, it made it into the Speech from the Throne that we're going to address the assessed value. Dealing with it for all those years, I understood what it meant. Towns had to modify their assess value rate, the mill rate, to lower the – the tax amount will be the same, just one would offset the other.

It was easy to see when you did it for years, Mr. Speaker, but for a lot of people it was beyond belief because their house went from a \$200,000 value to a \$400,000 value, which meant people believed their taxes were going to double. So I guess that's where I'm sort of leading up into our levy. A lot of people are under the impression that our levy is going to be a lot more taxes. Little did we know that anybody under \$20,000, under this levy, will not be paying the \$300 as was anticipated.

Mr. Speaker, a lady in Greenspond always had a saying: wonderful bad. It used to raise a smile, wonderful bad, and this is a wonderful bad situation we find ourselves in.

We have issues where we talk about billions of dollars, so much that we don't even realize what a billion dollars is anymore. Every time someone opens their mouth it's a billion dollars for this and a billion dollars for that. Years ago a million dollars seemed to be a lot of money, and now we talk about billions like it's absolutely nothing. We are in a serious financial mess. Our job is to get the message out. We have to get the message out to our constituents of the situation we are in. It's easy for everyone to say we're going too fast, too hard, but we're in a situation where something has to be done.

Our new tax levy is going to be a source of revenue. This is much debated. Members opposite, Members of the Third Party, us on this side, we've all felt it on social media. Everyone was quick to like a bad comment on there.

This morning we were given a stat which said 38 per cent of the residents will not even pay the minimum; 43 per cent in this province will pay less than \$340. So, in total, 81 per cent of this province will pay less than \$340 per year into the levy; \$76.4 million will be spent to support seniors. In addition, we're going to spend \$63.7 million on the Trans-Labrador Highway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: And \$23 million on the Team Gushue Highway; \$9.3 million on the lift bridge in Placentia; \$5 million on heavy equipment so that we can maintain our roadwork and everything else; \$13.5 million on vessel repair and refits. I got to say, that's of particular interest to me, because I come from a district where the ferry service is very important to a part of my district.

Right now we need a good system to keep our ferry going. So I'm glad to see Transportation has put in \$13.5 million for refit. We just had a \$50 million boat, and if anyone ever watched the news, you'll see our boat is hanging out downtown. She's not servicing the public. It's of great concern. It's of much debate for the minister and me.

Because of that \$50 million boat, we are trying to repair a 50-year-old boat to put back in service. Now that seems to be a step back, but a 50-year-old boat actually would offer better

service. So thanks to the refit money, we hopefully will get that boat going up and soon.

Right now we're dealing with a smaller boat trying to do – I think the boat, now someone can correct me, can carry somewhere in excess of 30 cars, whereas the new one can do 60. So to say that the boat and crew are taxed to the max would be an understatement.

Another commitment of this government is to the municipalities. Again, I have a strong background in municipalities. The MOG, Municipal Operating Grant, is being maintained again this year. That, I'm sure, comes to much relief of many of the municipalities in this province.

Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador worked hard with PMA and the Department of Municipal Affairs over the last number of years to work on a good fiscal framework for the towns. So we've secured – and I'd say they secured – the MOG which will be used for much of the maintenance in town, from salaries to garbage collection, to water and sewer, to repairs, to road maintenance. So that is a great thing to see.

There's going to be \$72.7 million in capital works. For lots of our infrastructure, it's crumbling. Lots of it was put in shortly after the war or shortly after Confederation, lots of it was put in. So we have a crumbling infrastructure that needs to be addressed. I'm sure the \$72 million, if I talked to the minister over there for Municipal Affairs, he'd probably tell me he needs \$172 million to come up with – but \$72 million at least is put into it. With the 90-10 share for most of the towns not being changed, I'm sure that comes as much relief in this year's budget.

In my district is the fishery. The fishery is very, very prominent in my district. Right now we're working on the LIFO program, which is the Last In, First Out. We're working adamantly with the federal department on that. Our Fogo Island fish plant deals with the shrimp in my area, and I have numerous fishermen that are involved in the fishery. I would think in my area you're looking at in excess of 60 per cent of the employed people get their money or employment through the fishery. We have

numerous tourism sites. If you can start on the Barbour site down in Newtown, you can go to Fogo Island with as many scenic attractions. We have day parks. We have weekend parks. We have parks all over the place. We have beautiful sandy beaches. We have places for people to come and go to.

I apologize for my throat, Mr. Speaker, but I can't get over the flu.

AN HON. MEMBER: Some bad isn't it, b'y?

MR. BRAGG: Yeah, I'm dried right out now.

We're looking at \$5 million that we're going to put into Arts and Culture Centres. Mr. Speaker, \$1.46 million is going to the former American radar site in Hopedale. They're going to replace the T' Railway bridge in Terra Nova for \$530,000.

My Member up in Torngat Mountains will be happy to hear that we're going to have \$351,000 for the Labrador Transportation Grooming Subsidy. He jokes with me often and tells me he's never going to look for pavement.

There's \$8.13 million for renovations to wharfs and ferry terminals, another very important thing. We have the boat; we need the terminal for it and that is very important, that the infrastructure is put in place.

Mr. Speaker, \$62 million for provincial roads and brush clearing. I heard the hon. minister say he needed a billion dollars to satisfy all those needs. So we may not be getting it all at the one time; we're picking at it one piece at a time.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're prioritizing.

MR. BRAGG: We're prioritizing is exactly right.

Overall, there's \$226 million going into transportation infrastructure and \$344 million in municipal infrastructure programs. Through it all, I do believe that this budget, although it has some negative aspects, the positives by far outweigh the negative.

I look forward to getting up and having the opportunity to speak in this House once again.

It's great to serve the residents of my District of Fogo Island – Cape Freels.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to *Budget 2016* on the non-confidence motion. I will say that I believe the Opposition and the Third Party continue to underestimate the seriousness of the situation that we're facing here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

If we look at the unprecedented deficit that we have at \$1.8 billion and had we not made the difficult decisions that we had to make in the budget and kept going down the path of the former administration, the deficit would be at \$2.7 billion. Over a short period of time, it would have happened that our entire net debt over the last 66 years would have been amassed in just five years. Just completely unsustainable.

The previous Member opposite, the Member for St. John's Centre, got up and talked about the great job the Government of Alberta is doing when it comes to their budget and how they're taking care of the economy. Well, unfortunately, Newfoundland and Labrador was not in a position that Alberta was, in the ability to be able to borrow.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: The Alberta government borrowed over \$10 billion in terms of their deficit they have. That impacted them automatically from their AAA rating –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: – for the bond-rating agencies, it went down to an AA rating. If we have not taken the decisions that we had to make – we could not continue to borrow. Borrowing at an unsustainable level would impact our credit rating and that would further make the situation worse.

Right now, we're spending more on debt servicing than in education for our children. Our government clearly believes in economic diversification. Our government believes the answer to building a stronger economy is through diversification, job growth and creation of new jobs.

So innovation is one of those areas that we will be focused on. We've already started work on a new provincial innovation strategy in collaboration with the industry and innovation partners to drive economic growth and focus on ways of which we can measure advanced innovation, productivity and competitiveness, because that's completely key.

When we talk about competitiveness, we also have to talk about the measures that are in budget 2016 and 2017. We have to make sure that our personal income tax is competitive. It is in the Atlantic counterparts and in other parts of the country. When we include a levy and we look at the rates of taxation, where they were in 2006 and where they are today, they are very comparable. Actually, when you look at that across all income levels between the \$10,000 and \$250,000 level, in Newfoundland and Labrador people will pay between \$233 and \$5,000 less in personal income tax, including the levy, than what they paid in 2006.

In *Budget 2016* we're investing in broadband. This is highly critical. We're going to reallocate \$2 million for broadband infrastructure. We're going to work with the private sector and the federal government. Through their Connecting Canadians program, they have \$500 million. So we're going to be very strategic in looking at leveraging dollars to put in broadband infrastructure. Currently, we have a high amount of the population that has access to broadband, but we certainly want to reach all communities that currently do not have access.

When it comes to social enterprise, we realize and recognize the value the social enterprise and non-profit sector plays, and we're leading a development in the social enterprise strategy to enhance the benefits of that sector of the economy. We're growing our forestry and our agriculture opportunities, and in *Budget 2016* we've lived up to the commitment of allocating \$60,000 to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture so that we can help them in terms of growing the industry with their stakeholders and capitalizing on provincial and federal opportunities.

We've done a lot of research and development when it comes to agriculture, looking at the winter wheat program that we currently have in place, looking at opportunities in which we're growing grapes and other fruits here in the province. We certainly have a climate that allows that and has that opportunity.

We're engaging with stakeholders for new entrants, such as when I addressed the egg and chicken farmers at their AGM this week. We're talking to the industries; we're talking to people who are involved in business as to how they can upscale and how they can create new opportunities. When we look at what we want to do in terms of a food security and agriculture growth strategy, we've had stakeholder discussions with farmers and also 22 stakeholder groups on this discussion already. The work is being done.

When we look at Newfoundland and Labrador and our economy of only having 500,000 people, we have significant riches when it comes to our natural resources, when it comes to our business community, when it comes to the human capital that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador, and where we have opportunity for exceptional growth is through trade. We have a lot of opportunity in trade, and we're currently negotiating the agreement on internal trade.

When it comes to reducing barriers for interprovincial trade across this great country of ours, across Canada we also have and we're working through the finalization of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, the Canada-European trade agreement, CETA.

We're also working through TPP. These opportunities present tremendous potential for firms in Newfoundland and Labrador when we look at the shipping opportunities to Europe, whether it be through our Argientia or St. Anthony or looking at the containerized shipping that can go into Canada from the St. John's marketplace.

If we look at trade as well, we have an MOU with Nunavut and we look at the opportunities in the North and the interprovincial trade that could happen with Greenland. We had a delegation of 15 people from Nunavut come here and talk about the opportunities. That was further followed up with our partners in the board of trade.

I'm very pleased that the Minister of Environment and Conservation attended that and further talked about the opportunities and the investments that this government is making in the North, whether it be in the Trans-Labrador Highway or whether it be looking at a feasibility study for a fixed link. These are all things that this government is doing when it talks about making strategic investments in the economy for the long term.

We're also looking at the fishery and looking at making investments there. We have lived up to our obligations for the advisory council on seafood, and also looking at making sure that we're able to get investment into the fisheries. We certainly will work towards establishing a fisheries investment fund, something that this former administration completely failed to do, failed to deliver and was unable to be successful in putting upwards of \$400 million in our fishing industry.

We're also looking at our high-growth firms. When we look at driving economic growth and the agenda, we look at start-ups; we look at new technology in those enterprises, access to venture capital and promotion of research and development. The budget has millions and millions of dollars for R & D through the Research & Development Corporation. It continues to commit on venture capital. We've made investments this year, since becoming government, in venture capital and new jobs that are created in the tech sector, in our tourism and cultural sectors and heritage.

To support economic diversification, the *Budget 2016* has a continued investment of \$13 million for tourism marketing. And actually when you look at tourism right now – and I heard Members talk about having some concern about the tourism market, but right now I've been talking to people in the industry, the accommodators and the bus tour operators. Looking at our own statistics, our website is up 16 per cent, the traffic is at www.newfoundlandandlabrador.com. People are engaged and we're seeing bookings enhanced. We will have a strong tourism season this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: We also are investing \$18.5 million to support culture and heritage and the arts communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We see the value and the importance of doing so and that's why we retain that commitment of \$18.5 million for film, for writing, for productions, for museums, for all sorts of opportunity to support those involved as we develop the status of the artist act.

There are 2,500 businesses involved in the province's tourism sector, of which 82 per cent is small business creating 18,000 jobs. When it comes to regional economic development, we recognize the critical importance of making strategic investments to advance the development and diversification of all regions, both in urban and the rural economy, and directing limited government resources to where they will have the greatest impact.

In fact, we have \$8.5 million in a Regional Development Fund which we will use to leverage other federal, municipal, non-profit and other dollars. One of the recent examples that we've done is that we've provided an investment of \$490,000 to support the expansion of the St. John's Farmers' Market. It supports craft producers, local artisans from the entire region, not just the City of St. John's.

It also looks to contribute to the province culturally, socially and economically. We've also funded the Newfoundland & Labrador Snowmobile Federation to do an economic impact study to look at the value of recreation and snowmobiling, the actual impact that it has on Newfoundland and Labrador.

We look at the infrastructure that's in the budget; this budget has \$570 million for infrastructure to look after things like roads in our province, to look after investments that we have to do for municipalities, major investments that will look to meet needs throughout our entire province and create a thousand jobs. This is quite significant. These are the types of investments that are in this \$8.48 billion budget.

I want to say that we have to have a competitive tax regime. We have to have it not only on the personal level, but we also have to have it for business. The Member opposite talks about taxing the rich, the millionaires that exist in the province, and taxing corporations as the means to solve the \$1.8 billion deficit – well, actually, a \$2.7 billion deficit. It seems like the Member opposite for St. John's Centre wouldn't want to make the changes that are in this budget. The facts are that there are not that many millionaires or people at the top of the income bracket. Even if you tax their income 100 per cent, it would not solve the deficit problem that we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When it comes to business tax, corporate taxation, it has to be competitive to have the appropriate business attraction to create jobs for our regions and our economy so that we can further stimulate growth and have broader economic development. We have the third lowest small business tax rate in the country. That is something that we're quite proud of and that we retained in budget 2016-2017.

When we look at the impacts of budget 2016-2017, what we've done as a government – and it's government's responsibility to balance the impact for those that are most vulnerable in society and also balance social programs and economic policy. This is why we created the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and also the enhanced Seniors' Benefit. So that \$76.4 million will go to those that are most vulnerable, despite Members opposite in the Third Party continuing to talk about and spread misinformation out there in the public, fear mongering to seniors.

I had four public consultations in my own district further explaining to seniors, those that are on fixed incomes, those individuals and families and those with disabilities that there is a

program to help them and further mitigate. Actually, some of these seniors that are on fixed incomes, or a couple who are seniors, are going to be better off based on the program that's in place, even with the consumption tax increases, the levies and everything that's in the current budget.

In fact, 38 per cent of people in Newfoundland and Labrador will not pay the levy because the net taxable income is not over \$20,000. There's a lot of misinformation out there, so I would encourage the general public and the population to reach out to Members of the government here, to their MHA, to get accurate information when it comes to what's available in this \$8.48 billion budget, to look at growing the economy and fixing the financial mess that was created by 12 years of overspending by the former administration that failed to set us on the path that we need to do.

We need to go forward in a way that is going to create economic value. I will be supporting *Budget 2016* as we go forward and create the economy that we need for future generations, for people of my age, our children and the next generation. We have to make the decisions now so that we can build that stronger economy. I thank the Finance Minister, I thank our Premier and I thank all Members on this side of the House for having the courage to present a budget to take the necessary action that is needed to get the province back on track.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm prepared to –

AN HON. MEMBER: Madam Speaker.

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Speaker, sorry. Sorry, it is getting late in here.

I'm prepared to speak for a few moments now on this motion that was made. It is my first

opportunity to speak to this budget. I did speak to a side bill the other evening, but I just wanted to put a few comments out since we are all here talking about it.

I've taken opportunity to listen to Members of this House on both sides over the last number of days – Members of the Opposition, Members of government – and taken some notes and listened to what people had to say. In some cases, especially for my colleagues on this side, many who have never been through the budget debate before, I just wanted to talk a little bit about sometimes the stuff that goes on during this debate. Never having been through this I'm sure it is quite interesting.

The first thing I would say is that you cannot blame the Opposition for doing their job. The Opposition's job is to hold – it's not just to oppose. Sometimes people get the misconception it's to oppose. It's not just to oppose, it's to hold government accountable. It's to hold us accountable. People elected us and I have tremendous respect for the job that Opposition does. I've been there, I've done it. So I can say now, that I've been on both sides and I know the work that goes into it.

I don't blame Opposition, nor should anybody for, in many cases also, that comes with it. Sometimes there's the expression of genuine concern, sometimes there's obviously the fanning the flames that comes with it and, certainly, there's a fair amount of grandstanding that comes with it.

In fact, I heard one Member opposite – and if I'm wrong the person can correct me. Actually, one person said in an interview that budget day was the worst day in the history of the province. Every day we sit in this House and we think about Beaumont-Hamel. For a province that's been through deaths on the ice, death on the water; we've been through financial crises, the closure of the cod fishery –

AN HON. MEMBER: The *Ocean Ranger*.

MR. A. PARSONS: – the *Ocean Ranger*, Cougar. I would say to say that was the worst day in the history of the province is absolutely – I don't even want to use the word shameful, but the fact is let's keep things in context.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. A. PARSONS: I say to the Member opposite: If that wasn't said, then correct me if I'm wrong. I'm being told by the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi that I am misinterpreting. Well, when she gets an opportunity to stand again she can stand up and clarify the remark, but I'm putting it up there.

I would also note that during her time speaking, I didn't say a word. I sat and listened, but I guess the courtesy won't go both ways. Anyhow, I'm going to continue on because I'm talking about the role of the Opposition and the role of government. The fact is Opposition is going to do what they have to do.

I have no doubt Members opposite have gotten called and gotten emails expressing concern. Do you know what? So have we. The fact is there's no one in this House who's going to say that we haven't heard calls, complaints and issues of people wondering how this was done. That comes with it. It's certainly not the first budget or last budget where we will have this kind of outreach, there's no doubt.

I've had people call me, but for every time there is a call of concern expressed, there are also times when – I have an email here. I said the other night I would reference it. I am going to reference it here because this is an actual email sent to myself and my constituency assistant by a constituent who will remain nameless. They don't want their name mentioned. I will even say the date. It was April 27.

They wrote and said – and I won't do what the minister did earlier, I won't reference my name. I'll just say they said my name: Dear Mr. Minister. I don't want to be unparliamentary.

They said: Let me start by saying I fully understand the very difficult and very unpopular decisions you and your government had to make regarding this budget. Given the financial state of our province left by the previous administration, we need a government willing to make those very difficult decisions. Having said that, I do have some reservations with the tax structure; I feel higher-income people will be getting off relatively easy compared to the lower-income class. I feel government should go

back and make changes in that regard. I do have a number of things I need answers to.

I'm a senior citizen with a disability. I received my pension cheque today and after paying all my creditors for the month, I have a total of \$440 for food, clothing, et cetera, until I get my next cheque. You can appreciate my concerns. Number one, will I still be eligible for the Home Heating Rebate? Number two, will I be eligible for the new supplement for low-income residents, and if so, how much? I am a single senior living in my own home.

I think we can all echo this. My constituency assistant got right back. God bless the constituency assistants on every side who do tremendous work for the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I will say in all this the constituency assistants do tremendous work; they answer these calls. No matter who you are, they are the people in our districts who really feel the pulse and are hearing this and answer the questions, so thank them.

In my case, my constituency assistant is a lady named Joanne Clarke, a fantastic person. She actually wrote back and said: Hi, Mr. Blank; it's Joanne. To answer your questions: number one, the Home Heating Rebate has been cancelled and replaced with the annual Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement; number two, yes, you'll be eligible for this Income Supplement.

There will be an online calculator available to the public very soon, which I have access to. This calculator asks you for your net income which, according to the attachment, was blank. They listed this person's income, which I'll just say for the purposes here, was between \$20,000 and \$25,000. There's a line that you would tick off if you're claiming a disability tax credit.

Based on the information, you would qualify for the maximum Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement of \$650. This will be paid four times a year, except for this year when you'll receive two payments together in October for a total of \$325. You will then receive \$162.50 in January 2017 and \$162.50 in April

2017. Thereafter, you'll receive payments July, October, January and April.

The levy tax is based on – and again, the Member opposite can't help herself from heckling, which is unfortunate, because a few years ago she said she wouldn't heckle. The levy tax is based on your income tax which in this case was below \$20,000; therefore, you're under \$20,000 and you will not have to pay the levy. Take care, Joanne.

So the individual wrote back and said: Hi Joanne; God, you guys are fast. Thank you for your response. Yes, I turned 65 in August 2014. That was another question. Will I be eligible for the seniors' annual benefit of \$1,313. If so, I don't have anything to complain about. There are a fair number of seniors in the same boat who I am sure will feel much better once they know this. I would be really interested in getting a copy of this. It will really solve a lot of arguments and put a lot of minds at ease. You take care, Joanne, kindest personal regards.

Finally, just adding to that, this person would be eligible for the full income benefit of \$1,313. The reason I mention this is because we know there are concerns that are expressed by certain Members on the Opposition that, in many cases, are grandstanding. We also have to talk about there are a lot of people – and don't get me wrong, I realize how tough some of the measures are. We all realize that, but there are some people that took the time to contact us and when they put out their information, what they got back, this is their own words: I don't have anything to complain about and I'm sure this will put a lot of minds at ease. That's what we're trying to do is to put minds at ease. In this case this person, they're saying now – this is their own words, this gentleman from my district – they're much better off.

I know that certain Members on the other side don't want to hear it. It's funny, earlier in debate they said they won't even get up and talk about it. When we get up and talk about it, they complain about us talking about it. You can't have it both ways.

So again, I had to put that out there. We're talking, and we're going to keep talking. We can stay all night and keep talking about it. Again,

I'm putting out something that was actually written by a constituent. I'm not complaining about Members of the Official Opposition. Members of the Official Opposition were actually sat on this side at one point, and while I certainly disagree with a lot of the decisions that they made, the same way that they sit there now and disagree with decisions, they at least understand what it was like to be here and make those decisions and have to defend them.

They get that. They understand that. They're doing their job. We are going to disagree. There's no doubt. That is not an issue, but in some cases when you haven't had to do that and you keep making suggestions that absolutely are not realistic, then you have to question it.

I'm going to get plenty of opportunity to discuss this more, because I will take an opportunity to speak to the main motion of the budget as well. I want to speak from a number of levels. I want to speak from the Justice perspective, and I also want to speak from my district. Again, I know there are other people that want to get an opportunity to talk about this budget and they'll certainly get a chance here, but what I will say is that we know this budget has some stringent measures; we get that.

I'm not going to reiterate what Members on this side have said on numerous occasions, which is (a) we got elected under one assumption; (b) we found out that it was a complete mess, more than what we were told; and (c) this is what we had to do. I don't think there's anybody out there that disagrees with that or doesn't get it. I don't think that for a second.

But the other thing, sometimes, that we're not quite realizing is that this budget still has a significant amount of investment in areas like education, infrastructure, in justice, in health care – and ministers are taking the opportunity. A number have done it tonight where they've got up and they've talked about the investment made by their particular department.

So, again, I'm going to talk about Justice, because we've had some difficult things we've had to do in the Justice budget. But we've also had a lot of good things that we've maintained in the Justice budget. Now, the one thing we've talked about, and it's got some attention,

obviously, is the closure of the courts. That's not something that you take lightly. It is certainly not something I take lightly.

It's not unprecedented. We look over at Britain right now which is shutting one-fifth of the courts in England. One-fifth of the courts in England are shutting right now. New Brunswick is actually going through the shuttering of provincial courts. In our case, we had to make tough decisions.

Now, the positive side is – and in many cases, we're still going to work to make sure there's a level of service. I can say this because I'm from a community and I practised law in a community that had the courtroom closed. Three years ago, I had the court closed in Burgeo for a savings of \$600.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who would have done that?

MR. A. PARSONS: Well, it wasn't us. That's the answer to that; it wasn't us.

I've been there; I've seen that. I've seen the court in Port aux Basques closed that was a full court and went down to a circuit court. I've seen it, so I understand the people in the community being upset about that. I get that.

It is going to pose some difficulty, but that's why we're working with the judiciary to make sure that we can address those concerns, whether it be a circuit court, whether it be advances in teleconferencing. In many cases – you look at Wabush, that's a difficult decision. Wabush only had a circuit up until 2007. The caseload has gone down by 48 per cent, so it will probably be a return to the same service that was there nine years ago.

We look at Grand Falls-Windsor, again, a difficult decision. Certainly I've heard from the ministers obviously concerned about that. Those individuals will have to travel 90 kilometres to get that service. I know that's unfortunate when you're used to a certain level, but they get the same service on the West Coast. Many people have to travel three and four hours. It's unfortunate. I don't like it. I'm not trying to say it's an improvement. That's not it at all.

Then when you look at Grand Bank – the Grand Bank Supreme Court, again, was a very difficult decision to make. We're still working through that with the judiciary to see what we can do in terms of circuits. It's one of the lower ones in terms of court numbers. I think the only one lower might be Happy Valley-Goose Bay. There are ways we can do this with technology. Do you know what? The judiciary has been very accommodating and willing to work with us.

Finally, we had the court in Harbour Grace. That was probably one of the toughest in terms of just the sheer numbers, the numbers are there. It's the seventh busiest Provincial Court in the province. It's the seventh busiest, not the third busiest as has been put out there. That's not actually accurate. There's a significant caseload; I get that.

Unfortunately the court was held in a building, the historic courthouse, which was left to rot by an administration that sat there for 12 years and didn't do anything to the point where – actually before we even got in office, you're not allowed to have court there. The fix to that is anywhere from \$5 million to \$10 million. That's a huge expense. The least cost on it now for the new court, where they're having it, is roughly \$300,000 a year.

The fact is I get that it's difficult. I've been working with various Members in my own caucus; the Member for Harbour Grace – Carbonear, Port de Grave – I'll get the names wrong; I'll always be at that – the Minister of Fisheries. I've been talking to the Minister of CYFS, I'm working – do you know what? I've already had a conversation with the mayor; I've had a face-to-face meeting with the mayor. We're trying to work through this to try to minimize it. The Member was there also and very passionate about speaking out for her constituents.

We realize there's an impact there, but it's not something we take lightly. I look forward to working with the judiciary. But that being said, moving forward, I've had questions on policing. There is no less policing out there now than there was last year. None, not one bit. When people say there should be concerns here, well, that's simply not factual.

I can say working with our police forces – working with Grand Falls-Windsor, they came and expressed a concern to us. They said we want 24-7 policing. They said we want it so we said good enough. We went to the RCMP and said this is a concern. They're aware of it.

Well, do you know what? They put 24-7 policing in. I'm happy to report, as I did in the House the other day, it's working. It didn't require more resources and there are actually savings. I know there are other communities out there – Gander, Clarenville – that want to move this way. I'm willing to work with them because we all want safe communities; nobody in this House doesn't want them. But to go out and say that the police are affected is not true. That's the purpose here now, is to make sure the truth is out there.

What else should I continue with in terms of Justice? The fact is we saw a significant effect in Justice. The Crown prosecutors are not affected. The Crown prosecutors are still doing a tremendous job. Our Legal Aid is doing a tremendous job. Our Civil Division is doing a tremendous job.

I will put out something that was brought up earlier in Question Period today. The Member opposite, the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned 85 to 90 lawyers in the department to handle the work. Actually, the number is 38. The other thing, too, is that there's a level of expertise amongst these lawyers. Not everybody is a general practitioner. There are some that handle strictly education. There are some that handle transportation. There are some that handle municipal affairs issues. There are some that handle labour. In fact, I think there are actually a couple.

I would say when it comes to Justice, in case this comes up again, there's always outside counsel retained by the department to handle work. We've got some files – there's tobacco litigation that has been ongoing for over 15 years by outside counsel. It's not a case of not having faith in your department; it's just a case of getting the expertise outside. The crowd opposite should know that because they did it; they did the same thing. You go outside. I actually have a list that's going to be provided showing every outside counsel that was retained,

what they were retained for and how much they were paid. You know what, that should be out there because it's public money.

Would I love to have the expertise in-house to handle the sheer quantity of work? Of course you would, but you can't. In some cases, you have to go outside and exercise those private lawyers because they have the ability to handle that immense amount of work. Is that anything about a lack of faith? I can guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous faith in the lawyers and everybody in the Department of Justice to make sure that we do what is right for the people of this province, and also to make sure we expend taxpayers' dollars in the best way possible.

I can tell you what was easy during this Treasury Board process that we went through in the budget process was to go through and find spots where there was absolutely just no management done, whatsoever, of the budget. To go through and say why are you spending this amount of money on marketing when you don't need it, to cut out vacant positions that were hired, such as media managers, whose job it was to look at newspapers: those were the easy ones to do.

To go through and see why are you spending this much on a line item that has nothing to do with the bottom line, the core fundamentals of that department: that's easy to do and we did that. But the fact is we're still doing the great work that we need to. I'm very lucky that I've come into a department with a number of great individuals. I'm just happy to be there on that team.

In my closing notes here, Mr. Speaker, I will say that I will have another opportunity to speak to this budget. Do you know what? My district saw a significant amount of infrastructure – it is going to see, hopefully, because it was something that was neglected for the last 12 years where you couldn't get roads fixed. Roads were collapsing and they couldn't be fixed; Municipal Affairs where they couldn't get – you got zero capital works to do water work. Couldn't get a thing because, again, I guess there just wasn't any money there.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I look forward to

speaking again and hearing the Members' comments.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand and have a few words, just for a few minutes, on part of the debate of the budget, Mr. Speaker.

I always heard the old saying – back in our way in Curling – if someone says something and it's not true, if you don't correct it, people will always believe it's true. So, Mr. Speaker, today I sat here, as I usually do, very quietly and just listened to the speakers here in the House and I just made a few notes. There are some things that I have to clarify and just put out the honest truth of it.

The Member for St. John's Centre got up today and said why don't you do like Alberta did. Facts do not matter to her. Stand up and just go off, it doesn't matter, just keep saying whatever. If she ever looked at it, right now Alberta has an \$18 billion surplus in their heritage fund. They have no debt. They can take on some debt.

So when the Member for St. John's Centre stands up and says: Why didn't you do what Alberta did, it's easy – it's easy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Why doesn't she just do a bit of fact checking? Why doesn't she do a bit of work on it?

To accuse the government here – you're not like Alberta. Alberta's NDP government just went out and borrowed \$30 billion. Why don't you do a bit of fact checking? Why don't you do a bit of homework on it instead of walking in here, grabbing your paper, standing up and giving this

big speech, as if we're doing something bad in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker?

There's lots on the budget that you can say we could have done differently, but don't go throwing out things that are just not true. We can't do what Alberta did. Just because she wants to show off what the big Alberta premier did, she should check her facts.

Mr. Speaker, I heard her say here today – and I was astonished. Once again, you can't let it go unchecked because pretty soon she's going to start believing her own comments that she's making in the House. How infrastructure is cut – there's \$575 million of infrastructure in the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't she just read the budget? To stand up here and say infrastructure is cut in the province, it's just not true. We can't let that go ahead. There's plenty of money for infrastructure in the budget. For her to stand up and say, oh, it's all cut; I think the Member for St. John's Centre should be more responsible when making those statements.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing she was talking about – no supplement. It won't help the low income. Absolutely not true. The Minister of Finance offered the Third Party and the Opposition a briefing on the Income Supplement. They wouldn't take them up on it. Do you know what they would rather do? Stand up there and just pass on all the false information.

There's plenty in the budget you can say we could have done a different way. Absolutely, there's plenty. It was a tough budget. Every one of us here agrees. But standing up and making statements, which is totally irresponsible and totally false, just to feed and then put more shiver into people in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is irresponsible.

I say again, the Minister of Finance offered briefings. They would not take up the Minister of Finance on the briefings that were offered, Mr. Speaker. That is just absolutely shameful. Yet, they'll stand up and make comments which

is irresponsible, not true and does nothing to add to the debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, you take the Department of Municipal Affairs and the money that's being spent in our municipalities. I'll use one of the departments, the Department of Municipal Affairs.

The Opposition has always been saying, well, the cost ratio is going to be cut and the money is going to be cut for infrastructure. I heard the Leader of the Opposition state here many times: How about your friends in Ottawa? I can tell you our friends in Ottawa, led by Judy Foote and the other six MPs, helped this province out with municipal affairs, helped this province out with infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: They understand the needs of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can tell you how close they are – the Leader of the Opposition is always saying your friends in Ottawa. Our friends in Ottawa are calling us every day, what else can we do to help, how else can we work together to make this province a better place, Mr. Speaker.

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: Here's the Member for Cape St. Francis – go over it again, Mr. Speaker. You heard him today; you had to cut him off three and four times today. I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker; he knows what to ask for in his own district because he knows the money is coming from Ottawa. I guarantee you that. He might be shouting there now, but he's also shouting when he's looking for infrastructure money, I can tell you that. Which he should, I make no bones about it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Don't stand here and say, oh, what great money we're getting for infrastructure and all of a sudden stand up the next day or let your leader stand up and say,

there's nothing coming from Ottawa when they're getting direct benefits – saying what a great job. That's the difference. I always prided myself if there was something done good, even when we were in Opposition, recognize it. Everything in this budget is not bad.

Mr. Speaker, when the cost-shared ratio stayed the same, how many people in Newfoundland and Labrador heard the Opposition – I think the Member for Cape St. Francis mentioned it once because I kept a tally. He mentioned it once. How many times did they stand up and say it was a great move for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador trying to keep rural Newfoundland together, trying to put infrastructure in for investments for business or for tourism – how many? One, and that was very, very briefly.

You hear the rest of them standing up how bad it's all going in Newfoundland and Labrador, how bad the economy is for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. There's going to be plenty of money spent here in Newfoundland and Labrador in capital works and in infrastructure from the Department of Transportation and Works. We have to recognize that. We can say doom and gloom as much as we like, and there's plenty in the budget that you can see we could have done, but there are a lot of positive things in that budget, a lot of positive things.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just give an example. Part of the sustainable plan that we have is Crown lands. I know Members opposite don't want to hear this. I know you don't, because you don't want to hear anything positive, no matter how small it is. I understand that. I understand it. We made a commitment that if there are Crown lands in a municipality that we would help the municipalities. Guess what? There are municipalities with frozen land in their municipal boundaries for economic development in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. They're coming forward now to say we have plans to create some economic development; can we freeze the Crown lands? And it has been frozen for them. It has been frozen.

Not like the Members opposite who, years ago, did some *Lands Act* review, and it is still not brought in, still waiting for it to come in. I'll bring it in, I guarantee you that. That *Lands Act*

review will be brought into this Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I'll give you another good example. We're in for what, three or four months? The Member here, the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development – guess what the Member is looking for now? Guess what?

AN HON. MEMBER: Crown lands.

MR. JOYCE: Crown lands, Mr. Speaker, for agriculture in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: This Member here is after contacting us and saying show us the Crown land that we can freeze for the farmers in this province, the hard-working farmers, so that we can freeze it and we can start economic development in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what this minister is doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: Diversification.

MR. JOYCE: Diversification. Three months and there's already major headway.

When I spoke to some of the people in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, who are working with the department, I said: Why didn't this go ahead before? Do you know what I was told? They wouldn't free up the land. There were business people coming in – I think 300 or 400 acres of land out in Stephenville way, out in Codroy Valley way. Do you know what happened? They couldn't get together. The farmers walked away. They said we can't put up with this. After three and four years of trying get land for agriculture to diversify, and this government wouldn't allow it.

Now all of a sudden, this is moving – I know the Minister of Environment also is on it. We're trying to get this land frozen so that we can start some development, yet we're being criticized for that. That's the kind of thing – I have no

problem with being criticized, but criticized for the right reasons, not because there are positive things happening in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I say to the Members opposite: You always pride yourselves on Newfoundland and Labrador. Go out and ask how many towns and municipalities right now – how pleased they are with the budget this year. Go out and ask them. Just don't stand over there behind your desks and shout; go ask a few of the mayors.

I spoke to a lot of your mayors. They're happy. They're pleased. They can see some development going to happen in their towns, Mr. Speaker. That's what we have to do. We just can't sit here and criticize and not recognize the good. You should jump on board, help out.

There are times Opposition should stand up and say: Here's how we would have done things differently. I agree. I agree 100 per cent, but there are positive things that we need your help on. We have to work together on all this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing in this budget – and it is something that got lost in the budget. I'm not one to always go out and say here's what we're doing as a government because we should be doing it and I know the government before did it also.

There is \$70 million for non-profit groups. The Minister of Finance stood up and said we will make sure that you have the same level of funding. But then we get the Third Party standing up and saying how all the money is cut, how there's no money there. Mr. Speaker, \$70 million, even before the budget came up –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. JOYCE: Seventy million dollars for the non-profit groups. Yet, the Third Party stands up and says everything is cut, there's no money there. It's just absolutely not true. It's just not true.

Those are the kinds of things that are in the budget. Those are the positive things that are in the budget. They're the kind of things, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of groups – they always talk

about being criticized for the budget. You better believe we hear it. You better believe we hear some of things about the temporary levy. But I can guarantee you one thing; I hear a lot of positive things in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, we've been in for four months. Don't judge us on four months. You wait three and four years and see how we're going to move forward. We had a tough decision to make. I can guarantee you everybody on this side of the House – when you walk in and you face what we had to face, we had to make tough decisions.

Like I told some people today – a few councillors and a few town councils – what do you want us to do? Did you want us to cut the MOGs? Did you want us to cut the cost-shared ratio? We need to take a balanced approach and this is short term.

The Member for Mount Pearl North said he was surprised there weren't more cuts to services. That's the decision we were faced with. Do we lay off another thousand people? Do we cut more services? These are the decisions we had to make.

The Member for Mount Pearl North: Go out and make the announcement on the hospital again for the fifth time b'y. Do something positive b'y. For God's sake, go out and make it on the hospital.

MR. KENT: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I heard a comment by the Member for Mount Pearl North. I ask him to withdraw it.

MR. KENT: I withdraw the comment, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know I always tell the truth in this House. I thank the minister for withdrawing the comment, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: I know, Mr. Speaker. It just gets kind of hot when you want to give positive information out to the public. I understand that.

I was getting back to the \$70 million for the non-profit groups and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. There's another thing I'm going to bring up now and it's the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition got up today and talked about presumptive cancers and all that. He put in a petition, Mr. Speaker.

When he got up today and made the petition, the part on the presumptive cancer, this is what's so ironic. This is why I have to inform people. He got up today with the petition. The stat review for workers' compensation was in their hands for almost three years. They wouldn't bring it forward in this Legislature for almost three years. Now, all of a sudden, they're over there in the Opposition and started saying here's what you should do. They had the opportunity to do it and they wouldn't do it. That's the difference, Mr. Speaker. Now, all of a sudden, they have the answers to everything.

When I saw that today, the Leader of the Opposition standing up there today, Mr. Speaker, and asking to bring this forward when he had it in his hand, as the premier of the province he should have ordered it to be done. Do you know what they did? They buried it.

That's the difference with this government. You may not like the decisions that are going to come forth, but we will make the decisions that we have to make in this province. As I said before, the stat review will be brought forward in this Legislature this fall.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: It will be brought forward because it's the injured workers. When you do a stat review on workers' compensation it is for the injured workers. If you can bring some legislation forth to ensure that we're providing safety to people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, you would do it. We will never sit on it for three years, to stand up the minute you get over there and say, well,

where is it. Three years, Mr. Speaker, that's the difference.

You may criticize our decisions, you may not like what we're doing, you may say we should do it a different way, but when we were faced with what we were faced with, we made the decisions. I ask the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, stay with us, judge us in three years' time, not three months' time, not looking after a mess, Mr. Speaker, a mess that we had with a \$2.7 billion deficit.

I say to the Third Party, when you want to stand in this House, when you want to stand in this Legislature, get your facts straight. I, for one, will stand here and I will make a note of it. I will make sure that the information put forward is going to be accurate, Mr. Speaker.

Just in closing, Mr. Speaker, you hear a lot of people out criticizing a lot of the work that the Members are doing and facing them. I know, I can start naming them here how many people here went out to the rallies that they had. They went out to the rallies; they faced them.

I know the Member for Corner Brook went with me in Corner Brook. I know the Member for Lab West went to some. I know the two from Stephenville, Bonavista, went out for one. We all went out, so don't ever say that we're hiding from the people. Don't ever say that because it's just not true. When I hear the Opposition say, oh, you're hiding. It's just not true.

MR. KENT: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Mount Pearl North, go out and make another announcement on the hospital. Go ahead; they're waiting for you to come out. I can't wait. Go right ahead. There's one thing we won't do, we won't stand up here in this Legislature and pretend that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: The Member for Mount – I must have hit a bad chord, did I? I say to the Member for Mount Pearl North, I wouldn't blame you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: After walking out and telling them, yes, the long-term care is coming, changing around and saying, yes, we're making an announcement. The Leader of the Opposition, as premier, went out; the hospital is starting in 2015.

I don't blame you for being upset. I don't blame you when I bring this honesty up, Mr. Speaker. Gerald Parsons said it to you right when he spoke to you. Gerald Parsons has a few good words and he said it to you right.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: So listen, Mr. Speaker, I understand the Member for Mount Pearl North just can't sit there and take it, because the positive things can't happen. He can't take it and I can tell you why. I'll tell you why, it's all illusion.

When they were going on with the budget, Mr. Speaker, they were saying here's what we're going to do. They forgot about the other \$800 million they forgot to tell people in the province. They forgot about that. The same thing with the hospital in Corner Brook, the same with the long-term care and I can go on and on. They forgot about putting it all out there.

I don't mind making a decision, Mr. Speaker. I don't mind if people don't think it's right or wrong.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: I don't mind who's right or wrong, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that. I don't mind, but I will make the decision and the people on this side will make the decisions. We're making it in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, there is one thing I will honestly say. I have never been so proud to be a bunch

who stuck together on this budget through hard times. I've been through it in '89. I've been through this, Mr. Speaker. I told our caucus I've been through it. I can honestly tell you, it's tough. It's tough on all of us. It's tough on every person on this side of the House of Assembly because we have to go home. We have to face the people who elected us. We have to face those people.

The president of the association, Barry Wheeler, he resigned. I sat down and had lunch with Barry that Saturday. I explained to him some of the information and Barry understood. Am I ever going to not return Barry Wheeler's phone call? Am I ever not going to drop by his house to have a cup of tea? Of course not. He's entitled to his opinion. Every Member on this side is saying express your opinion, but we'll give you the facts.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I can see my time is near. I just want to say how proud I am of all the Members on this side for facing the public, hearing their concerns, hearing their frustration, but I can tell you, we're a proud bunch. We'll stick together. We will make Newfoundland and Labrador a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, is the House ready for the question on the amendment?

All those in favour of the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips ready for the vote?

All those in favour of the amendment, please stand.

CLERK (Ms. Barnes): Mr. Paul Davis, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Kent, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Petten, Ms. Michael, Ms. Rogers.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the amendment, please stand.

CLERK: Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Trimper, Mr. Browne, Ms. Gambin-Walsh, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Letto, Ms. Haley, Mr. Bernard Davis, Mr. Derek Bennett, Mr. Holloway, Mr. Bragg, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Warr, Mr. Finn, Mr. Reid, Mr. Dean, Mr. King.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: nine; the nays: 24.

MR. SPEAKER: I declare the amendment defeated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

At this point, I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that the House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Against?

The House is adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.