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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 2:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today for Members' statements we have the Members for the Districts of Lewisporte – Twillingate, Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, Exploits, Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair and Stephenville – Port au Port.

The hon. the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize a young gentleman in my district from the community of Herring Neck. Cameron Rice is currently 16 years old and attending grade 11 at New World Island Academy. Cameron is a very active student participating in school sports, the jazz band and also playing minor hockey.

Cameron is better known in his community for all his dedicated volunteer service. At the age of 13, Cameron really took a leadership role in the community. He was instrumental in organizing the 2014 Come Home Year Celebrations. From the success, Cameron, along with other volunteers, continued to host the annual Herring Neck Dory Races.

During the Christmas season, Cameron was concerned there was no community supper, so he took it upon himself to organize a potluck meal for residents in his community. He even paid for the Christmas decorations, tablecloths, plates and cutlery out of his own money and being a talented musician, he performed to a full house.

Cameron is a true testament of what our youth can do for the betterment of our communities. Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in honouring Cameron Rice for his dedicated volunteer service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the outstanding public speaking abilities of youth in my district who participated in the Lions Club Annual Speak Offs, local and zone, both of which were hosted this year by the St. Alban's Lions Club.

The first place winner was Julie Young whose topic this year was that music should be a part of every child's life. Melanie Collier placed second and Bianca Stokes placed third. Julie placed first at the local speak out with nine other participants, and went on to win the zone speak out. Congratulations also to Maggie Adams Vaslett who placed second at the zone speak out. From there, Julie went on to compete in the Lions Club International District 3N Speak Out in Corner Brook.

All these extremely bright, young ladies continue to show their outstanding ability for public speaking and they certainly make us all very proud. I would also like to throw a bouquet to the Lions Clubs, teachers, parents and volunteers who assist the young in developing their oratory talent and skills. I throw a special bouquet to Julie's grandma, Ethel Burt, who was one of the best English teachers ever.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in delivering accolades to all the fine young ladies who show such courage in highlighting important issues and concerns in our society today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to commend the Botwood Collegiate Robotics Team, which has won a number of significant accolades over the course of the last eight years it has been around.

On April 8, the team competed in the Skills Canada Provincial Competition and were awarded a first-place finish. They will travel to Moncton in June to represent Newfoundland and Labrador in the national Skills Canada competition. During last year's national competition in Saskatoon, the team won silver.

I have to commend teacher/sponsor Brian Antle, who is the vice-principal of Botwood Collegiate. He has sponsored the team for eight years and also serves as the provincial technical chair for the running the annual provincial competition in St. John's.

His sponsorship of the Robotics Team demonstrates his commitment to empowering his students to develop technical and creative skills that will set them up for a lifetime of success.

Please join me in thanking Mr. Antle for his mentorship of the Botwood Collegiate Robotics Team, and congratulate the team and wish them the best of luck as they represent our province in the national competition in June.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a burgeoning sport in my district. In September 2014, thanks primarily to Didier Naulleau, a retired master warrant officer, a Judo club was born in the Labrador Straits. Classes are held three times a week as an extracurricular program of Labrador Straits Academy and open to ages 5 to 99.

The Labrador Straits Academy Judo Club has 25 students, no monthly fees and is operated by a group of very dedicated volunteers. Equipment was obtained through fundraising efforts and complimentary delivery services from the Labrador Fishermen's Union Shrimp Company Ltd.

In April eight students travelled to Gander to compete in their very first provincial tournament and they walked away with a stellar showing. Colton McClean and Noah Normore received

gold; Jada Normore, Keegan Fowler and TJ Flynn received silver; Michael Normore and Lucas Buckle received bronze; Corey Normore received a participation medal and Jada Normore was named Most Spirited Judoka of the tournament.

It's simply remarkable when a small school walks away from a provincial tournament with seven medals, demonstrating they can compete on the big stage.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Labrador Straits Academy Judo Club and we wish them much luck into the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge Michelle and Andre Jesso of Three Rock Cove. A husband and wife team, Captain Andre and First Mate Michelle have fished together for over 30 years. Their boat, *Wave on Wave*, is based out of Piccadilly and they fish in Port au Port Bay.

For the past two years, this dynamic couple and their crew have been featured on the *Cold Water Cowboys* television series. Now in its third season, this show has put a tremendous spotlight on our province's fishing industry. Fans of the show reach out from as far away as Europe and Africa. Their following has earned them a celebrity status they never anticipated.

They are as passionate about helping others as they are about their profession. They've used their newfound celebrity to do just that. Having held several very successful fundraising efforts; they have contributed to organizations such as the Bay St. George Women's Centre and the Janeway. They have also partnered with Coleman's Food Centre to promote healthy eating and the importance of consuming healthy protein like fish in one's diet.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Michelle and Andre Jesso on their success and their ongoing efforts in being strong ambassadors for the fishing industry and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. SPEAKER: For Honour 100 today we have the Member for the District of Gander.

MR. HAGGIE: I will now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine. This will be followed by a moment of silence.

Lest we forget: William Blackler Knight, Cecil James Knott, Harold Knott, William Knott, William A. Knowling, George B. Lacey, Harry Lacey, Robert Joseph Lahey, Anthony Joseph Lamb, Frederick Lambert, John Lambert, John Lambert, Gideon Harland Lane, Malcolm Lane, John Langer, George Langmead, James Joseph Lannigan, James Lannon, Michael Francis Lannon, William Joseph Lannon, Francis Lavigne, William G. Lawrence, Samuel John Learning, Charley Leary, Robert LeBuff, James Allen Ledingham, Edward LeDrew, George Hussey LeDrew, Herbert LeDrew, John F. LeDrew, Albert Lee, Joseph Legge, Marcus Legge, Walter LeGrow, Wallace James LeMessurier, James Leonard, Michael Leonard, William Leonard, Manuel LePage, James H. LeRiche.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to speak to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as we think about family and friends in Fort McMurray during the devastating wildfire and resulting mass evacuation.

The wildfire that is currently raging in Alberta and those impacted, including the thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians living and working there are foremost in our thoughts today. Like my hon. colleagues in this House and all residents, we have seen the images carried on mainstream media and through social media.

Last night our province reached out to offer help in whatever way that was needed. Today, I have a call scheduled with the Alberta premier, Rachel Notley, to discuss this further.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government is ready to respond to the needs of the residents of Fort McMurray. We are in contact with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry to offer our assistance. We will coordinate our actions through our Mutual Aid Resources Sharing Agreement and the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, through the Forestry and Agrifoods Agency to make our resources available.

While sharing our resources, we will continue to be equipped to protect our province, our people and our forest resources in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have responded to other provinces in situations like this one. In the past we have sent aircraft, firefighters and our Incident Management Team to Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

Today is International Firefighters Day. We want to take this opportunity to also thank the courageous firefighters for keeping our family and our friends, both in Alberta and right here at home, safe.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Fort McMurray today. For anyone concerned about the whereabouts of a friend or loved one in the area, please call the Alberta Red Cross at 1-888-350-6070.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the Premier for providing us with an advance copy of his statement today. Mr. Speaker, our thoughts along with the thoughts of the entire province are with those in Fort McMurray, especially the 60,000 residents who have had to evacuate their homes during this enormous tragedy.

While the situation is still developing, it's our hope, of course, that they get the proper assistance and support as soon as they can to assist them in these tragic circumstances, so they can focus and turn a page and focus on rebuilding. I want to acknowledge and thank the government for reaching out to Alberta and offering support and assistance to the Fort McMurray area and the people that live there.

As we know in this province, Fort McMurray has a very special place in our hearts for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's served as a second home to so many of our own family and friends.

I'm very pleased as well to see the Canadian Red Cross is now accepting donations and coordinating efforts to support people in their homes. I encourage everyone to contact the Canadian Red Cross and do anything we can to lend a helping hand to those in Fort McMurray.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement. We hold all the people of Fort McMurray and our loved ones living and working here in our hearts. We have not heard of a single fatality which is a great testimony to the emergency response planners and firefighters courageously and generously battling this terrible fire. We thank them for their service.

This tragedy once again shows us the beauty of the human spirit with people reaching out to help and protect one another. Thank you to all from this province gearing up to help the people of Fort McMurray. We support the commitment to share our resources to help the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to provide an update on the Waypoints Foster Family Support Pilot Project. This project is a collaboration between Child, Youth and Family Services, the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association and Waypoints.

Waypoints, a non-profit organization providing child and youth care for more than 35 years, provides after-hours support, crisis response and training to foster parents through this new pilot project. The project recognizes the current skills and expertise of foster families and builds upon their competencies, further enhancing the quality of care provided to children and youth in care.

Currently, there are 17 foster families receiving support from the project and, since January 2016, four training sessions have been provided – *The Impact of Trauma, Effective Discipline, Developing Relationships* and *Taking Care of Yourself*.

Mr. Speaker, our government continues its commitment to child protection with support of approximately \$150 million in Budget 2016 which allows for ongoing initiatives such as this pilot. We know the positive impact this initiative is having on our foster families, and we will continue to work closely with Waypoints and the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services for an advance copy of her statement. We are happy to hear that the current government chose to continue with this very valuable program, a partnership with a fantastic non-profit community organization that has much to offer in such an arrangement.

The Foster Family Support Pilot Project was developed in response to a growing need for additional resources to support our province's foster families. We know that there are increasing pressures on our foster system and the need for additional foster families continues to grow. One way to ensure more people are willing to come forward to become foster parents is to establish appropriate provisions.

Fostering, while so fulfilling, has its share of challenges. We need to make sure we have the supports in place for these families. This pilot does just that.

Before –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. The Waypoints pilot project providing foster families with on-the-ground support and training is a great step forward. I commend the foster families in our province for the important work that they do welcoming children into their homes and into their families, children who so badly need their help.

Pilot projects like this one will hopefully encourage more families to foster and that the

new supports to these families will become part of a permanent program. Bravo!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

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

The Liberals speaking points are changing on a daily basis in regard to this budget. They've said that people don't understand. They've said the media don't get it. Just yesterday, they blamed the Opposition parties for not explaining their budget. They have no plan, no vision, no focus on the people who elected them. It's time to show some leadership, some flexibility and respond to what people are asking for.

I ask the Premier: Will you listen as you promised to do? Will you reconvene your team of leaders and revisit this budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the comments made yesterday, particularly those around the Opposition, were really about not putting out some of the other information that was in this budget that the Opposition is quite aware of. As a matter of fact, it was the Opposition who even refused to come and get a briefing session on some of the important elements around this budget: things like the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement where there is over \$74 million available to help low-income families; things like the \$570 million in infrastructure spending that's included in this budget. There are many other things.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the fact around the levy. It is a temporary levy, one that as soon as we are in a financial situation – the plan is already in place; that's been outlined in this budget. It is a

temporary levy, one thing the Opposition has refused to continue to discuss.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I remind the Premier, it's not our job to sell their budget. It's the people of the province who are having difficulty understanding this; as well, the media are having difficulty. They're the ones who need the briefing from the government.

The Minister of Finance, herself, seemed caught off guard yesterday when asked by the media: Who will actually benefit from her own budget? She said it was difficult to know, but that those most vulnerable will be protected. She went on to say she wasn't sure if it was one or 100 or 1,000 people who would be better off. She had no way of knowing.

I ask the Premier: When your own caucus is having problems explaining your budget, how do you expect the people of the province to make sense of the choices that you've made?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, there are 424,000 tax filers in our province. Every single one of those tax filers has a unique set of circumstances as to how they would be paying taxes and also how they would be consuming products that would incur consumption taxes.

It would be impossible for a province the size of ours to create a tool that will provide an example of every single tax filer. What we have done, as I said in the media yesterday, we have provided clarity with the Newfoundland Income Supplement calculator so individuals who are the lowest income people can understand what they're going to get, and we've also provided all the information in tax tables so everybody else can see the information as well, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm trying to tell the Premier that it's the people of the province who are having difficulty understanding the budget, Mr. Speaker. The minister can get up and give us all the facts and figures here in the House, invite us over for briefings, but it's the people of the province who are having difficulty understanding the mixed messages that are coming from your government.

The current Premier, he has told the people that we have a plan and the people are going to like it. So I say to the Premier, I spoke to a lady today who just barely gets by, a senior lady. She doesn't qualify for the low-income supplement that you rave about and she's in fear of paying her bills. She's looking for some reason to feel that she's going to be okay.

So I ask the Premier: You're on the record as stating that all seniors will be better off in your budget, so what is in there for this lady?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, if the former premier didn't know the answer to that, I would encourage the lady to call our office and we will go through the options and the services that available to someone in her position.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the point is that people don't understand. It's not about me telling her who to call. They're not getting the message, Premier. They're not understanding how they're going to benefit from this budget.

The minister spent days and days and days telling people there was something bad for everyone in the budget, and now you've switched and said no, it's a good budget. People are confused by this.

Mr. Speaker, they're angry. They feel personally betrayed by this Liberal government. The Liberal sold people what many considered a fairy tale, a bunch of magic beans and the Liberals told the people no tax increases, no layoffs, no hardships and a stronger tomorrow. People can't find any of that, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier campaigned on the only thing he'll eliminate was waste. Teacher cuts, health care workers, eliminating 40 long-term care beds, is this all the waste that you said you were going to eliminate, Premier?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The former premier knows very well the numbers that he had access to long before the election, refused to share them with the information – I would like to ask the former premier: Why is it that he held on to that information? As a matter of fact, the information in his own election platform that he campaigned on, that the NDP campaigned on, the numbers were wrong when you released your platform and the former premier knew the numbers were wrong at the time, yet refused to make them public. I'd like to ask the former premier why he did not let the people know that during your election.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

If hon. Members in this House want to be recognized by the Speaker, I'm asking you to respect the person that the Speaker has

recognized to speak, whether it's a question or an answer. If Members continue and persist in interrupting when another Member is speaking, they will not be recognized by the Speaker.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, last year in our budget, we laid it out for the people of the province the circumstances we faced. We were going into a budget saying we were going to increase taxes, we're going to reduce services and programs and the public service. We went to an election saying we had to make hard decisions. Much unlike what the Members opposite who promised the world to the people of the province; they sold them a bill of goods, Mr. Speaker, is what they did. They sold them a bill of goods.

Last night, Mr. Speaker, right here in this House, the Minister of Education well, we saw what I think was a meltdown. It was a temper tantrum at the very least. He thumped his fist on the table and he stated no matter what he is going to cancel leases on the regional library in Conception Bay South and the regional library in Corner Brook if it was the last thing that he did.

Mr. Premier, I'll ask you this: Do you support this type of behaviour by the Ministers of the Crown that represent you? Do you support the closures of these regional libraries? It is clear (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, speaking about poor behaviour, last year during the budget that the former premier just mentioned, he outlined a plan for the province. His plan that he said was the way forward for Newfoundland and Labrador. His plan last year said that this year there would be less than \$900 million in the deficit. In less than one year – in one year, under his plan it would have been \$2.7 billion.

Mr. Speaker, that's a big miss. That miss would have led to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in just seven years owing for every man, woman and child nearly \$53,000 per person. That's the plan that the former premier is trying to defend. He wanted the biggest industry in our province to be one paying interest on the missed failures and the mismanagement of his administration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I'm pleased to see that the Premier did not defend the minister's behaviour here in the House last night. I would suggest to the Premier that investing in libraries and in literacy is a much wiser investment than paying upwards of \$500 per hour for external legal and communications counsel. I think that would be a better investment.

I ask the Minister of Education: When you flip-flopped on your decision last night, did you include this reduction in your budget? Was this part of your budget plan, or did you just make this decision up last night based on the emotions we saw in the House of Assembly yesterday?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I was emotional in the House of Assembly last night because of Members opposite and individuals referring to children with special education needs as leftovers. As I said last night, I will not stand for children with disabilities being referred to in that way, and discussions in this House of Assembly about the good students and then the leftovers. I'm not going to stand for that.

I apologize to the Member – who I didn't see him over there last night paying attention to me. I apologize if he was upset about what I said.

What I said last night was that we had two library operations that had a negligible charge to government, and then the previous administration entered into agreements to the tune of over \$200,000 per library.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, since the budget, the Minister of Education confirmed to me, in a conversation we had, that he was committed to the library in CBS. CBS must be part of our regional system.

He confirmed the funding was committed to. He went so far as to say you can publicly say that the minister – he spoke to the minister and he is committed to the project and funding. Feel free to tell whoever.

I ask the minister: Why the change? What happened last night? Why the flip-flop?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to maintaining the library in Conception Bay South. There's no question about that. I spoke to the mayor about that several times, including today. That's not the problem.

The problem with the CBS library proposal that was basically endorsed by the Education minister of the day is that the previous operation, the lease cost zero because it was in a municipal building. The lease that the previous government endorsed is 25 years at \$230,000 a year; from zero a year to \$230,000 a year locked in for 25 years. That's the lease arrangement that they want for CBS. The mayor himself has more or less said we can find a better deal than that for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, two regional libraries the minister has targeted, CBS and Corner Brook – he left out Corner Brook; he's not alluding to that one. The regional library system that he's proposing will serve one-fifth of the population, upwards of probably 100,000 people.

The minister has touted the regional library system, yet now he says he's going to close down – his quote today is a bit different than what he said last night. He was pretty good last night in his tantrum. If it's the last thing he ever does he was going to do that. I had to listen again this morning, Mr. Speaker, to make sure I had his facts right.

I ask the minister: It's a bit of a change in tone today, but how can you eliminate two libraries when you're saying regional libraries are the future of the province? That's not what you said last night.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, let's just recap here. I did not say that.

The Member for Mount Pearl North took to Twitter spreading false information about what was said here in the House of Assembly and I ask anybody to review the record. That's the Member for Mount Pearl North's record of behaviour around this budget. So that's not true.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Corner Brook situation is that the previous library was in government owned space that cost nothing additional to the people of the province. The minister in that government put us into a situation where we're paying now over \$200,000 a year in a 20-year lease. That's what they

endorsed. There's a problem with this. We went from zero in both instances to almost half a million dollars.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised to diversify the economy. We've been reviewing the budget Estimates over the past couple of weeks and we haven't seen any economic diversification revenue budget in current for future years. The only revenue the Liberals will generate is from the pockets of the people through taxes and fees.

I ask the Premier: When will we see your heralded plan to generate revenue, or is it simply to take a lazy way out and continue to tax, tax and more tax?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking of the lazy route, the route that this former administration had this province on which would have led to an unprecedented amount of borrowing, 66 years since Confederation, \$12.4 billion in debt accumulated during that 66 years, that would have doubled under your borrowing strategy. Is that what you call economic diversification, go to the banks and find which one has a diversified portfolio that you can borrow more money from?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, the question was about his plan and what he was going to do. So from his answer there's no revenue for economic diversification from the plan. So he's answered the question. Alarming!

Mr. Speaker, frustration is building as people do not understand the Liberal budget choices. The Minister of Finance is having trouble explaining the budget to the people of the province.

Yesterday, in a media scrum the minister could not identify who would benefit from the budget.

I ask the minister: What groups are better off and how many people are doing better based on your calculations?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I think there are many people in this province who are learning the harsh reality of this budget in the context of what would have happened had we not taken action. We are spending more than we have, we are borrowing the most we have in our history and our costs and our risks of borrowing are greater than any province in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this week, and up to the budget and since then, we have had individuals who have reached out and said the people they want to make sure don't bear the burden of the mistakes of the former administration are the ones in future generations that they would like to punt this problem to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister isn't able to tell us who's going to benefit. So I'll ask her this: If she doesn't know who's going to be affected, how can her revenue projections in her budget, based on the levy, income tax and other taxes in the budget be accurate when she doesn't know who's being affected and negatively affected and what the revenue generation is going to be? How is your budget going to be accurate?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, we realize that this budget is a very difficult budget for the people of the province. There's no doubt about that. Nobody in this House is ever going to argue that fact. The reality is that had we done nothing, our province would have been faced

with significant risks to be able to finance the critical services that we have to offer.

Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite continue to not acknowledge the reality of the very difficult fiscal situation that we are in. We invested \$74 million to ensure that the most vulnerable in our province are protected as part of this budget. We will continue to make decisions on how to continue to mitigate those things as time progresses, but we will not kick the can into the future and put our province at risk of other crises.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: No answer again, Mr. Speaker. She's preparing a budget and she doesn't know what the impact to people is going to be based on the rates and additional fees they brought in. We should be good later in the year when they're trying to figure out how they're balancing their budget or where they are with it.

Mr. Speaker, a single, 22-year-old working mother with a young son tells me with the increases in home and automobile insurance, increasing gas, no Home Heating Rebate and all the other taxes and fees, even without including the Liberal levy, she will lose at least \$100 a month to her and her son to live.

I ask the minister: Is this mother and her son in the group that is doing better?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, without knowing the exact information for that tax filer – as I said earlier, there are 424,000 tax filers in the province. What I can assure that mother is that this government is making sure that her young child doesn't bear a burden in debt in the province that would be equal to \$53,000 per person. That's what I can assure that mother.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This budget is supposed to be about people. Closing schools, increasing the number of multi-grade classrooms, larger classes, less teachers, fewer programs and now cutting busing for children – I say to the minister: The NLTA has lost confidence in you, teachers have lost confidence in you, parents and students have lost confidence in you and recent leaks suggest your own caucus has lost confidence in you. People are outraged.

Will you revisit the devastating, ill-informed choices you have made?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: I'll tell you what they don't have any confidence in, Mr. Speaker, is anything that Member says about education in this province. Yesterday, he stood up in the House of Assembly and said: Will you put a stop to multi-grade classrooms?

Newfoundland and Labrador has had multi-grade classrooms since the inception of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have over 100 of them in this province today. We had over 100 of them every year that the previous administration was in power. We're going to have 170 of them in September, that's not including the combined-grade initiative.

Yesterday, he asked about getting rid of them. The cost associated with what he's asking for, that basically have classes with one student in it and one teacher, in many instances, the price tag on that is \$46 million for an additional 500 teachers and an additional 500 classrooms. We don't even know the cost of the infrastructure of what he's asking for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: So, Mr. Speaker, his answer is he is going to continue to devastate the education system in this province. Shocking!

Mr. Speaker, we support full-day kindergarten; however, we question proceeding in September when grades one to 12-aged children will be negatively impacted by these budget cuts.

Will the minister inform the people how he supports choices which negatively impact kids currently in the education system?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the previous administration two years ago – over two years ago now – made a commitment to full-day kindergarten that we are going to honour.

Thirty million dollars was put aside. Much of that work was underway by the time we took office, some 100 renovations to classrooms across the province. I think it was done by them because they believe we should invest in our children, but I don't know based on what the Member just said if he still believes that. We believe we need to catch up with the rest of Canada and make necessary investments in the youngest generation, our smaller children. That's what we trying to do here.

We know none of this is really easy. These decisions are very difficult but we make them to make better use of the finances we have, the limited tax dollars we have, in the best interest of children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

There are significant changes coming to busing in September. I've received emails and calls all morning. While the minister may consider these concerns nonsense – he just talked about small children. Small children will be put out in the dark in the winter months.

Minister, one parent wants to know: When are you going to stop messing with our children, and how is this a stronger tomorrow that you promised?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the cost of busing in Newfoundland and Labrador skyrocketed under the previous administration. That was something they presided over: making changes that resulted in skyrocketing costs. We'll spend millions more in the next school year than we did in the current one because of skyrocketing operating costs. We know that there's going to be difficulty in making changes for people.

We already have double bus runs in this province and many children are already, under the previous administration, bused over a great distance to get to school. That's the challenge that we're trying to meet and we are, again, providing additional millions of dollars this year for busing. So I can't see how the Member can say that. That's not nonsense; that's a fact.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, what is nonsense, he won't listen to the parents' concerns. No listening, that is what the nonsense is because parents do have concerns. Parents are concerned about the change in the bus schedule. One parent wrote that her son babysits her younger daughter after school and the changes happening will cost her \$100 more a week.

For a government that expects families to pay additional costs on top of all the new taxes and ridiculous fees, why are you changing these

schedules at the detriment of hard-working families with school-aged children?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, here lies the sort of contradiction in what the Opposition is saying. This Member says he's concerned about additional costs that he alleges is going to be borne by parents. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island who spoke about full-day kindergarten, now wanting to cancel that, has no consideration whatsoever on the impact of parents who planned for that over the past two years; does not care at all. Those parents are emailing me saying thank God the government is continuing along with that initiative.

We know the busing changes are difficult. There is no question about that. The school district is going to continue to work with school councils to come up with reasonable solutions to our problems, but basically we cannot continue to pour money into busing the way that it has been done. We need to make changes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, what I'm hearing is absolutely ridiculous. Will you listen to the parents? Will you listen to a parent that has to put a young child out for a bus at 7:20 in the morning in the dark? That's terrible – small children and changes that are being made.

Mr. Speaker, we're getting many calls about this bus schedule. I'd like to ask the minister: Can he inform the House –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've asked Members for their co-operation. I'm restarting the clock for the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking on behalf of the parents in my district. That's what they elected me to do, to ask the questions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Their questions are not nonsense. They're good questions that they're asking because they're concerned about their children. You mightn't be. We're getting many calls about the bus schedule.

I'll ask the minister: Will he inform this House which schools will be impacted and will he table these changes?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the school district has communicated this information to parents. If the Member wants that I can certainly give him the number or I can call the school district and ask them to send it over to me or I can get it from my office. He can easily get that information. He doesn't need it tabled here in the House of Assembly at all.

I say to the Member he stands up there and he gets on this diatribe. How many students is he aware of today, before these changes, that have to go to school at that hour and get picked up? Does he even know?

He has no idea that this exists in communities across Newfoundland and Labrador today. So why are those children that he's alleging he is concerned about – why is it that he is not concerned about the others? I never, ever heard that Member get up here and complain about that before.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I recognize the Member for St. John's Centre, I ask the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune counting down the clock is interjecting in another Member's speaking time. I've got a stopped clock here. If you have any

questions about the timing, you can get them from the Clerk.

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and minister keep saying their levy is temporary; cold comfort for those who have to scrape together the money to pay for it.

I ask the Premier: Why didn't he come up with a temporary, fair tax rather than his temporary unfair levy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The implications on this budget has been, as we know, because of revenue that was obviously trying to offset some of the significant damage that was done by the prior administration when it comes to debt servicing and paying interest, of course. So what we've seen here are a number of measures.

The levy is, indeed, a temporary levy. It is in place, offset with a Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement program of nearly \$76.4 million. This will help seniors, it will help low-income families and it will help individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, like most people in this province I, for one, want to see this levy gone as quickly as possible; that's the commitment that we've made to residents of Newfoundland and Labrador and that's the one that we will keep.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, saying the levy is temporary does not make it any less unfair than it really is. In the Liberal platform government promised to simplify the tax system with a complete, comprehensive independent review. This review must also look at fairness.

I ask the Premier: When will government start this independent, fair tax review?

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

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

The tax review that we have committed to will be undertaken as part of the 2017 budget. We will be looking at the taxes as a whole, including everything that people of the province are expected to pay right now, with the objective of making sure that we remain competitive.

It is worth repeating, that the taxes we have in this budget this year still are quite competitive within Atlantic Canada. Certainly that tax review is something that we are very committed to and I look forward to the work that we're going to do on that in the next fiscal year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I have taken up the minister's offer for a technical briefing on the budget and how it affects all income levels.

I ask the minister: Will her briefing include the effects of all the extra taxes, such as gas, home and auto insurance, taxes on books, increased personal income tax, increased HST, the increased fees and new fees, the cancellation of the Home Heating Rebate, the Adult Dental Program, the provincial portion of the HST rebate, the over-the-counter drug program cancellation and other (inaudible)? Will she help us with the real facts, Mr. Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, people are afraid and need answers, the real facts.

I'm having a town hall this evening. I know it is short notice, but I ask the minister if she or someone from her office could attend and work with the people to help them figure out – with all these extra fees and taxes, can they help them figure out how the budget will affect them?

That would be a good thing to do, Mr. Speaker. I know it's short notice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly be willing to support the Member as she is dealing with constituents, but I certainly have my own constituents that I'm supporting as well and have to spend some time continuing to talk to them.

I would mention to the Member opposite that, as I said earlier, we have over 400,000 different tax filers and, quite frankly, to be able to provide the specific details on every individual is going to be very difficult for her as well.

The challenge that we have – and I want to remind the Member opposite that the situation with this budget requires us to take action. It required us to make some very difficult choices that nobody wanted to make. I'd ask the Member opposite maybe she could tell us exactly what she would have liked cut.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, when I asked the Minister of Finance if somebody perhaps from her office or herself could come to my town hall this evening, that is an honest and sincere invitation. I fully realize how busy everybody is and how last minute it is, but it is about dispelling the fears. My whole town hall is about trying to figure out what this budget means for people. It's not about telling gruesome stories.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: It's about getting people together in tables. It's about getting people together to talk about what's the reality of this budget? What are the real rollout effects and what can we do? What would people like to do? So it's not an ambush. It's not an insincere invitation. It actually is one I will give her officials. People are sitting at tables talking about specific issues. They can have a separate table where people will go up to them one by one for concrete information.

That is what I'm offering, Mr. Speaker. I'm offering that on behalf of the good people of St. John's Centre and whoever might come to the town hall, because people are asking for information and people are afraid. If, as the minister says, people need not be afraid, then let's get that information into their hands.

I am willing to help provide an opportunity for the minister, or any officials from her department, to be able to do that. It's a sincere and an open invitation. It's not grandstanding. It's not anything but that. I would like to be able to because I've been offering people, we'll do the best we can to give you the information. We don't have all the information. We don't know all the rollout of this particular budget. So if there's any way the department could help us, I guarantee you –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – I will ensure that it will be taken with great respect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll do a petition again. I've lost count of how many times I've done this petition, but I'll continue to do it.

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

WHEREAS policing is vital to the protection and service of our province's communities;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to increase the presence of law enforcement in the Conception Bay South area.

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

I've presented this petition numerous times because I have a lot of them, Mr. Speaker.

The other day it was brought to my attention – I was going to take a little break from them because I have presented quite often. The hon. the Minister of Justice, I think – I'm not sure, I may be wrong. I thought part of what he said was the petitions that's been presented, there's no change in the policing in CBS last year to this year.

He is 100 per cent right. I wasn't the MHA last year, but I am this year. Last year, the MHA was one of his colleagues who also lobbied for increased police presence. Both sides of the House are in agreement with it. The former MHA was a Liberal MHA advocating for the same thing I am. I am the MHA on record today, not last year, and I will continue to lobby.

It is 27,000 people. I hear this every single day. The amount of crime in CBS – we don't have a police office up there. We have two cars that float around. We're being treated like a little municipality where you get a satellite fellow fly through every now and then. We're the largest municipality in the province, outside of St. John's, arguably, and all we have are two cars.

I'll keep presenting these petitions because people actually want more of them. I just want to continue on down the road representing the people because they want more police presence and I'll continue on.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the petition if the Members (inaudible).

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) Question Period.

MR. A. PARSONS: You don't want answers. I was going to give you answers but, sorry, no leave. Okay.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the minister has all the time to get up, but there's only a couple minutes left now for me to do a petition that's important to our people.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis on a petition.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I can't hear.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Can you ask the minister to be quiet?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: – the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

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

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

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to immediately stop the introduction of this temporary levy – as a reduction in the levy.

Mr. Speaker, everywhere you go people are talking about this budget. No matter where you go to anywhere. I know that the people in the province were hoping for better. I know they were hoping for better. What they were promised – and we see it on the ads every day, that people matter. You can't lead unless you listen.

Well, listen to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I know some ministers think it is nonsense, another minister says it is what it is, but the people of Newfoundland are talking. Every one of the people over there in those districts knows what I'm talking about because they hear it every day too.

While the ministers get up and say we're getting emails that are positive, read them out here in the House of Assembly. I have them here, look. I have them right here that's showing what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador think of your levy. I can read them out all day long. They're from your districts.

Please, I'm asking you on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to listen to the people that put you in this House of Assembly. You're just not listening. That's why you were voted here. Your bosses are the people in the districts.

Ministers, you have districts also, so listen to the people in your districts. This is what they're telling you. They don't like the levy. They don't like the burden you're putting on them. It's too much too fast. You're not listening to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that elected you. Please listen to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and make changes to this ridiculous budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We have time for a very quick petition.

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

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

WHEREAS Budget 2016 introduces over 50 new fees and over 300 other fee increases; and

WHEREAS Budget 2016 asks the people of this province to pay more for decreasing government services; and

WHEREAS the fee increases negatively impact the financial well-being of seniors, youth, families, students and individuals;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately reverse the fee increases as introduced through Budget 2016.

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

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, over 300 fee increases are going to have a dramatic impact on people's lives here. We've talked about not just the levies, we've talked about not just the other tax increases, but the fee increases around post-secondary education, about Adult Basic Education, about fees and services for insurance and for other relevant things that drive our economy here. We do implore the government here to review these fees and cut these as quickly as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: It being Private Members' Day, I call on the Member for Mount Pearl North to present his private Member's resolution.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll begin by reading the motion into the record here in the House:

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the introduction of legislation for the recall of elected Members of the House of Assembly, similar in principle to the legislation in effect in British Columbia, where a registered voter can petition to remove from office the member of the assembly for that voter's district provided the voter collects signatures from more than an established percentage of voters eligible to sign the petition in that electoral district.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I believe we should set up an all-party committee of this Legislature to study the implications of recall legislation and to determine the details thereof. I don't claim to have all the answers, but I do believe this is a topic that deserves to be considered. It deserves to be explored. My desired outcome today is to have support from all three parties to work together in a committee to develop recall legislation that's perhaps similar in principle to the Province of British Columbia.

Today's debate won't be about the details of how the legislation would work; time limits, percentage of signatures and those kinds of things. Rather, it needs to be more like we all agree that times are changing, that voters want more accountability from their elected Members. They want to have more involvement than simply voting once every four years.

This resolution recognizes this and is suggesting a path forward so that the details of recall legislation can be explored and considered for this House. The details are important and I believe we can all agree that the details can't be worked out in a single afternoon here in the House of Assembly. That's why I think it's important for a committee of the House to explore the option of recall legislation. Mr. Speaker, this is about giving more power to voters. This is about increasing accountability for MHAs.

Some people may be wondering what is recall legislation. There's actually a really good article in the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*. It was in 1994 by Peter McCormick. It gives a good overview of the arguments for recall legislation.

I should say it's not a new idea. It was on the books in Alberta in 1936 and in Oregon in the States in 1908. Secondly, it's not a rare idea. Most US states have had recall at some point of their democracy. In Canada, Alberta has had it in the past, and British Columbia has an enacted it and has recall legislation today. Third, it does not destabilize a democracy. Many would argue that it strengthens a democracy.

There are two general models of recall; one is a three-stage process. The first step is a petition has to be signed by a certain percentage of the electorate. The second step is that there's a vote in the district on whether to recall the member. The third step is that if the vote is yes, then the seat is vacant and a by-election is triggered.

The other method is the one that BC has which is only a two-stage process. The first, a petition must be signed by a specific percentage of the electorate; and the second, if the threshold is reached, then the seat is vacant and a by-election is triggered without an intervening vote on whether to recall the member. The petition itself triggers the by-election.

Now, in the three-stage process the petition threshold is usually lower because it won't trigger a by-election, but it will trigger a recall vote. The percentage may be as low as 15 per cent of eligible voters in the district, but in the two-stage process that petition threshold is higher. It may be two-thirds of eligible voters or 40 per cent or 50 per cent; now BC uses 40 per cent.

There is usually a timeline to collect signatures. In the US, it's 60 days; that's the limit in BC as well. Mr. McCormick, in his paper, goes on to reject to some of the criticisms of recall. First, he doesn't believe that a failed candidate or party will use recall to get a second shot at the election. Second, he doesn't believe that voters would be discarding their members every other week. In fact, in BC, there can only be one recall petition in a district between general elections.

Third, he doesn't believe that premiers and Cabinet ministers would be particularly vulnerable because they have to take unpopular decisions. He said these members carry extra weight in the political process and that sort of balances the scales.

Then he gives arguments in favour of recall. He says elected members of all parties would have to take their voters more seriously between elections, not just in the lead up to a general election. Second, it actually empowers backbenchers and makes them feistier. Since their caucus leader knows that they could be recalled for not standing up for their constituents, the leader cannot treat backbenchers and their constituents as pawns to be manipulated at will.

Mr. McCormick says: I see recall as a device not to limit private members, not to reduce their role, but to increase it. I think a lot of private members would welcome the chance to have a second master to play off against the caucus master they now clearly have and that they would benefit from that opportunity.

In the longer run, I think the only real road to a more effective Parliament is a feistier set of backbenchers, and I value the recall for the chance that it might contribute to exactly that outcome.

Now, BC has certain restrictions to keep the process from being abused. The person petitioning for recall must be an eligible voter in the district. A person can petition for the removal only of the person's own member. The applicant must provide a street address, pay a processing fee and provide a reason in writing for the recall initiative.

Everyone who signs the petition must also provide a street address and a signature must be witnessed. Only a registered voter in the district can canvass for signatures. A recall initiative cannot be commenced until 18 months after a general election and there are other restrictions as well, Mr. Speaker. There are financing provisions. There are consequences for those who fail to comply. There are provisions on advertising; sponsors must be registered and so on. There are all sorts of provisions to ensure the process is not abused, and naturally there are

penalties for defined offences such as boat buying, intimidation, wrongful canvassing or wrongful advertising and so on.

Today's private Member's resolution is not the legislation itself. It's simply a motion to support the development and introduction of such legislation. So perhaps our current government would consider striking a committee to examine the legislation that's out there, to look at alternatives, to tailor the legislation to our own province's needs and circumstances. It could then be brought back to this House for a debate on the actual bill, and it could even be further amended at that point. This is merely a discussion today on the principle of recall legislation.

Now people have been saying on social media in the last 24 or 48 hours, why has this not been a key plank at party platforms? Why didn't you do it when you were in government? Well, the fact is that no political party in our province has brought this forward before now.

Frankly, I think the public appetite for recall is whetted only in certain circumstances. Those circumstances arise when people are frustrated that their Member is not representing their wishes but fighting against them instead of representing them. All governments, Mr. Speaker, have had those moments. They usually happen when a government has introduced an unpopular budget or unpopular legislation.

Mr. Speaker, there are two general ideas about how a democratic jurisdiction like ours should work. One says that you elect a representative to serve on your behalf and you trust that Member to make the decisions that are in your best interest and the best interest of society. That Member will have more information than voters may have and can therefore, in theory, make a more informed decision. That Member in theory shouldn't be held hostage to the will of the mob, so to speak, or should be free to make difficult choices that may be unpopular or leave a bad taste in your mouth but that are good for you.

A second general idea is that people are more informed now than ever and they want a greater role in telling their Member how to vote on their behalf. The second idea has been gaining strength in Canada, especially with advances in

the flow of information through traditional media, newspapers, TV, radio, the Internet, computers, smartphones and so on. The second idea is behind the push for more free votes, more referendums on major initiatives, more citizen town halls and public forums and the like.

All of us realize that people want a stronger role in how they are governed. Some see this as a bad thing, and that's unfortunate. Some believe that people will usually behave like a mob and demand choices with short-term benefits that may have terrible consequences down the road,

Ironically, perhaps the 2015 election in this province is a case in point. Voters bought a red book that was based on fantasy from a party that denied them the details throughout the campaign and then threw out its shiny but unrealistic promises once elected.

Ironically, the Liberals, who sold people a fantasy in 2015 and placed a prudent restrained budget that we delivered, are now telling people to accept what's good for them instead of listening to what people have to say. So wouldn't a government have to be more honest with voters, both during and between elections, if the voters had more power to cause real consequences for that kind of behaviour?

Is it good enough for a government to be free of direct accountability to the people, except every four or five years? I don't think so. Not in this day and age.

Mr. Speaker, government Members in recent weeks have stood in this House one by one to say how they disagree with some of the choices in this budget because they will hurt their own constituents. Yet, they're going to vote for those choices anyway and they have voted for those choices anyway. That also, Mr. Speaker, is rather unfortunate.

So why not create the circumstances that compel Members to be led by their constituent's wishes instead of being led blindly by those on the front benches whose choices may sometimes be flawed? What if the public is right that some of these choices are really going to hurt people and better choices ought to be made to make the budget stronger?

Maybe the government ought to be more open to suggestions from the people and from Opposition parties. Maybe introducing recall legislation is a way to make our system more responsive to the public and more adaptable. Recall legislation will shift the balance in favour of the people.

I say to hon. Members in this House: Does that worry you as a Member? Does it give you an unsettled feeling in the pit of your stomach when you think about it? Perhaps that unsettled feeling is what it feels like to lose complacency.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: Perhaps you ought to embrace that feeling as increasing sensitivity and attentiveness to the will of the people who elected us.

None of us ought to believe we are so smart that we are incapable of being shown better choices by the people who elected us. Even those among us with stellar credentials and certificates on the wall, and letters and titles before and after our names, ought to be more humble and open to the possibility that wiser choices are there to be made. How arrogant it would be to believe that a Member is wiser than the voter who elected the Member.

Over the years, we have taken all sorts of shifts in favour of giving the voters greater control over the way things work in this House and in government. There were referendums on constitutional change regarding education. There have been free votes in this very House from time to time. We now have fixed-term election legislation that restricts a government's power to call an election when it is most politically advantageous to the governing party.

We have whistleblower legislation that gives public employee protection when they disclose perceived wrongdoing. We have the strongest ATIPP legislation in the country to give people access to the information they need to understand about what government is doing.

The Open Government Initiative, which is now at risk, is all about getting people actively

engaged in the process of governing. We've taken many steps towards a different style of democracy and I'm suggesting, Madam Speaker, that this can be the next one.

Changing the way the House works to give private Members greater roles in assessing legislation and proposing bills is another step towards a different style of democracy, and all parties in this House have called for that. It's a decentralization of government power, a limitation on government authority, a shift toward greater power in the hands of the people. It's the end of the world as we know it and we feel fine.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you going to sing?

MR. KENT: I'm not going to sing, I say to the hon. Member, not today.

Recall legislation is yet another step in that direction. Although it may seem to have come out of nowhere in this session with this resolution, in reality it is the natural progression of things and something we believe the public would welcome.

As we listen to the debate this afternoon, I encourage people to think about what is the fear, what is the downside? You'll hear various arguments. The waste-of-money argument doesn't wash. Since 40 per cent of voters really don't want their Member to continue being their Member but want a by-election, then surely money is not a good enough argument for denying people their right to vote.

The open-to-abuse argument, which you'll hear this afternoon, doesn't wash either because there will be checks and balances to ensure that only the rightful voters in the district can be involved in the process. It's hardly an abuse for voters to be active in holding their Member accountable.

You'll also hear the destabilization-of-democracy argument. That doesn't wash either, Madam Speaker. A government whose stability is grounded on Members who do not have their constituent's support is not really stable at all.

The Premier talks about confidence votes. Yes, it is true that the government must have the confidence of a majority of Members in this

House in order to govern. That's fundamental in our system. But those Members should also have the confidence of their voters. If they are afraid that they do not have their voters' confidence, then what business do they have propping up a government's agenda?

Surely a government that has lost the confidence of the people should not continue to govern. Surely, there should be a way for people to express their lack of confidence in a way that makes a difference. If Members of this House are afraid to give people that power, they ought to think about why they are afraid of that.

Some may make the argument that it's actually Opposition Members who will be vulnerable, that voters would mobilize to throw out an Opposition Member in favour of a Member on the government side. That, too, could happen, but Oppositions have a role to fill. Sometimes when a government is extremely popular, an Opposition Member's role may be very unpopular. We have to give the public credit for being wiser than that.

Madam Speaker, I have more to say. My time is running out. I look forward to the debate and I look forward to speaking again later this afternoon.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

First, I'd like to thank the Member for Mount Pearl North for putting the motion forward and acknowledge them in Opposition and the important role that they play and bringing the unique ideas to the forefront for discussion.

I just want to refer back to the motion for a moment for those who may have missed it. I'm just going to cut a piece here. Essentially the idea is: where a registered voter can petition to remove from office the Member of the Assembly for that voter's district provided the

voter collects enough signatures from an established percentage of voter's eligible to sign the petition in that electoral district.

So it is a little vague and again understanding that it is essentially just a private Member's motion, the idea presented by the Member for Mount Pearl North would be to have some type of all-party committee to further review that motion to come up with some ideas. But in the vague nature that it's in, it sounds very grassroots; I'll give you that. It sounds very democratic in theory, but I do believe it is very impractical.

I think a recall is purely political in nature. I don't see any other way around it. It actually lends itself to instability, dysfunction. It really deters unpopular decisions, even if they're the right ones. Hence the timing of this motion, I would gather, given our budget, which is unpopular – and that's known to us and that's certainly known to you and certainly known to the electorate. But just given an unpopular decision doesn't mean that it is not necessarily the right one.

If we had to recall a government every time we took an action that citizens opposed –

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible).

MR. FINN: Well, we're not going to recall the government – fair enough for the Member for Cape St. Francis for bringing that up, recall a member. Sure, and you could recall every member perhaps if you wanted to, if you had the legislation to do it.

But again, every time a specific interest group or lobby group had a bone to pick with us, whether it's a union or any form of matter, the opportunities are endless for every time we make a decision. I don't know how we'd be able to long-term plan. How do you long-term plan if you can't make any decisions that wouldn't be very popular? It is just in excess of democracy, adding bureaucracy to what's already bureaucratic process as it is.

The Member referenced BC and BC is the only province in Canada that currently has this legislation. I believe in the United States there is close to 29 or 30 different states that support this

legislation, and they do it in various forms. Whether that's at the state level or the municipal level, you can recall mayors, judges, lawyers. There are a number of things you can do in the US.

But in Canada, in BC in particular, their legislation essentially only has a 200-word-or-less statement in which their opinion why a member should be voted out or recalled. It's very subjective. Essentially any action that no one likes by a member – maybe a voter in my district doesn't like my family so they want to recall me, I'm not sure. Maybe someone in my family does something that's not very popular and then someone wants to recall me. Well, that's not an accurate reflection of me and the representation that I provide my constituents. Therefore, I don't believe it would be a justifiable reason why I should be recalled. However, without any specific information there this is very subjective in nature.

BC, again to reference that example, former Premier Gordon Campbell was going to increase the HST in the province of British Columbia. Then, in doing so, there were threats and looming of a recall. So he essentially, in order to avoid the recall, held a referendum on HST and the electorate obviously voted the HST increase down. Now that government did not make that tough decision and they will not benefit from any extra revenue as a result of that.

Some other areas where, again, very vague, there was a mayor in Colorado – this one is very interesting. He was recalled in a small town in Colorado over a plan to switch parking from diagonal parking places to parallel parking places. If you can recall someone over something as simple as that, I don't know how you essentially – no matter what all-party committee you put together – could find a happy balance in between to determine what is particular for a recall.

A recall also does not change the resources which we have as a government to work with. In fact, it does nothing but tie up resources. We'd have to hire people to the Elections NL office for how long, to review what? You submit an application, you're stating here's my recall, now we have to go through and review how many signatures. A number tossed about was 40 per

cent, so 40 per cent of your electorate would have to sign this petition. How much time would it take to verify that and for what benefit, for what gain?

I think we have people in Elections NL that could find a lot better use of their time than going through different recall legislations every time someone has one issue with a member of their district. Once initiated, this process will be cumbersome no matter which way you look at it.

What about a decision by the federal government? What if that wasn't popular? What if the Liberals in Ottawa right now did something very unpopular that poorly reflected my district or my colleague's district? Would that be justifiable reason enough for someone to recall me as a Member of the House of Assembly?

How about, for example, industry? Let's say the Abitibi mill closure is a great example. The member of the day in the District of Stephenville – Port au Port, formerly St. Georges – Stephenville East, was unable to help resolve the Abitibi situation and that industry leaves town, leading to a number of job losses. So because you weren't able to save an industry from surviving is that justifiable enough for a recall, even though we have no influence over how industry reacts and the ebbs and flows and commodity prices and everything else that comes along with it?

This type of legislation would essentially delay important decision making, I would suggest not dissimilar to that of the important decision making the PCs didn't make for the last 12 years. It kind of influences their idea of kicking the can down the road again, really, and you can only hold on to your seat when one is popular. I mean, even if you had to wait 18 months – because that was another number thrown about – into your term before you could be recalled, well, I'd wager to say that 18 months is not enough time to give anyone an opportunity to run on a mandate. We've only been in power for five months right now, and we have another three years and seven months to go.

In that three years and seven months that is going to follow from now, we're looking forward to delivering on our mandate. Recall

legislation would essentially deter that from even happening. Myself as a young politician – I'm new, I'm young and I admit I have a lot to learn. I'm learning lots every day, and I'm really keen on learning. I'm also keen on delivering to the constituents of my district, and I would not be able to do so if recall legislation was introduced and I, as a Member, was recalled simply because we made some unpopular decisions in a budget process.

Making decisions with keeping people in mind and keeping the electorate and giving the power back to the people – and those are points the Member for Mount Pearl North made. We make decisions every day, and we do it within consultation, unlike some of the decisions that were made by the Members opposite when they were in power and did make decisions without consulting with the public.

I'll give you a prime example. In my district, the West Coast Training Centre was due for closure – in fact, the Liberal government in the early 2000s were looking at closing the West Coast Training Centre, and in doing so what they did is the Liberal government came out and they consulted with the town council and they said help us come up with a plan to keep this institution open before we look at closing it.

So the town council of the day came up with a plan and they worked with the Liberal government – now, ultimately that government did not look at introducing that plan – and then a number of years later the PC government just two or three years ago came out and said, well, we're going to close it on 48 hours' notice, with no consultation at all.

What then ensued was a lot of kickback from the public and a consultation process occurred, at which time we came up with a plan and now have one of the best facilities on the Island in the West Coast Training Centre that stands in my town today.

So consulting with the public is something we're doing often, and it's something we continue to do. Stating that it would give the backbenchers a more feisty position and greater opportunity to represent their constituents and speak out on their concerns – we speak out on their concerns every day. The Members opposite know this and

they've read the media to understand it as well. We always challenge our Cabinet ministers on the decisions they make, and so we should, and we continue to do that.

When we look at checks and balances that we have in place to keep us intact – I can understand recall in situations if someone committed some crimes, or a felony, but that's what our Member's Code of Conduct in the House of Assembly is for. That's exactly what that's for.

Also, when we look at long-term planning; I don't know what kind of lending institution's appetite would be if they had no idea going forward in terms of what government's going to be in power. What about industry, business, investors? How can they look at making an investment – maybe a business wants to come in and say, look, I want to start a business here in this area. The government in power is in full support of this but the Opposition ran completely contrary to that, so I'm not going to go ahead with my investment in this area.

Also, the subjectivity of such of these reasons as I listed from something as foolish as parallel parking, which happened in Colorado, to something as foolish as somebody doesn't like someone in my family for that matter. This type of subjective language – I'll give you an idea. In Tennessee, there was a mayor in Tennessee and he had six recalls put up against him in a short period of time. He ended up filing lawsuits which he won, because the subjectivity of such of the language. You can on and on for hours in a day, what justifies a recall?

Again, I think our folks in the Electoral Office would benefit from using their time more wisely. I also believe that if we were to look at an all-party committee, we could have all-party committees doing much better things than sitting around talking about recall legislation.

The Opposition in this would be essentially the beneficiary. If there even were rules for spending, how do you control rules for spending in recall, I would ask the Member for Mount Pearl North? I don't understand how you would introduce spending, because they could have lobby efforts everywhere in every district and

have people funding campaigns to recall someone.

What about voter apathy? People are tired of going to the polls. We just had a federal election. We just had a provincial election. We're going to have municipal elections coming up again. We constantly have elections. So, voter apathy, I think, would be a huge consideration when you look at people who are tired of going to the polls.

What about the cost of a by-election? Even if the Member, as he had suggested, said well, maybe if you looked at a recall and in some instances there's no by-election. Well, if you have no by-election your constituents are left in the lurch, for one; and for two, if you did have a by-election there's a significant cost that would be incurred. People don't want to go to the polls over and over.

When we look at the opportunities the former administration had, this was an opportunity they had to introduce this legislation at that time. I think if they did, there would have been a number of things questioned. There are some real better ways to spend money instead of tying up resources and looking at legislation of this nature.

I'm willing to bet, as well, there's some irony in the fact that we're looking at recalling Members who are elected, when the former administration actually appointed individuals to elected positions for which they were not elected and then further would not run in by-elections.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who?

MR. FINN: I believe there was an appointment to a Cabinet position for someone who wasn't even elected, but now the idea is we're going to recall individuals who have been elected.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. FINN: In terms of recall, there are a number of things we could recall.

I recall the former administration decreasing taxes to our highest income earners and

decreasing the HST. It would be really nice to recall that right about now. We'd have about \$4 billion just in the tax decreases alone that we'd have in our coffers.

How would we recall Muskrat Falls? How would we look at recalling the Muskrat Falls fiasco and the billion-and-a-half dollars you put behind the budget with no oversight and no plan?

I don't think there's any individual here that would like to put the time and energy into looking at recall legislation. It has a time. It has a place.

BC went ahead and did this. In 1996, I believe, they introduced the legislation. Twenty-six different individuals have been recalled. All have failed miserably. In one instance, someone ended up resigning. So there was never a point in time where it has even proven effective in the Province of British Columbia.

If we are to go down this road and follow the pattern of the US, what are we going to do then? Are we next going to have municipal councils recalled as well? Are we then going to follow suit there? We're going to tie up Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and every municipality for a recall. Maybe a town councillor makes a tough decision or makes a remark. Maybe there's a decrease in a budget or an increase in another budget. I mean, the list goes on and on.

Unpopular decisions are made by governments every single day. It does not make them popular by doing so, but sometimes you have to make decisions for the right reasons when you're looking at future interests. Just because every time you make an unpopular decision you have an opportunity to be recalled, I don't think that's a very good consideration.

The Member for Mount Pearl North also just said we ran on a platform this fall and we sold the electorate a fantasy. I struggle with that statement because we ran on a platform of which we had an understanding of the financial situation which, actually, that was the fantasy, was the financial situation. It was a fantasy world they lived in when they overspent at times of high oil revenues and at times of surpluses. I

have great difficulty to sit here and listen to that rhetoric from the Member opposite.

The shift of balance would only put this in the favour of the Opposition. It would certainly only put this in the political interest for them. It would do nothing to benefit the electorate. We'd have a high increase in voter apathy, and the list goes on and on.

In closing, I just want to say I applaud the Member opposite for the unique motion here, but, unfortunately, this is something I don't think I can support at all and I don't believe any Members on my side will be supporting today.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time has expired.

MR. FINN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

Indeed, it's a pleasure to get up here again today to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. I applaud the Member for Stephenville for getting up and giving his points here in the House of Assembly, a good job that you did, hon. Member.

That's what this is all about. That's what this legislation is about. If you want to make changes in the House of Assembly, we all have to work together. There's nothing wrote down on this particular amendment. We're looking at things we can do better, how we can represent our constituents, how we can represent people in the province better.

As I say every time I get up, the people that elected us are our constituents. They're the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. I understand exactly what you're saying, but if someone is against your family, they didn't vote for you in the first place, all right?

It's not all about you; it's about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's about the constituents. It's about people that had promises made to them that were broken. That's what it's about. This is legislation that can come in place that will make this place better. If you look at the legislation that we're proposing –

AN HON. MEMBER: It's in the policy (inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: It's in the policy book. You spoke out against your government. Good for you. I really think that a Member – a good job that you spoke out.

Do you know what your problem was? Madam Speaker, the problem was that he didn't hear about the libraries closing until the libraries board told him, so he wasn't engaged. I was in the backbench too; I know where you're coming from. We all should be engaged. By having recall legislation, it means that the people on this front row will have to engage you.

You never knew about the libraries getting closed, never had a clue until they told you because they didn't let you know. That's what this legislation is about. It's about making sure that we're all engaged. They have to answer not only to the constituents, but they should answer to the backbenchers. It's accountability.

I was there. Let me tell you something right now, your government is not the only one that did that. I sat on that backbench over there for seven years and there were a lot of times I wasn't engaged. I was as mad as you guys are now. I was mad because there was – as somebody said, I would have liked to have known the decisions. I thought that as an elected representative I should know, but that's politics. Cabinet has a secrecy and they do what they have to do, but that's politics.

If there was recall legislation you'd be telling them, saying: listen here, my job is on the line, I need to know, my constituents need to know. That's what this is about. This is not about me. It's not about the Member for Stephenville that just got up and spoke that could have someone against his family. This is about representing the people.

We made promises – we all go around election time and we make promises. We stand, we knock on a door and we tell the person we're going to represent them. I'm sure every one of the backbenchers over there, ye did the same thing as I did. I told them I'm going to work hard. I didn't make a promise whether I was going to build a school or build a – and neither did you, I know you didn't. But the ministers along the front row and the Premier, and our party, the Third Party, we all had platforms and these platforms were what people elected ye on.

Now that we got in here and all of a sudden things change – and there are things that change. If you look at the price of oil, yes, it went down; our deficit went up. Things change, but we all made promises. I made promises to work hard, you made promises to work hard, but you need to be engaged. This is what this legislation is all about, giving the voters the opportunity to be able to say listen here, that's not why I elected you. I know the minister –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, I know, the Member for Harbour Grace, I understand –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the Member to direct his comments to the Chair.

MR. K. PARSONS: Okay, I understand what the Member for Harbour Grace is saying. I'd be upset too if my library was getting closed, if a school I promised people was going to be built is not going to be built, if the courthouse is not going to be done. You should have been engaged beforehand, and this is what this legislation will do, it will force everyone to know what's on the table.

It's important. Listen, I don't know how this is going to work, I really don't know how this is going to work, but I think if we had an all-party committee together and sat down and said okay, what's the best thing for the voters of Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm sure we could come up – I don't know if the BC thing is the right way to go; I really don't know. I tell you one thing; I've got emails and lots of them from all over this province, from every district in this

province. Do you know what they're asking me? What can we do? I said send emails to the minister, send emails to your – you may think that's funny, Minister of Education. It's not funny because these people are concerned. You may think it's funny. It's sad that you think it's funny. It's nonsense, I know.

MR. KIRBY: I'm reading my (inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Oh my, I tell you, I get upset, Madam Speaker. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: I do get upset when I see that.

People are worried about this. They're sending emails. You're talking to families – everybody over there is talking to families too, but this is a part of legislation that will make us more accountable, and make us more accountable to the people that elected us. The Member across the way talked about oh, it could be a union against you, it could be somebody against you, but that's not the point. Listen, we're lucky in an election today in Newfoundland that we get 50 per cent of the people out to vote.

Now, I'm a very lucky person because my district had the highest turnout in the province: 71 per cent. People are engaged in my district, and I've very proud of that because 71 per cent got out to vote in the district. I worked hard, and I know people that ran against me worked hard to get their vote out too, and we did a good job. People were engaged. I'd like to see more Newfoundland and Labrador voters engaged in the whole process. I think this will probably even make them more engaged because they'll feel part of it. They'll feel part of the process. They'll feel part of saying listen if you don't do what you told us you're going to do, then we have a recourse. It would make us more accountable.

Madam Speaker, I'm not saying it's the liberals, okay. It could be the PCs; it could be the NDP. I'm sure that if you look back at history, you'll all see this. When an election comes, you have

no worries the first couple of budgets that are coming down are going to be the hard ones.

Do you know what every one of the ministers over there, I am sure, are telling the new people that are here? I am absolutely positive that they're doing it. They're saying now listen, it's going to be tough for a couple of years but the last couple of years before the election comes, you'll see a bit of change. We'll build that school in Coley's Point; don't you worry about it. We'll make sure that everything is done in the districts that need to be done.

That's the way it works. This recall legislation will stop that; you'll have to be accountable right from day one. You'll work harder. We'll work harder as MHAs.

If the people in Cape St. Francis say they don't want Kevin Parsons, b'y, listen, if you have 40 per cent, I'll step down. I will step down and say if you didn't want me, that's okay; I understand. If someone else can better do the job, so be it, and I'm sure all you Members are the same.

People vote for people because you're good people. You're good people over there; I have no doubt in my mind you're good people. The election called last October, they didn't vote for you because you're a bad person or anything at all or because (inaudible). I believe that honestly you won. The people in your districts thought you were the best person to represent them, just like the people in Cape St. Francis thought I was.

All this legislation is doing is making us accountable. It's making us accountable to the people that elected us. What's wrong with setting up an all-party committee to decide whether we can have – and they decide what the rules are.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bill 29 (inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Bill 29 – yes, Bill 29 is a bad thing, isn't it? Why are we going back? This is about going ahead.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: You're losing –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Do you know what? The hon. Member across the way, if there was a recall in her district she'd be worried. I know she would because of what happened here and I feel sorry for her. I really do. I wouldn't want to be in her position. I really would not want to be in her position.

I understand where the Member for Bonavista is coming from. I'd be concerned in his district too. I don't want to see any personal attacks against anyone. I don't want that. I don't like that. I don't think it should ever be because like I just said a few minutes ago –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the Member to direct his comments to the Chair.

Thank you.

MR. K. PARSONS: I think you're good people over there. I think the decisions that you're making are bad decisions, but I think overall you're good people.

People are more engaged today. I got two kids that I have to give them the Blackberry or the computer. If I need to buy something, I usually ask the young fellow to go get whatever it is because they're so engaged. Our young people are engaged and you all have to admit it. I never saw it before that we see so many young people engaged in politics. It's because of technology; it's because of what they see on Facebook and Twitter and everything else. So people are engaged.

The funny thing too, Madam Speaker, I look at some of my friends on Facebook and they're elderly people. I never, ever thought that – computers back 20 years ago were like, wow, they were scary type things and when you look at the people who are engaged today. People are more engaged.

The House of Assembly 20 years ago wasn't televised. There are people watching this all day

long. Things have to change so why not change. This is all part of it. We have to change.

Some people were against it last year when we changed the number of Members in here and there were a lot cried that it was a big change and all this stuff. Actually, my district was one of the largest in the province and it got reduced and I kind of like it, to tell you the truth. But it was good changes. There's nothing wrong with changing policy.

Again, I have to go back to the Member who just spoke before. You talk about consultations. People got out and I applaud them – I went to them; I went the consultations that you had. But do you know what the problem was to the consultations that you had? You didn't listen to the people that made them. The 1,000 people that stood up, you didn't listen to them. That's the problem, you didn't listen, and that's why people are mad today.

Madam Speaker, people are mad in this province and there's a reason why they're mad. There were promises made and they are not kept. They went out and they said okay, we're going to consult. The one I went to I never heard one person mention a levy. We all spoke. I was at a table that had a really good – the Minister of Transportation is there now. Do you know what the biggest suggestion – I never thought about it either but I'm after getting a couple of emails, Minister, is that the people said turn off the lights here in the nighttime. Why are you paying the light bill? I'm sure you're all after hearing that. We're all after hearing that. That is true. Those were the things people were talking about.

People weren't talking about 15 per cent on their home insurance and their property insurance. People didn't talk about a person who is making – I came up last week with a lady that was making \$36,000. People never talked about taxing that person so she'd have to come up with \$3,000 or \$4,000 more a year to live. That's not what you talked about.

While you can get up and say you're learning as you're going, so am I. I've been here for eight years and I learn every day when I get in here. There's something new that strikes me every day that I come to the House of Assembly, and I try

to react to it. I do it at the utmost respect to every individual that calls me or emails me or whatever it is. I try my best.

I hope that when I'm finished someday someone will say he was a good MHA. Just like I said about the former MHA that was here, Jack Byrne, that represented our district for 16 years. He was a good MHA. I hope that's what every one of ye wants.

If the people in your district, 50 per cent – now only 50 per cent are going to get out to vote. We'll just say 50 per cent; BC has 40 per cent. If 50 per cent of the people in your district think that you should be fired, guess what? They're your bosses; you should be fired.

Give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador credit. They're not stupid. Everything they say is not nonsense. Statements like that, what are you saying to the people of Newfoundland? The more we can engage our people, the better off this place will be. The better off Newfoundland and Labrador will be.

We need to engage people. This is not something that – a Member said, oh, it was only a short little thing, 200 words. We can make up our own rules. We don't need to be guided by anyone else. We can set up an all-party committee – and by the way, an all-party committee usually has a majority from the government side. That's the way an all-party committee works most times, I do believe. So what's wrong with that? Why wouldn't you vote for a committee that can make this place more accountable to the people that elected us? I don't understand that. I don't understand why you don't want the constituents of Stephenville to be able to have a say.

It's not a family that's against another family. That's not going to get it. That's not part – it's not a union against this. This is about 40 or 50 per cent of the people that are in your district. I think the last election 52 per cent of the people got out and voted. It's not like you're just going to pick 20 coming down the road and say b'y we're going to get rid of you now. That's not the way it's going to work.

Let's sit on a committee together so we can make this place work better for the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador. I think it will work better for the backbenchers. I was a backbencher for seven years and I wanted more say in my government. I did. We were the PC government at the time. I wanted more say, just like every one of you over there wants now.

Don't tell me you don't because when I hear a Member saying that he didn't know his library was closing until they called him or another Member down in Gambo area said he didn't know when his library was going to close – you should have known. You're an elected representative. They should have had the respect to notify their Members this is what's happening in their district. That's all this is about.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time is expired.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity to stand today to respond to the private Member's motion put before us by the Official Opposition. I thank all the Members who so far have spoken, and I thank the Member for Cape St. Francis, and I echo his comments that I think we all hope here in this House to walk away from politics someday and have the people who elected us look back and say he or she was a good Member. He or she served us well and represented our interests. From everything that I've heard from people who live in his district, I think the people have well received the Member for Cape St. Francis, and I congratulate him on being re-elected because it's a true testament to what he's offered his district. That doesn't mean I agree with everything he had to say, Madam Speaker.

I'm certainly glad to hear Members opposite are interested in furthering accountability and I'm glad to hear Members opposite are interested in

seeing the voices of our citizens are heard, and I am glad to hear the Members opposite that they've had an epiphany and now hold every virtue and every answer they didn't have for the last 12 years, Madam Speaker.

I'm not one bit surprised that the Members opposite are bringing this forward, because they've had experience with recall. Let's not kid ourselves, this province does have a recall provision, and it's called a general election. The crowd opposite were recalled by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for over a decade of waste and gross mismanagement of the public purse.

Everywhere we went, Madam Speaker, during the election, all we could hear is: Where did the money go? What happened to the money, the \$25 billion? Out the window, out the door, where did it go?

AN HON. MEMBER: Humber Valley.

MR. BROWNE: Humber Valley Paving's a great example of that, Madam Speaker, but we'll get to that, don't worry.

Let me also point out, Madam Speaker – and I think this can help inform the debate here today – that we have fixed election dates in this province where MHAs are held accountable every four years. This is a concept the Official Opposition might not like, because they tried their very best to outmaneuver and circumvent and sidestep the scheduled election dates last year as long as they could. They would have tried to push it into this year, no doubt, but unfortunately they couldn't find a Machiavellian way to do it. So here we had the election last year and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador spoke and elected a new government.

With that said, do I believe accountability is important? Absolutely. Do I also believe this province and our country deserves political stability? Absolutely. How many people have we sat across the table from, how many business people and potential investors have said to us: We want to invest in this province. They value the political stability that a parliamentary democracy brings. That's why they're choosing and considering to invest right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Recall, Madam Speaker, is not a legal item. It's not a legal term. Removal of MHAs for wrongdoings is already possible. Recall in this instance, what the Official Opposition is presenting here today, is purely political and it's a matter of gamesmanship. What would be the basis for recalling an MHA and who would decide what that basis is? Would recall be allowed because they voted for an unpopular bill, as an example?

I just had a message, Madam Speaker, from a constituent: I didn't elect anyone to be wasting time on this nonsense. That was the message I received today. When people look to me and say we can form an all-party committee on this, I should suggest that there are a lot more important and pressing matters facing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and certainly the people in my district that we could form an all-party committee on, more so than the political hand-wringing for the Opposition. That's what this is. It's a pure political maneuver. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are tired of the theatrics that the Members opposite are continuing to put forward.

We've heard the Members opposite bring forward the example of British Columbia. We've seen them today herald this example, so let's talk about BC, Madam Speaker. It has not been particularly effective in the one jurisdiction in Canada that has this system. British Columbia has had 20 recall efforts so far: 19 were rejected, dismissed outright by the government because they could not verify the signatures; and the other one was cancelled when the Member resigned over the recall effort. Since bringing forward that legislation in 1996 in British Columbia it is has not succeeded once. It has succeeded, on the other hand, in tying up resources but has never succeeded in its ultimate goal.

BC is the only Canadian jurisdiction to do this, which doesn't surprise me that the Members opposite would be going down a path where nine out of 10 Canadian provinces would not have gone. We all remember Bill 29, Madam Speaker, another piece of legislation that was unique to one province which was Newfoundland and Labrador. Then we had to spend a million dollars to conduct a review by Chief Justice Wells to get out of the same

legislation that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador were crying out against and didn't want in the first place. So we had to spend a million dollars to get out of that and I don't think anyone wants to go back to that place.

Madam Speaker, the Member opposite also talked about accountability and open government. I think there were some comments made in the media. Well, just let me remind the Member opposite that he and his colleagues rose in this House and defended Bill 29 to the hilt, and then shoved it through against the public will. It was the same Member now today who was responsible for open government this time last year and had the opportunity to bring forward these considerations and changes, but didn't do so.

Today, we have a debate in the House of Assembly where we could be debating any number of measures. I think next week Members will see a private Member's resolution brought forward that is productive and goes towards the betterment of Newfoundland and Labrador. Today, we have one that's pure politics and games, Madam Speaker – pure politics and games.

I would argue when we talk about accountability, Madam Speaker, that the PC government was held accountable for all the moves they made in the last 12 years and that was in the last election. The point here ultimately is that I'm not afraid to face the voters. I welcome the opportunity to do that in four years' time. I think each and every one of us will stand on our records and ask the people for their support if we so chose to seek re-election.

The Members opposite talk about the budget and the tough choices that had to be made. Since the budget, Madam Speaker, I've travelled to a number of communities in my district including Southern Harbour, Arnold's Cove, Parker's Cove, Marystown, Bellevue, Long Harbour, Chapel Arm, Norman's Cove, Long Cove and St. Lawrence. I almost run out of breath here trying to tell people where I've been.

The point of this, Madam Speaker, is that I'm not afraid to face the voters. The weekend after the budget I was out on the wharf with

fishermen in Southern Harbour debating the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: I'm not afraid to go out there and talk to the people, hear what they have to say, and bring those concerns back to Members of my caucus and my colleagues here in the government. That is the role we've been elected to do. To hear the Members opposite stand, who sat silent for the last 12 years, it's fairly rich, Madam Speaker. It is fairly rich.

Why don't we just go over a few things that happened in the last number of years? I want to start with Muskrat Falls, the largest project in our history, Madam Speaker. It saddled us down with costs and debt. In fact, we had to send \$1.3 billion over to Nalcor this year. It's ballooned. Every time and time again they come back with an updated cost. There was very little oversight when it was put forward.

They said no to the PUB. They said no to independent panels. I recall distinctly at the time, Madam Speaker, that the former premier of the day, Ms. Dunderdale, said that they'd have a private Members' debate in the House of Assembly and that would be all. There wouldn't be a vote. There wouldn't be anything other than that. Should we have had recall legislation on that?

What about the CETA deal, Madam Speaker? The same former premier marched off down to The Rooms to make the big announcement, and even had the now Leader of the NDP accompanying her that day. A \$400 million fund for the fishery. What was the problem? They didn't even invite that feds. Actually, it wasn't that they didn't invite the feds; they didn't even tell them it was going on. Maybe we should have recalled that government of that day for misleading the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

How about ferries? You want to talk about ferries being built in Romania for Change Islands, Fogo and Bell Island. Should we recall the ferry? It's down there tied up in St. John's harbour, Madam Speaker. They didn't do their homework.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BROWNE: The work was taken out of the province. No opportunity to do it in the province.

I have a shipyard in Marystown that could have aptly done the work. We have a skilled workforce and a fine facility. The opportunity wasn't even presented to them. You sent it over to Romania. You didn't even do your homework. We would have been slapped with a bill for \$25 million. It's ridiculous, Madam Speaker.

The fact of the matter is had we not elected a federal Liberal government, this province would be on the hook for another \$25 million when the work could have been done right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BROWNE: I say to the Members opposite, Madam Speaker, maybe their government should have been recalled on that. Really, in essence, they were recalled because the people in my area certainly rejected what they did and many areas of the province. They forced them out of office and elected a new government.

How about Humber Valley Paving? You were up in the Department of Transportation, weren't you? Let's talk about Humber Valley Paving. The company had contracts in Labrador. The owner of the company, a private businessman, was going to step forward for the PC leadership. He was the chosen one by their former leader. Within a span of hours, the contract was, poof, gone, Madame Speaker – \$19 million.

I'm sure we'll get back to this at a later point, Madam Speaker. Should the government and the Member's opposite of the day have been recalled on that? I would argue they were recalled in the last general election.

AN HON. MEMBER: The minister stepped down over that one.

MR. BROWNE: The minister stepped down. There should have been more who stepped down, but we'll get back to that at a later date.

Madam Speaker, what about Judy Manning? You wanted me to get back to recall. Here's a substantive question on recall: How would recall legislation, that the Members opposite are proposing, apply to an unelected Cabinet minister that refused and refused and refused to run in a by-election to seek a seat in the House of Assembly? How would that have worked? How would an unelected minister – which they broke constitutional convention and set a record in the country as to what to do. How would that fit in?

They went and erased the Department of Justice for a couple of days and then put it back. How would that fit into their plan, Madam Speaker? Once again we've got a resolution put forward that is ill thought out and ill planned which is a hallmark of the government that they led for 12 years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BROWNE: Madam Speaker, I want to respond to some of the comments that were made by Members opposite before I finish up. The Member for Cape St. Francis made some comments about backbenchers being more engaged. I think that he brings up a very good point, that all Members of this House should be engaged in whatever matters are being put forth, and that includes Members from all three parties. I believe the more we work together, the more we collaborate and the more we bring our thoughts and ideas together, it will be to the benefit of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

He talks about having backbenchers over here muzzled and not being able to talk. Well, let me remind the Members opposite that for the first time in the history of the province we had a parliamentary secretary answer a question in Question Period, allowing parliamentary secretaries to take on an expanded role. The Member for Cape St. Francis was a parliamentary secretary. The Member for

Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune also was. This is something that we are doing now.

Also, in the first time in our history a government backbencher presented a petition on behalf of their district. There were no knuckled rapped; there were no punishments put out. This is about opening up government to a place where everyone in this House, all Members, can rise on their feet and speak for their constituents and represent their constituents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BROWNE: We talk about being more engaged, how many times has the Minister of Finance stood in this House offering a technical briefing to the Members opposite and they haven't taken her up on the offer? Why aren't they choosing to be engaged and be part of the solution rather than the white noise of critique all of the time? Come forward to the table I say, Madam Speaker.

I also want to respond to the comments that the Member for Cape St. Francis made about the fact that not all the things in the budget were a result of the Government Renewal Initiative. I'd like him to come forward and say exactly what it was that were not in the GRI. I attended a number of sessions, Madam Speaker, where I heard the people of Newfoundland and Labrador say to us make the tough choices, don't kick the can down the road. We've accumulated enough debt as a result of the decisions taken by the past government.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I think the message from my constituents says it all. I think we elected people to talk about more important things in this House than a political maneuver on behalf of the Official Opposition to try and gain some brownie points.

Yes, there are tough decisions, Madam Speaker; but I believe working together as Members of this House, in four years, we will stand again to the people of our province and we will ask them to judge us, and that is something we are very willing to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm very happy to stand in the House and to speak to this private Member's motion.

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the introduction of legislation for the recall of elected Members of the House of Assembly, similar in principle to the legislation in effect in British Columbia, where a registered voter can petition to remove from office the Member of the Assembly for that voter's district provided the voter collects signatures from more than an established percentage of voters eligible to sign the petition in that electoral district.

I see now that the Speaker's Chair has been resumed by another Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to speak to this private Member's motion. The current uproar over the provincial budget is understandable. Low- and middle-income earners, many of whom are women, seniors on fixed incomes, people from rural areas, people who rely on public libraries, parents of school-age children, the people of Labrador, students, people with a sense of social justice, those who understand the need to foster literacy and love of books – there are many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have a very good reason to be extremely upset by this budget today.

What is particularly galling to many people I have spoken to and heard from is the fact that so many measures in the budget fly in the face of promise after promise in the Liberal platform in last fall's election. I share this feeling of anger over the breaking of promises made as late as two or three days before the general election. The Liberals continued to make those promises two or three days even before the general election. People feel they were betrayed. People feel bamboozled.

They are not willing to simply accept their vote was taken from them under false pretenses, because that's what it was, Mr. Speaker. There were very clear, unambiguous promises, and

people are mad because they believed the Liberals clear and unequivocal election promises and are now paying dearly for believing those promises. And they believed them. Why wouldn't they? They were promises made by people and we would expect that those promises would be kept.

If a general election every four years is the cornerstone of our democracy, then people have a right to expect candidates will say what they mean and mean what they say. While the exact details of the province's economic situation were not fully clarified till after the election, however, this serious downward trend was clear even before the writ was dropped. Yet the Liberals double downed on their promises, even in the face of what was very clear to everyone in the province. They double downed on their promises. They said no HST increases, no public sector layoffs, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. They double downed right up until the bitter end of the election campaign. They made a social contract with the people of the province. They made a promise.

Now, in this context of votes cast in good faith, in response to clear, unambiguous campaign promises, votes that many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians feel were stolen from them – in this context, a discussion of our democratic system is timely. Recall has been suggested in the private Member's motion as a means of addressing the anger caused by such a cynical approach.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that recall is one of many potential tools that needs to be carefully examined. To date, recall hasn't proved a very successful tool in Canada. In British Columbia, the only Canadian province with recall provisions, there have been 26 attempts at recall since 1995. One member in question resigned, but the others fell through for various reasons. So it hasn't been very successful.

That doesn't mean that recall isn't worthy of consideration here today. It is and while we are at it, our debate here today should go beyond simply consideration of recall. Mr. Speaker, the unprecedented widespread and sustained province-wide uproar over the budget underlines the need for a review and modernizing of the foundations of our democratic system. What is

happening today is pushing us to this point. I believe that this is a good thing.

This review should include consideration of recall legislation but also it should go well beyond that and look at the other pillars of our democratic system. In other words, recall is not the only answer to our democratic problems. But it might be part of a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador approach to comprehensive, democratic reform, which we really need. We all know that.

I remind the Member for Mount Pearl North that when he was deputy premier, he and his colleagues slashed eight seats from the House of Assembly – he and his colleagues – taking away the voice –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If my colleagues here in the House would like to hang on a sec –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: If my colleagues here in the House, particularly on the other side of the House, hang on, I'll include them as well. I sure wouldn't want to leave them out.

I remember the Member for Mount Pearl North, when he was deputy premier, he and his colleagues slashed eight seats from the House of Assembly, taking away the voice of many rural residents at a time when rural representation is especially needed in this House; all the more so in light of a budget that is especially tough on people who live in rural districts.

MR. KENT: She was doing so well.

MS. ROGERS: I'm glad to hear the Member for Mount Pearl North saying I'm doing so well.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind my colleagues that I'm going to make sure everyone is included because that would only be fair. We're talking about fairness and democracy.

The slashing of rural seats greatly contributed to the democratic deficit in this province. I remind Members this was a joint decision of the Conservatives and the Liberal leaders and parties. They made their deals late at night in the hallway. I saw them. Together they conspired to cut seats.

Today, we see a few bold Liberal backbenchers speaking out on behalf of their constituents, speaking out against their own government after being put in an untenable position by a budget that is particularly harsh on rural Newfoundland and Labrador. This budget is particularly harsh on people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

These Members had the courage to speak out and the conviction to speak out on behalf of their constituents. These Members are part of the remaining remnant of rural representation in this House. I applaud them for standing up to their own leaders, leaders who were complicit in silencing so many rural voices in this House.

Cutting eight seats was most certainly not the democratic reform we are looking for. It was a regressive, ill-thought-out move which has hurt the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly, Mr. Speaker, in this present fiscal reality.

I remember standing up in this House speaking to that motion, speaking to that legislation saying in this fiscal reality – we knew it then – that we needed, we couldn't, we mustn't weaken representation for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Now we are seeing the effects of that.

In the last election, we, the NDP, promised democratic reform if elected, a promise that we would keep. We promised to consult with young people and work to increase youth-voter turnout and political participation by developing a complete youth-voter strategy.

In our platform we promised to modernize and strengthen the House of Assembly. We would do it in these ways: by making all-party standing committees that examine, debate and hold public hearings on important issues, including our resource use – how we use and how we manage our resources – financial management, social and health services and democratic renewal. We would make those a permanent fixture in our

democracy. Not just every now and then, but permanent fixtures, working mechanisms in our democracy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: We would also conduct an open, transparent review of the Standing Orders which is very much needed. We would increase the minimum number of sitting days to 60 per year so that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador know that we would have at least 60 sitting days per year. At this point, we never know how many sitting days there will be.

We would finally accept electronic petitions, empowering more people to engage with their government on issues of concern. I have electronic petitions in my office right now with 18,000 names on them. I will be bringing them down to the House and presenting them in another form; 18,000 signatures from all over the province that cannot officially be presented here because they are electronic.

We would also adopt a fair allocation of time to all parties in Question Period. Not the unfair allocation we have right now. We would adopt a lottery system to order the private members' bills to be debated and voted on in the House of Assembly. Not the current way it's done now.

To this suite of measures, we would add a debate on alternatives to our current first-past-the-post system. Our current system predates the invention of the automobile and is in serious need of modernization and a debate on the merits, pitfalls and best approaches to recall of Member under particular circumstances.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Having said this, the idea of recall is not intended to be simply a consideration of the election outcome. It's not a best of three. One of the challenges would be to lay out the circumstances in which recall would be possible.

The motion before us is very general in nature. The devil, as they say, is in the details; details which would be very important to its implementation. The trick to successful recall legislation is establishing a balance. On the one hand, it can help to ensure Members remain accountable to their constituents. On the other hand, MHAs should not be left constantly vulnerable to attack from those who simply disagree with them.

The details of a recall regime are crucial. As we've seen today, this motion is silent in that regard. Having said that, we would be glad to participate in an all-party process, including meaningful public engagement to enhance our democracy, addressing some of the potential tools I have outlined in the past few minutes, and including an examination of recall as simply one of the tools of accountability of Members.

With these explanatory remarks, I intend to vote in favour of this motion. Our party would be pleased to participate in putting together a detailed plan for democratic reform, including very much the modernization of our House and a complete electoral reform review, with the objective of enhancing and improving our democracy. Mr. Speaker, I believe that we can do this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of Topsail – Paradise.

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

It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to this resolution this afternoon, the resolution being: "that this Honourable House supports the introduction of legislation for the recall of elected Members of the House of Assembly, similar in principle to the legislation in effect in British Columbia, where a registered voter can petition to remove from office the Member of the Assembly for that voter's district provided the voter collects signatures from more than an established percentage of voters eligible to sign the petition in that electoral district."

Mr. Speaker, to be clear for Members opposite, this private Member's resolution today is not about taking down a government. It's not about that. It's about a level of accountability. It's about a level of democracy. It's about improving what people elect you for, what you are elected to do and the reasons why you promised what you promised when you knocked at the door and what you said you were going to do.

If a Member decides to disappear and not show up to any events, not have any meetings, not meet with their constituents, just stop doing the work that the people elected them to do – they're looking for recourse. They're asking for recourse. That's what this type of legislation would do.

That's what this private Member's resolution we're proposing to the House would do. It would say, well, I lined up. I put my hand up. I knocked on doors. I made a promise to you that I was going to work hard for you, I was going to do my best for you and I was going to look out for the best interests of you as my constituents, and all the things that people say – some people say when they knock on doors, because not everybody says that. Different people take different approaches.

We know Members opposite, in this particular case, and we just heard from a couple of them this afternoon – and I'm going to get to that too, Mr. Speaker. They knocked on doors and they made promises to the people. Like I have never seen before in all the times that I've been elected to an office, like I have never seen before, people are writing and asking in social media and they're saying: What can I do? I am completely dissatisfied with the bill of goods I was sold by my elected Member who promised no job losses, promised no tax increases, promised to be an individual that's going to stand up for the people.

They're saying: What can I do about that? What we tell them and I tell them – and I'll be quite open and frank with what I tell people – I say you need to communicate with your Members. You need to communicate with those Members. If you're opposed to the budget, communicate with the government, each individual Member and their Members and tell them how you feel

about it, and tell them what you would like them to do. That's all you can do.

Mr. Speaker, last year during the election campaign, I remember Members opposite, they campaigned on a platform. On November 6, when they rolled out one of their levels of the platform, part of that was establishing an all-party committee on democratic reform. When you read the fine print it says the committee will consult with the public to gather perspectives on democracy in Newfoundland and Labrador and make recommendations on ways to improve. Well, we've been here for almost six months since the election, and we haven't seen any of that come from the Members opposite yet, but people are writing us and asking us for it.

Now, as a Member of the Opposition, I can tell you that it's very different in many, many ways; but one of the big differences, people pick up the phone and call us like I've never experienced before. Mr. Speaker, much unlike some of the Members opposite, I just got what sounded to me like a lecture from the brand new, very young, very youthful Member for Placentia West – absolutely was. Standing up over there in his place telling us all about the good and bad and how terrible we are over the last decade and listing off a few things he read about in the media and knew about. That's exactly what he did. He stood in his place and he did that. That's exactly what he did.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, there are many people in this House on both sides. On the government Liberal side, the NDP side and here on the PC side, a little bit of news for the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue: We were elected – some of us have been serving our province and our people to the best of our abilities maybe for longer than he's been alive, a long time. Many of us have. Members over there too; the people over there served their public and served their constituents and served the people in their community for a very long time, and did it with the utmost respect for people, much unlike we see from that Member, a brand new Member.

I can't believe with the tone he comes in and oh, he's in the government now and I'm going to talk down to those bad, bad people over there. Oh, you got thrown out. That's what recall is, he

said. That's what he said. The people recalled you in the election and threw you out. That's what he said.

I tell the Member opposite, I've been elected several times and very proud of it, and very proud to go back and knock on the doors of my constituents –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: – and I would be very pleased, Mr. Speaker – without his interruption, if I may. I never interrupted him. I never said a word. If he can't take it, he should keep his mouth shut and think more closely about what he's saying, what he wants to say. If you can't take it, you should be a little bit more respectful. Yes, you can shake your head.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you, I knocked on the doors of the people in my area in 2001 and I asked them to elect me to municipal council. There are lots of Members over there with a history of municipal council, very successful. I got elected and I worked hard. In 2005 they re-elected me; that is what they did.

In 2009, I went back and knocked on their doors again and asked them to elect me again, and they elected me again. A year later I made a move and ran in the by-election. I asked them to elect me again to provincial politics, and they elected me again. They elected me again in 2011.

I knocked on their doors again in 2015, when everyone was saying we were going out on our behinds, and I said elect me again. People said to me: Paul, you're up against a hard go. You guys have been around for a long time and the winds have changed around. But if I vote for you, will you stay? I said: Yes, I'll stay. That was my commitment to them: Yes, I'll stay.

Mr. Speaker, they elected me again. I earned the respect of my people that I represent. I earned the respect of the people of the province. I come to work every single day and I do my very best. I do my very best every time I come to work but I can tell you, if I stand in this House and I'm going to call someone out like the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue, after what he got on

with today, talking down to us in the tone that he did, yes, I'll do it. But if you're going to call me out, you better be able to take it because I'll give it back to you.

That's against the grain that I was raised on, Mr. Speaker. That's not the way that I was raised, but I'll tell you I always learn that I will look after myself and I will defend myself when I need to.

Recall legislation is about when people stop doing the job they promised to do. I promised over and over and over for many years to do my job, I've worked hard and I am grateful. I am grateful and honoured that people re-elected me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: I am grateful because I enjoy the work that I do. When people call me and say I have a problem, I need your help, can you help me out, it's a pleasure to do that. I quite often rely on the people around us. That's what a team is about, about pulling oars together, going in the same direction together, looking for the greater good of the province. That's what we did. Every time I was elected, if it was municipal council, school council way back when, even before municipal council, worked my best and did my best.

Sometimes people don't do their best. Sometimes people will knock on the door and say I promise you this and they don't mean it, or yes, I'll represent your views.

The Member for Placentia West – Bellevue, it was brought to my attention earlier today how he put a note on his Facebook about – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, wrong Member, but I'll get to him in a minute. If you look on their Facebook, people are writing will you, will you, will you. You don't see a lot of response from a lot of the Members opposite. You don't see it.

Earlier today the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port was up. He seems like a nice man by the way. He seems like a decent individual. I have to say he seems like a decent person. He seems like an honest young man who wants to do well.

AN HON. MEMBER: A nice guy.

MR. P. DAVIS: He is a nice guy, yes.

AN HON. MEMBER: A sweetheart.

MR. P. DAVIS: Yes, he is. You can call him a sweetheart. He's a nice guy; I'll go as far as that. He seems like he really wants to do good.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're a sweetheart, Paul.

MR. P. DAVIS: Pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: You're a sweetheart.

MR. P. DAVIS: I'm a sweetheart? Oh, thanks.

He seems like he really wants to do good and he seems like he's approaching it from an honourable way. Not destruct and tear down the hard work that people have made efforts in the past, but he looks like he's looking towards the future, which we all should.

It's easy, Mr. Speaker, to chastise others. My father always said those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. We all do our best – not all of us. Most of us try and do our best and do what's right. Sometimes we look back and say we could have done that a little bit differently or we should have done that differently. Well, so be it, Mr. Speaker. That's what it is to be human.

What this is about is when someone knocks on your door, gets elected, packs up their bags and says you're on your own. The Members opposite, many of them – the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue got numerous messages sent to him telling him vote no or we're voting you out the next time. Don't support the budget or we're moving you out. He doesn't respond to them. He does not.

MR. BROWNE: That's not true.

MR. P. DAVIS: Many times, I can show you lots where you never responded. I can show you lots.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Then there are other Members. I got to him again, I guess, Mr. Speaker. He can't sit and listen.

Mr. Speaker, then I hear from other people in St. Brendan's. The Member for Terra Nova was up the other day talking, another man that seems like a good man. He seems like a reasonable man.

Apparently what I heard from the people that he met with, he said something – I wasn't there, Mr. Speaker, but he said something to the effect that we had to do this. If we didn't do this, no one else is going to come in and take over the province and we won't have a say.

He stood in his place and said they all understood – when I spoke to people they all understood. They almost went out of their minds, Mr. Speaker. Those people almost went out of their minds because they're saying that's not what happened. That's not what took place. They're out of their minds.

What did they do? They call us and say: What do I do about this? What can I do about this? They gave a pile of petitions to table in the House – yes, took them and went off to table them in the House. We haven't seen them yet, but I hope they will. He had petitions for the trestle in Terra Nova too, and he was specifically given them to bring them in. Mr. Speaker, when people came to me –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: – when I was in government and they said I have a petition for you to table in the House, I'd say no, but I'll bring them to the minister for you. I'll make them aware for you – and if people were fine with that, fine. At least I said if I'm not going to table them, I'm not going to table them.

Mr. Speaker, recall legislation is very simply this, if a person fails to do the job – doesn't matter what side of the House you're on – if you've been elected and you fail to represent your constituents, if you fail to hold up to the contract in which they entered into with you,

then the people have recourse. That's about as simple as I can put it.

People have recourse. Instead of just waiting for the next election in four years' time, as the Member opposite talked about, they would have recourse. The other thing it does, it also would let elected Members know there's a level of accountability on you that when you get elected that people have a right that if you don't do what you promised to do, if you don't do your work and make your best effort, then they have recourse.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you many times when I was in the government, and I'm sure Members opposite by now know fully what I'm talking about when I say that people would call and say: Mr. Davis, or Paul, I need – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; I'm not supposed to say that, am I? They call – what was it, Jerry? They'll call me Jerry. They'll say: Can you help me with this? One of the hardest things to do when you sit on that side of the House is to tell people I'm sorry; I can't do that. You make an effort for them, you call them back and you say: I'm sorry; I can't do that. That's one of the hardest things to do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if you do it properly and you do it respectfully and you do it correctly, then people, most of the time, 99 times out of a 100, it's been my experience, people will say: Thank you for your effort, and I understand why you can't. I don't agree with it – some people are irate when you can't help them, and so be it, because it might be something very important to them, and it's just one of those things that you can't do for them.

If you do it over and over and over, you fail to show up, you fail to do your job, you fail to represent people, the people of the province are looking for a recourse.

In British Columbia, the Liberal government out in British Columbia who is power today, there's recall legislation. What we're saying is that would be a good framework where the government could start to say we we should look at this. It doesn't happen very often, it happens very rarely, but it's there and it's another level of accountability, and it's a level of democracy in many ways whereby people will feel they

have some influence and control over the person they elected. That's what it's about.

It's not about bringing down a government. It's not standing here and talking about what happened 10 years ago or five years ago or four years ago or whatever happened in the past with government. It's not about that. It's about Members being accountable to the people who elected them on the promises they made.

Mr. Speaker, I made promises to people many times when I knocked on the door. My promise consistently has been: I'll do my best. I've always steered away from those specific oh, yes I'm going to do this for you and I'm going to do that because that's the kind of promises that got the government in trouble today.

When people say not on my watch, that's like saying I give you my word. As long as I'm here, that will not happen. That's what that says. When someone says – and several of them used it – not on my watch, to me, and if you speak to many people, they'll say that means it won't happen as long as you're there. It's putting your reputation and your job on the line. To me, if I said that to someone it will never happen, then I'd have to seriously think about my future.

Recall legislation is about Members doing their job, no matter what side of the House you're on, what district you live in, if you're in government or Opposition or the Third Party or if you sit as an Independent. It's about giving people recourse. It's about creating accountability and giving another level of democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of Burgeo – La Poile.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I'll try my best to get right to this, as I only have 15 minutes to speak to this. I think the first thing I'm going to do is respond to the comments from the Leader of the Official Opposition who had

15 minutes to speak to recall legislation but may have used a minute and a half to actually speak to the context of this PMR, because he spent the other 13½ minutes trying to rant and have a tantrum about comments from the Member on the other side.

Now, it's absolutely incredible that the Leader of the Official Opposition can stand up here and criticize him and every time he makes a comment, he talks about his youth. We sit here and we try to encourage other people to run for the House of Assembly. We encourage them to run. We encourage getting young people, to get old people, to get males, to get females, to get different nationalities and the minute they do, he stands up and has a tantrum.

It's funny, the irony here today. He criticized the Minister of Education –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: He criticized the Minister of Education for being upset about commentary by Members on the other side about children. Yet, he stands up today and has a little rant and doesn't say an absolute word about the context of the bill brought forward by the Member for Mount Pearl North. It was an absolutely disgrace. Talking about accountability, well, I'm going to go to a few more things he said there. It's funny when he was on this side he said since 2004; but when he's on that side, judge me on my record. Do as I say, not as I do.

The first thing I'm going to talk about – because it's funny, we got elected on November 30, some of us got put in Cabinet on December 14, and, in fact, I am the minister responsible for democratic reform. It's May 4 and he is criticizing us because we haven't instituted democratic reform from a government that was in power from 2003 to 2015 and didn't do anything, not a word when it comes to campaign finance, we're going to change it. We're going to change it. We are going to change it. They did nothing.

We brought in the fixed election rule, but last year, they didn't follow their own rules in an effort to stretch their grasp on power as long as

they could, because they weren't going to go out unless they were grasping with their fingernails on the way out the door, I would say to the former, unelected premier of this province, elected by 300 people down at the Delta or wherever it was. Again, don't stand here and criticize Members for giving their tone and then stand up and do the exact same thing.

He wants to talk complaints on Facebook, saying the Member didn't answer. I would suggest that the Member talk about the complaints on Facebook that he's received in the past and the actions that he took when he got complaints. I would say the Member opposite knows exactly – the Leader of the Official Opposition when he was premier, let him get up and talk about what he did when he got complaints by members of the public because I can tell you what, he responded in a completely different fashion.

I actually am going to speak to this bill because it's important, but I don't need to hear the Leader of the Official Opposition, somebody talking about knocking on doors. He mentioned the Member for Terra Nova but the former member for Terra Nova actually was heard complaining saying I wish the former premier had spent some more time out here; I might have done better. But no, where did he go? He went back to his own district to preserve his own seat. He went back. The skipper goes down with the ship, I guess. That's how it goes. The skipper goes down with the ship – not likely, not on that ship.

Again, I wasn't planning on talking about that. Every Member that stood up in this House before talked about accountability. They talked about this bill. They talked about the reason why we should or why we should not, but not the former premier of this province. He got up and went on rant, insulting and trying to degrade the youngest Member of the House of Assembly. That's what he did. He spent his time bullying the Member for Placentia.

That is absolutely unacceptable and I would say, look, he has a duty to stand up and talk to the bill. Don't tell us to talk about the bill and then stand up there and go after somebody. If he wants to I can tell you what, I'm going to stand up and answer him any time. I'm going to go

after him on his record. He has a record and the administration that he was a part of and which you are a part of also had a record, I would say that.

Again, I'm going to get to some of that record now when I get going, talking about tone, talking about insulting –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: Do you know what? We have a record that started on December 1 and here's the thing – and I say to the Member for Cape St. Francis if you want to talk, get up – get up – but I'm going to have my say. Now, I listened to the rant by the Leader of the Opposition, didn't say a word, listened to his rant, so extend me the same courtesy.

Our record started on December 1. Who knows where that goes, but we were elected with a four-year mandate. One that is governed – again, we had fixed elections. It's not like before where governments could call an election whenever they wanted. In this case, we do know that that got stretched out for various reasons because we went through premier one, premier two, premier three and a half, premier four. We went through that. We went through the almost premier and then the Tom Marshall who got hauled back in like *The Godfather, Part III*. We went through that.

Now, we went through all that.

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. A. PARSONS: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Cape St. Francis who doesn't have a word to say about this has plenty to say when he's over there. I suggest he get up and have his say on this. Again, the same courtesy –

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: Actually, he was speaking but I didn't hear a word he was saying because it was perhaps gobbledygook, I guess.

I'm going to continue on here –

MS. PERRY: (Inaudible.)

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, the real champion of democratic reform.

Here's the thing, there is one province –

MS. PERRY: (Inaudible.)

MR. A. PARSONS: Again, Mr. Speaker, she can't stop; she can't help herself. She didn't have a word to say to this. Again if you have something to say, put it on the record but if not, listen. Listen, I would suggest that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: Now, I listened to what the Member for Mount Pearl North put in. He is suggesting a –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

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

Again, it's funny because there are Members opposite – the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune can't help herself. Didn't have a word to say to this, but has lots to say sitting down. It's amazing. Nothing of substance to say standing up, nothing; but sitting down, there it is.

Democratic reform: We want to talk about recall legislation. It is in one province. The former premier said the Liberals had it out in BC. Well, actually it was brought in on 1996, so it has been around some time. It's the only province that has it. It has not been enacted by any other province. I know that it also exists in some States and I'm not going to get into that.

The fact is we have a democracy here right now where you elect a Member, you have a four-year term that is fixed by elections and then you go to

the polls again. People have every opportunity at that time to come out and express their will and vote for the individual that they want in that office.

The fact is prior to this time, we've seen many stages. Right now this is purely – I was listening to it to see what it was all about, but there's no doubt this is just purely a political PMR. That's all it is. I listened. I was hoping for some reason – I know the Member has put forward some facts, but the context of the language suggested this has nothing to do with actually trying to make something different.

He's just trying to make a point about the fact that right now we have something that's very unpopular out there in the public and the fact is people are upset. We know that; we see it. They see it too. A lot of people actually blame them. They're not happy but I tell you what, they're not happy with the former administration that blew everything.

The fact is over time we've had many occasions where there were difficult situations, difficult pieces of legislation. Go back to the '90s and education reform, a very, very contentious time. I know Voisey's Bay was a very – I wasn't here in this House, but I'm sure there was a raucous debate in this House.

In my time here, we had Bill 29. It's funny; they talk about hearing from the Members. Well, I heard from a lot of people on Bill 29. I know the Members opposite also heard from a lot of people on Bill 29. I'm sure that they heard it. They may have responded; I don't know. I don't care about that.

What I'm saying, though, is that they made a decision, I'm sure, I'm assuming, that they thought was right; but it was unpopular, there was no doubt. We led a filibuster. It gained attention. In fact, it got national attention. It was a huge issue. The fact is, though, at the end of the day they went ahead and actually invoked closure on the House, had a vote and brought in Bill 29.

If they were to listen to what the people had said at that time, they wouldn't have done it. If they had recall legislation at that time, I'm sure that it would have been brought forward, but you

cannot make your decisions based on the fear of recall. You have to make your decisions based on what you think is right, knowing that over time you accumulate a record and you will bring that record to the people that you are lucky enough to represent. That's what's going on.

I'm sure there were people back during the education reform debate that were – because I know that one was extremely nasty. In many places it was hugely emotional. I'm sure there were Members that were threatened saying, you're never getting in again. If you do this, you're never getting in. They did what they had to do. It's funny. When you look back on it now we say in hindsight it was the right decision, but can you imagine if the decision was made based on the fear of getting recalled? Can you imagine that? We've had this.

I could get back to the fact that up to Monday I had never heard this once from a single Member of the Opposition in speech or in writing ever. I never heard it before. So it's funny, a government that was elected in 2003, 2007, and 2011 never thought it necessary to have it. I don't know, maybe the idea was brought up behind closed doors, I have no idea. It's funny now; just a few months after they are not in power they want this done. The fact is at the end of the day they didn't do it then because they didn't think it was the right idea. They're doing it now because they're in Opposition and it's the political move to do.

If you want to talk about procedure and House reform it's funny, actually. They almost never brought this in because they didn't enter it. They didn't enter the motion. We actually had to give leave to enter. Now, if we wanted to be spitey, we could have denied them the opportunity to do this, but we didn't because we should have this debate here. We should have this debate on the floor. There's no problem with that.

I've had this too. I've brought forward things in the past. In fact, in 2012 I brought forward a motion to open the House of Assembly and close the House of Assembly at regular intervals. That year when we got elected – we got elected in October 2011 and the House didn't open until March – there was a huge outcry by people saying, why don't you open the House? The former premier at the time said

there's no need to have a debate. We don't need to go back there.

MR. K. PARSONS: The same thing (inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I think the Member opposite for Cape St. Francis forgets there's a difference between October 11 and November 30. There's a bit of a difference there. I don't want to get into how a calendar works here, but anyways.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: The fact is at that time I brought forward a motion. I don't think it was even as contentious as this one is, because this is one that can draw strong emotions. I brought forward one saying we need to make sure the House of Assembly, the people's House as we call it, could open up assuredly, no matter what. You couldn't keep it closed for no reason.

In fact, I can guarantee you, contrary to what the Leader of the Official Opposition says, these are things that are going to happen. We are going to make it happen. Do you know what? It's been five months. The fact is we've had a lot of work to do in those five months, including dealing with a huge financial mess that was left to us. Plus everybody here is learning their positions. Ministers are learning their positions. There's lots of work to do. They get that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: The fact is we are going to make changes. Actually, I've spoken to Members on the other side about going and changing the Standing Orders to update them, to actually make them relevant. The fact is at that time when I tried to change something like actually opening the House, not a chance, voted down. The former House Leader at that time screeched at me so loud that he actually came over and apologized after. My God, how could you suggest something like that? I remember that debate. The fact is that was something like

keeping the House open, and in this case, we're talking about recall legislation.

I think the Members on our side have done a very, very good job of explaining why we need to do what we think is right. Our record will be judged over the course of our mandate which is four years. I can guarantee you, we'll have the four years and we're not going to change the election date to grasp onto power like the previous government did.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the Member for Mount Pearl North speaks now he shall close debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank your, Mr. Speaker.

I'll do my best to bring us back to the subject we're debating here today which is the notion of recall legislation. What we're calling for is that all parties put politics aside actually, and we get representatives from the three parties together. It can take weeks or months. It can take as long as necessary to examine the options when it comes to recall legislation, and see if we can come up with something that would work here in Newfoundland and Labrador, learning from what's gone on in British Columbia, the United States and other places in the world.

I finished my comments earlier talking about the potential effect recall legislation could have on Opposition Members with a popular government. That isn't the circumstance today, but things change really fast in politics, Mr. Speaker, as many of us know.

Let me give you another scenario; imagine how people feel when a Member crosses the floor to sit with another party or as an Independent. The public might strongly support such a move. They may even re-elect Members who've done so, or they may not. Perhaps they want to have a say. Perhaps the public would trigger a petition for recall so they could have a say in that

decision. Perhaps the petition for recall would utterly fail. That in itself would constitute kind of an endorsement of the sitting Member.

Mr. Speaker, there are new ways of doing things. They are all based on the premise that a government governs at the pleasure of voters. Voters must be empowered to shape the ways in which they are governed. We simply don't have to trust others to rule our lives. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that we've all been raised watching American television because this way of thinking is very American. This idea of governance is spreading around the world.

To governments that mistrust or fear the people, this movement is very troubling. Who knows what might happen when people demand a greater say, like they are doing right now in Newfoundland and Labrador. Who can say their way is better than the democratic way? Who has the right to put his or her own views against that of the people?

We've seen too many things go wrong over the years to relinquish our power to shape our own destiny. We are tired of having to say hindsight is 20/20 and picking up the pieces years down the road. We want an electoral system, a democratic system that's more responsive. We want a democratic system that's more adaptable. We want a democratic system that's open to improvement.

Mr. Speaker, the anger over this year's budget is not just anger about the choices that have been imposed. It's also anger over the fact that people feel powerless to do anything about it. They feel taken for granted. They feel hoodwinked, manipulated, led down a garden path, sold a bill of goods.

They see their Members rise in this House or in local media or on social media to vocalize their constituents' concerns over the budget, and then they see those very same Members stand to vote in favour of passing the very measures they have just criticized. That's been going on in this House in recent days and it will go on in the days ahead as well.

They might be forgiven for thinking their Members are marionettes on strings, operated by the Premier or the Finance Minister and the

Cabinet. Well, many people think the strings are their own to pull. They believe the Members ought to be more responsive to the public will rather than the Premier's will.

Are people wrong to want that? Is that idea too dangerous for our democracy? Would that spell the end of stable government like government backbenchers suggested it would today? Would that throw out our province to the wolves? Of course not. To say that, you'd have to believe that the people who elected us really don't get it, you'd have to believe that your wisdom is greater than the people's.

This vote today is truly a vote about the people. A vote for recall is a vote to give the power to the people to chart their own destiny. A vote against recall is a vote for the power to assert your own will over the peoples' and protect yourself from the consequences of that.

This is Private Members' Day, Mr. Speaker. There's been discussion in recent days about free votes and confidence votes. Well, it's Private Members' Day, so this is in effect a free vote. It's not a confidence vote. Government won't fall because we agree to set up a committee to look at an issue that I think needs to be looked at.

We did it on mental health. At first, we were reluctant. I was reluctant. But we listened to the debate on the floor of this very House and we said there's no harm in coming together on an issue that makes sense and working together. That's all I'm asking today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: The government can write the legislation, Mr. Speaker. They have the power to bring in whatever legislation they wish or don't wish. They have a strong mandate and they ultimately have control. All I'm saying is let's get together and look at this. There's no downside to government. Despite the rough economic times and political times we find ourselves in, there's no downside to striking a committee to look at this.

I urge Members, because this is a free vote, to think about the wishes of the people who put them here and vote accordingly. Will you deny

your constituents the power to hold your feet to the fire, or are you truly prepared to be governed by those you stand here to represent?

Mr. Speaker, I want to wish everybody a happy McHappy Day. I'm willing to bet the local McDonalds restaurants don't hire employees with a clause that they can't be fired for four years. Yet, any Member voting against recall is saying just that, that voters shouldn't be able to fire them between elections. If an elected representative loses the confidence of their constituents, I believe those constituents should have the ability to fire their MHA.

I believe that as an elected representative, my constituents should have mechanisms to hold me accountable beyond a general election. I believe if they think I'm doing a poor job representing them, they should be able to fire me too. They shouldn't have to wait until the next election to do so.

This isn't an initiative that would allow voters to second guess every decision that's made by MHAs, like the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port suggested. Rather, it would allow voters to fire their MHA if they are unhappy with how they are being represented.

I know there are many details to discuss in order to ensure we enact sound legislation, which is why further discussion is needed, which is why we should set up a committee and just look at this. That's all I'm asking today.

I thank the New Democratic Party for their support. I urge the government to reconsider. I understand the to and fro that happens in this Legislature. I understand in our parliamentary system sometimes we take opposing views for the sake of taking opposing views. I don't think that's right. I really don't. I think today is an opportunity to say hey, this is an idea that's worth at least exploring.

Times have changed a lot since we first started using representative democracy. We owe it to our constituents that we also change with the times. People want more today than a vote every four years. They want accountability. They want to have recourse if they feel their MHA is doing a poor job.

Most everyone in our society works with the understanding that if they do a poor job at work, they'll eventually get fired. Our elected representatives, Mr. Speaker, should be no different. Voters should be able to fire their MHA, just like they are able to elect them in the first place. What is critical to recognize here is that recall legislation can actually empower voters, while also making our elected representatives more accountable.

The question is: Do Members agree that recall legislation may improve our democracy, provide more accountability and empower voters? I do. I believe that discussion needs to happen. The debate about the details of the legislation is best left to a committee, which is what I'm proposing we do together.

A vote against this motion should be seen as a vote against people that are upset and people that have concerns and aren't sure what to do about those concerns. It's a vote against people who want to participate more in our democracy. It will be a vote in favour of the status quo and it will be a vote in favour of politicians protecting their own self-interest.

The government Members voting against this motion shows they don't think voters should be able to fire them. They don't think voters should be able to hold them accountable for their performance or for broken promises. So I suspect that unfortunately government will whip the vote on this one. Will the Premier decide for all his MHAs how they must vote, or will they be permitted to vote in the best interests of their constituents?

I predict very shortly, Mr. Speaker, that they'll all stand together and vote against this motion. Will Members opposite vote in favour of their constituents, or will they vote to maintain the status quo, to stand in the way of democratic reform that we all agree is so desperately needed? Will they ensure that no matter how angry people are about whatever happens to be going on or any matter, that they won't be able to take democratic action?

Mr. Speaker, I have a few minutes left. I know it's late in the day, but I want to pick up on a few of the comments that were made by Members during the debate. I thank Members

for participating in the debate. I sincerely wish that more Members had focused on the actual subject that we're debating here today, but such is life. I acknowledge that the Member for St. John's Centre did focus on the issue that we were debating today.

Let me start with her comments, Mr. Speaker. She said that this is one of many tools that should be carefully examined when we talk about modernizing our democracy, and I fully agree. This is just one, but right now there are a lot of people out there who feel they have no options. This is about giving people more options. She also said that we need comprehensive democratic reform, and I agree. Recall legislation is one small piece, but it's an important piece that can make a difference.

The Member for Stephenville – Port au Port and the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue, I was disappointed. I thought as new Members of this House, they may be open to new ideas and challenging the status quo. Instead, we see them toeing the party line today. Some of the rhetoric that's existed for years about recall legislation is what was spouted today.

The Member for Stephenville – Port au Port talked about this being costly and impractical and political and undemocratic. He used voter apathy as an excuse. None of those things wash and I hope in my remarks earlier today that I discounted some of those arguments.

He also said that we should have brought in recall legislation. Mr. Speaker, when recall legislation has been called for around the country, it's often been Opposition parties that have been advocating for it, just like we're doing today. We didn't bring it in. The Liberal Party didn't propose it. The New Democratic Party didn't propose it, but it's a new day and we have an opportunity today to strike a committee and to look at this together, and that's all I'm asking.

The Member for Placentia West – Bellevue used the stability argument, that this would somehow create mass instability in government and implied that it was about recalling government. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. This is about holding individual Members of the House of Assembly accountable to their constituents. This is about allowing

voters, about allowing the people of the province who are not just tax filers as they were referred to in Question Period, this is about allowing the people of the province to have a greater say in democracy, not just every four years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, who was rather animated, I might add, suggested that we didn't advance democratic reform. I would argue that there were reforms that have taken place in recent years that have moved things forward.

I know he and I agree that there is a lot more work to do. I know the New Democratic Party agrees as well. We have lots of tradition in this parliamentary system that we're engaged in and I believe there is a better way, and I hope over the next 3½ years we'll have a chance to work together to advance parliamentary reform and democratic reform.

Today is an opportunity to say we're serious about it. That it's not just another broken red-book promise. I hope that government Members will reconsider.

Just to remind the Member for Burgeo – La Poile of some of the things we did do, that I believe have improved how things are being done in this Legislature and within government. We implemented fixed-date elections, as I alluded to earlier. We did change the number of seats in this House to better reflect the size of the province in terms of population.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: We launched the Open Government Initiative, which is all about increasing dialogue and collaboration and making more information available to people, making government data available to people so that businesses and individual citizens can do more with it. I hope government does pursue those 43 initiatives in the Open Government Action Plan. I worry that they won't. I suspect we'll hear more about that in recent weeks.

We went from having some of the worst legislation in the country, when it came to access to information and protection of privacy, to having the best legislation in the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: Yes, we weren't perfect, I'd say to the Members opposite. We recognized that we could do better and we took steps to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Yes, it was costly. Members opposite are suggesting that these recall provisions could be costly. We made the changes and we invested the money in ensuring we had the best ATIPP legislation in the country because it was the right thing to do for democracy. Exploring recall legislation, Mr. Speaker, is the right thing to do for democracy.

Members opposite have suggested that this is just about politics. Well, I assure you it isn't, Mr. Speaker. All we're suggesting is that we strike a committee of the Legislature. It's no different than the work we're doing together around mental health and addictions.

We put politics aside, despite the fact that as a government we were about to say no, we don't need to strike an all-party committee. Well, we did. We listened and we did. In this instance I'm saying if we're all saying that we need democratic reform, then I'm saying let's strike a committee and let's look at recall legislation. It's worked in BC, it's worked in other jurisdictions around the world, and it's been in place for decades.

Mr. Speaker, here's an opportunity for us to do something together. Here's an opportunity for us to improve democracy. Here's an opportunity for the public to have a way to make the people they elect more accountable to their constituents. That's a good thing and I urge all Members of this hon. House to stand and vote with their constituents this afternoon.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

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

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

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

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Lane, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Browne, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Letto, Ms. Haley, Mr. Bernard Davis, Mr. Derek Bennett, Mr. Holloway, Mr. Bragg, Ms. Parsley, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Warr, Mr. Finn, Mr. Reid, Mr. Dean, Mr. King.

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

MR. SPEAKER: I declare the motion defeated.

It being Private Members' Day, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.