



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

---

Volume XLVIII

FIRST SESSION

Number 24A

---

HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA*

Monday

9 May 2016  
(Night Sitting)

The House resumed at 7 p.m.

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

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

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

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

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

It's certainly an honour to rise in this House this evening and speak to the main motion of budget 2016-2017. Mr. Speaker, tonight I'm going to talk – I've spoken a lot so far about overall impacts of the budget and if time permits, I will get back to that again.

Tonight I wanted to talk in particular about my District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune which is a rural, remote district I would say, Mr. Speaker. We are about 180 kilometres from the next largest centre of Grand Falls-Windsor. We are a total of 22 communities spread over 11,000 square kilometres. Four of my communities are accessible only by boat or helicopter.

We are rural Newfoundland living at its absolute finest. We continue to maintain all the traditions that Newfoundlanders hold near and dear. As we look at the tourism ads, they could be done in any one of my communities.

The budget this year is going to have a devastating impact on my rural region, Mr. Speaker. The ones that are really, really bothersome to all of us in particular are the health care cuts and the loss of the libraries, two essential services to the rural region. I strongly believe they are going to have a devastating impact.

As I spoke earlier today in the House when I raised a petition against the closure of the clinic, it really makes no sense at all, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the savings that Central Health had to find, it was \$420,500. That was the reduction in the operational grant to the Central health authority. We're losing our dialysis as a result of that. We are losing a clinic in a community, a whole community now – actually, more than one. We have Hermitage-Sandyville, we have Seal Cove, we have Gaultois and we have McCullum that all feed into the clinic in Hermitage. Now all of these people will be forced to find a way to get themselves to Harbour Breton, which is an additional 40-minute drive, and that is provided you have good weather conditions, which is often not the case, Mr. Speaker.

We also know that's going to have a devastating impact on the people of Harbour Breton as well. We will lose as a result of the closure of the clinic and the dialysis two nursing positions. My understanding of health care now in the region – Harbour Breton itself has a population of about 1,900. It is also a large centre for the clinic in Mose Ambrose. So you have an additional 600 or so people from Mose Ambrose that if emergency services are required, they are sent to Harbour Breton.

Now we're going to tack an additional 600-plus people going through the doors of that facility with two less staff. My understanding now is if you call the hospital for an appointment, it can take you up to two to three weeks to get in. Everyone is wondering, well, what is going to happen once the clinic closes. Will we be waiting a month, will we be waiting six weeks. Not to mention the additional cost and stress that everyone will undergo trying to get themselves from the Hermitage-Seal Cove area to Harbour Breton.

There are a lot of issues and I really think that this decision needs to be revisited. Perhaps there is some kind of travel expense that could be eliminated. Perhaps there is some other expense that is nonessential, I would say, but the ability to see a doctor is an essential service. I truly hope that my people will continue the good fight. I certainly will stand with them to fight the good fight because these are essential services and it is totally unacceptable to see rural Newfoundland and Labrador stripped of these services.

So let's talk about libraries, one of the few places that residents of rural communities can go to, Mr. Speaker. Children – it brings me great joy to look on Facebook and social media from time to time and you see the parents posting pictures of their little ones as they are heading off to story time at the library. It is an event that all the preschoolers look forward to, and everyone in our community from the preschoolers right through to seniors use these libraries.

What is astounding, and something that we can't understand, the library in St. Alban's has the highest usage in the entire region, yet it's being closed – the highest statistical usage. It is boggling to us, Mr. Speaker, and it's something we will continue to lobby to hopefully have the minister reverse his decision.

Gaultois, Hermitage – again, Hermitage losing a clinic and a library. So we're losing three libraries in my region. It is hard to fathom, Mr. Speaker, how devastating these cuts are going to be. We certainly know that this is not what the people voted for.

I'm going to move on now, Mr. Speaker, and talk about some of the other cuts that are in the budget. On the Internet there is a link to a document which talks about some of the line-by-line savings. I want to highlight some of them. Certainly, there are numerous ones here. I could never get them all out in 20 minutes because there are so many.

Some of the ones we haven't heard a lot of talk about in some cases and some of them we have, but I certainly wanted to bring to attention because, again, I feel some of these are going to have significant impact on the rural areas of our province. I feel gravely concerned about rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I go to bed at night, Mr. Speaker, with a heavy burden because I am the only rural Opposition Member outside the Avalon.

I'm the only person province-wide that people can call and expect to stand up for them here in this hon. House. It's an overwhelming responsibility. I've been quite busy; busier than I have ever been since becoming a politician, but the people can count on me to bring their voice forward and that I can absolutely assure you.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** I thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I assure the people of this province they have an ally in me and an advocate in me for rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MS. PERRY:** Now, let's talk about some of the things that are going to impact people all across the province. In rural Newfoundland, it's very expensive for us to leave our homes and come to St. John's to go to university. Not only do we have the cost of tuition, our parents have to find the money to pay for our accommodations, groceries and travel to get us back and forth.

Well, in this budget the government has reduced the grant portion and increased the loan portion of the student financial assistance for Newfoundland and Labrador students. So the \$40 loan and \$100 grant will be the maximum weekly and that includes medical students, Mr. Speaker, in a time when we recognize that we need more doctors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and we're certainly not doing anything to make it easier to increase that supply. We're making it much harder.

There's a reduction of funding for youth and student services. A savings in 2016 of \$1,203,900 – significant by any standard.

In the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, tourism is touted as one of the key opportunities for diversification, yet we don't see measures in this budget, Mr. Speaker, to enhance tourism. In fact, we see an unravelling of efforts that have been 15 to 20 years in the making.

I know from having worked in community and economic development, and I've served on the Central Newfoundland tourism committee and a number of provincial committees relating to tourism, one of the big issues that came forward to maximize the value of our tourism industry was to try and develop initiatives that would

extend the tourism season. In this budget, that has been cut. They've received a cut of \$25,000 for the season extension program. Funding for provincial and regional Visitor Information Centres has been cut by \$224,000.

They're also, Mr. Speaker, reducing funding under the Regional Development Fund by \$1 million. That fund – I know again from experience, having worked in community economic development – was heavily utilized by rural entrepreneurs. In rural Newfoundland and Labrador where your population base is not large, every single support that we can put in place for entrepreneurs to be willing to take the chance needs to happen. So it's very disappointing to see a million-dollar loss in that, and I'm reading right here from the government's very own documents.

In terms of Education and Early Childhood Development, in that department there's going to be an elimination of the transportation benefit under the Child Care Services Subsidy Program of \$750,000.

Under the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, they're going to "Limit provision of intensive core french through reduction in teaching services budget by \$365,000." Again, in a country where bilingualism is the law, it's certainly very disappointing and astounding to see such cuts.

They're also going to "Reduce support for optional programs – literacy and numeracy support and teams focused intervention programs for staff and students through reduction in teaching services budget." So not only are they cutting libraries, they're also cutting supports for literacy. We all know, or it's well known that an educated population tends to be the most successful, and this government looks like it's doing its best to make sure they suppress us. I fail to understand why in God's name this would be happening, but this is where the cuts are taking place.

Now, let's look to the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. They're eliminating the Coastal and Ocean Program grants by \$150,000. They're reducing the funding for the Seafood Development Program for \$325,000. They're reducing funding for the Bay Management

Initiative by \$60,000; a very important initiative if we're going to truly put efforts into growing the aquaculture industry. This is funding that will be deeply missed. They're going to reduce funding for Workplace Adjustment Program by \$350,000, and they're reducing funding for the Centre for Fisheries Ecosystems Research by \$800,000.

Mr. Speaker, the one that boggles me immensely is they are eliminating \$290,000 from the Special Assistance Grants program. Now, Mr. Speaker, I know in my district that is going to be absolutely devastating, and in all rural communities where the fishery continues to be a key player. What we call SAG, Special Assistance Grants, gone.

That \$300,000 grant meant a great deal to the fishers committees who needed repairs to their wharves or to their bait-holding depots. This will be sorely missed by the fishers committees. I've already had some very disheartened people call my office wondering about the grants this year. We had to tell them this is something the government saw fit to eliminate, at a time when we should be looking to revive the fishery and provide whatever supports we can to do that.

Let's look at the Department of Health and Community Services. They're removing the coverage for over-the-counter drugs. They're introducing diabetic test strip limits, consistent with national guidelines they're saying but with the population in Newfoundland and Labrador, I would say we probably have a much higher incidence of diabetes. I know we do in my region, and province wide we probably do as well. This is not the type of thing we need to see if we want to keep our population healthy, Mr. Speaker.

There are so many more here. Like I said, I could be here all night. So I'm going to move away from that paper, but I do encourage the public to go online and look at the budget document. It is a 10-page document and it outlines line-by-line cuts.

Mr. Speaker, if you think that's scary, there are a lot more documents you should look at as well. The persistent uncertainty and fear that has resulted from the Liberal approach has crushed consumer and investor confidence and has

already seriously hurt our economy, and the cuts haven't even taken place yet.

With huge tax increases, people will have less to spend and that's going to crush business and kill jobs in our communities. Instead of creating the conditions for growth, the Liberals are creating conditions for economic collapse. In fact, the Liberals have even admitted that their actions will make the situation worse.

Here are three sentences from the 2016 budget: "Most main economic indicators are expected to be lower in 2021 than current levels. Several major economic indicators like employment and real compensation of employees will be lower by 15 per cent and over 22 per cent respectively when compared to 2015 levels."

Can you imagine? In five years' time they're predicting we're going to be 15 to 20 per cent worse off than what we are today. I don't call that growth, Mr. Speaker. I call that severe regression.

"Provincial deficit reduction measures are estimated to account for 40 to 50 per cent of predicted declines in these broad measures of economic activity." They are acknowledging by their own hand, they are responsible for a 40 to 50 per cent decline in our economy.

If you want to be really shocked, look online at the budget document called *The Economy* and check out page 17. They are predicting that unemployment will fall from 233,700 jobs in 2016 to 200,700 in 2021. That's a loss of 33,000 jobs in our province in just five years. That's not growth, Mr. Speaker. That is a disaster. It is the equivalent of the job losses that decimated our province during the cod moratorium in the 1990s. I'm sure many of us in this province never wanted to go back to the '90s. Little did they know when they voted for change that they were going back to the '90s or probably worse. It's certainly looking a lot worse.

I was driving home not last Friday, the Friday before, and I listened to a caller on *Open Line*. He said, yes, people voted for change and change they got.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** Change in the worst kind of way. Hopefully, please God, Mr. Speaker, we don't have to endure three more years of this kind of decline, and that the Members opposite will either start to listen to the people and change course or stand with the people and vote against this budget. There are options.

This is certainly not what the people voted for. It is not solving the problem that we are facing. This budget is actually making the problem worse. The Liberals blame the PCs, but consider the decisions that they themselves have made since they were elected in November. No one wears those decisions, Mr. Speaker, only them.

Premier Ball's first action on his very first day as Premier was to reverse the HST increase for January 1. He later flip-flopped on this by bringing it back for July 1. In the meantime, his decision had cost our province \$100 million in revenue from January to July. That revenue would have easily paid for the Deficit Reduction Levy, plus the cuts that the province's health boards just announced. Both of those issues, the health cuts and the Deficit Reduction Levy, could have been eliminated if the HST had stayed in place, Mr. Speaker.

As Progressive Conservatives, that was the reason we announced last year that there would be an HST increase because saw what was coming ahead and we were taking responsible measures, Mr. Speaker. Here we are today –

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** If the Liberals had not cancelled that HST increase and campaigned on the promise not to raise any taxes – how amazing is that – all of this could have been avoided. Now, that is shocking and deplorable. Here we are today in a very sad situation that could have been easily avoided.

Not only have they flip-flopped on the HST, but they ramped up every other tax, just about, and every other fee and they've created 50 new ones. These measures, plus the job cuts, are taking the money out of our economy at a time when our

economy needs stimulus. This is making the crisis worse, not better.

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

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

The Speaker would remind all hon. Members – I realize you have very, very pressing conversations going on there, but I would ask that you take them outside.

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

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

Thinking about the fact now that the Liberal government and the actions they have taken with this budget is actually making the crisis worse, not better, then think about the negative impact of uncertainty among those who do not even know if they are going to keep their jobs, and that uncertainty they walk around with every day and they will continue to walk around with until September. Uncertain consumers do not spend. Uncertain businesses do not expand. Uncertain investors do not invest. That is also making the current crisis we face much worse, not better.

The government has a role to drive the economic growth. Their budget did not include an economic plan to stimulate and support growth in industries, other than oil, where we really need growth right now to get our economy growing again – not one single measure for growth, Mr. Speaker. Their failure to have a plan is again making the crisis worse, not better.

Their refusal to fight for federal fairness, emergency stimulus, equalization reform, or election promises like the CETA fisheries fund are also making the crisis worse and impossible to justify. While the other oil-producing provinces are fighting for assistance, our Premier is refusing to stand up for the province in a time of great need.

Mr. Speaker, it's certainly very, very disheartening and it grieves me that the economic advances that we spent years building are now in jeopardy because of a failure to plan and an inability to lead. Consider how much is at stake; consider the impact on struggling families

and our poorest children. A generation of our youth could be lost as a consequence. Some opportunities, once lost, can never be regained.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon all Members of this House to please listen to your constituents. Please take some time. Make some revisions to this budget so we do not destroy our province entirely.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Deputy House Leader.

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

I call the Concurrence Motion for the Resource Committee.

Thank you.

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

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

It's a pleasure, as always, to rise in this hon. House to speak to the Concurrence. I had the opportunity as a new MHA, and I appreciate the opportunity, to sit as Chair of the Resource Committee. For those who are at home listening tonight, in Estimates it's the formation of a committee. On one side, we have members from different departments along with their minister and staff. On the other side, we have Members from the Official Opposition, the Third Party and Members from the government side that are actually on that Committee.

What that Committee actually does is they have the opportunity to go line by line down through the Estimates of a particular department. What they are doing is the Members on the opposite side are holding the minister and his department accountable for the actual line-by-line Estimates of that particular department.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, coming into this Resource Committee, I was a little nervous in the beginning, really not knowing what to

expect, but what I did see was a certain level of respect – actually a high level of respect – for the job that’s done in this House of Assembly and by all staff in the departments.

I have to say in chairing these Estimates meetings I was impressed with the level of respect. And certainly from the government side as well, they were prepared in the deliberations to release any and all information that the questioners were asking for. In most of the departments – in fact all of the departments – I will say that a copy of the Estimates binder was actually passed to both parties, the Official Opposition and the Third Party, the persons who were representing them there that evening.

I thought it was a great deal of working together and I saw it as holding government, again, accountable for the decisions that they made. I just wanted to go down through the departments that we had the opportunity to sit with and had the pleasure of listening to. Mr. Speaker, before I say that, I have to say if there is one education that I received in this House of Assembly, it was the education that I received in the Estimates Committee meetings. I think I speak on behalf of all Members who sat with me – certainly all new Members – it was truly an education and my hat goes off to all the departments.

I want to mention that I had the privilege of sitting with the Vice-Chair, the MHA for Cape St. Francis; the MHA for Conception Bay East – Bell Island; the MHA for Exploits; the MHA for Fogo Island – Cape Freels; the MHA for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave; the MHA for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi; and the MHA for Stephenville – Port au Port. Again, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to chair that and it was a pleasure.

This year the Resource Committee heard from the Department of Advanced Education and Skills; the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development; the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Office of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency; the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture; the Department of Forestry and Agrifoods; the Department of Natural Resources and the Office of Public Engagement.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the education was unbelievable and I hold the highest respect for anybody in this House of Assembly in doing the job that you’ve been elected here to do and holding government departments accountable in the process.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

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

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

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

It’s a pleasure to get up and speak on Concurrence.

The MHA for Baie Verte – Green Bay actually chaired the one I was on, Environment and Conservation. I want to thank him for his professionalism. It was a great Estimates and you did a great job.

Also, before I begin to speak I want to recognize the Minister of Environment and Conservation for his very forthright and great answers and co-operation during the Estimates. I want to thank the minister; most notably I want to thank his staff. The staff prepares a lot. I know from my days in the departments, it is a lot of work for staff to prepare, to get the ministers ready for Estimates. So I do want to acknowledge the staff as well. We all know the staff is very important in all of our departments.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few things I’d just like to talk about tonight. I’ll try to stay relevant to Environment and Conservation. During Estimates we talked about the budget a lot, but one thing we never really talked about a lot is fee increases and what not. In Environment and Conservation there are a substantial number of fee increases right across the board. Some of them are probably warranted. Some of them may have not increased for a long time. Some I have concerns about.

Last week, the minister got up and mentioned in a Ministerial Statement about the reservations and how quick it sold out. There is no doubt. Personally, I RV myself; I understand it’s more

of a supply and demand chain. We're limited in our – in the Northeast Avalon we probably have a vast majority of the population. Being a person who has owned an RV, it is challenging to get into many parks. It is a challenge. Most times you have to be kind of lucky; the luck of the draw. I understand why it would sell out quickly because we don't have that abundance of serviced RV parks available. But in saying that, I do have some concerns over park fee increases.

You're upping your nightly rates. I understand they're probably bringing it in line, in comparison with some private parks, but when you compare a private park to a provincial park, no doubt provincial parks – that's where I like to camp. But private parks, if you're going to bring it on par with them, they offer more services. You have electrical; you could have convenience there located. There are a lot of other services provided in the private park that is not available in the provincial park. Provincial parks; basically you're in there, you're camping – which is nice and it's what I like, it's what people like – but you're not comparing apples to apples. There's quite a difference.

The substantial increase in the fee to enter the park; again, you encourage families – camping; for any of us that have ever done it or are lovers of it, it's probably one of the most relaxing and family-oriented things you'll do. I've done travelling around, vacationed on boats and planes and whatnot, but there's something special about going up, sitting back in the park, lighting a fire and not really a care in the world, sitting down. It's something that I have concerns about. I know I've spoken to a lot of others; it's something I just wanted to highlight here tonight in our parks. It is a concern.

Mr. Speaker, you look at some increases; a permit to alter a body of water. That could entail someone building a cabin that may want to put a – they may need to change something to get their wharf in place. That was \$100 in 2000. Now it's gone from \$200 up to \$4,000.

A lot of these fees are not just – you get a well drilling licence, well, that's a business fee. But a lot of these fees could be just by the average public. I say again it's buried in the details under the big-ticket items of we all have to pay the levy, the tax increases and that. These fees are

going to be challenging to the people that avail of different services in Environment and Conservation. Again, I guess it can be considered a tax. I'd stay away from it being a tax, but it's another hit on people's pocketbooks which makes things challenging.

You look at some of the savings that's been attained. Moose management we hear a lot about. It has quieted down now. It may pick up on our moose management plans and our moose-vehicle collisions. We're changing the way we're doing our moose management. Maybe it might be a good change, I'm not sure, but any time I see a change incorporated that there's money being saved, you throw caution to the wind.

The minister will agree, they're great – the Wildlife Division out there, I know a lot of them personally. They are a good operation. Wildlife is near and dear to them, but you're only given so much money to spread around. I question sometimes when you change your technology on – you're changing the way you're monitoring moose.

There's some stuff there that draws concern, but there's other stuff there; you have to reduce the operations grant to Pippy Park. If there's a reduction, you're saving money, but what impact will it have on Pippy Park. I'm not a user of the park, but I know people, especially the people out of the Northeast Avalon area. It's a very popular place. It's usually very busy. There are a lot of people there. Those things draw concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just talk about – and it's been talked about today and last week – the feasibility study on the fixed-link tunnel. If I'm not mistaken I think that's running through Environment and Conservation. I hear the conversations, I hear the debate. I understand Members opposite, the Member for Lab West and Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair. I really understand their concerns. That's what they're elected to do and I respect their decision and their opinions.

To make it clear, it's not that we, as an Opposition, are opposed to it or in favour of it. We're saying is this the right time to do it, based on the fact that I have a news release back from



2005 when the last study was done and that study deemed it to be not feasible. It also deemed it at a cost of \$1.2 billion with total development –

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

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

**MR. PETTEN:** A total development cost of \$1.8 billion, including escalation and interest.

I hear the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair telling me they only half did the work. So would it be fair in saying that's \$2.4 billion or \$3.6 billion with escalated costs?

It's not about attacking Labrador. I actually –

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

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

**MR. PETTEN:** I appreciate you letting me finish. This is not about attacking anyone on the other side, Mr. Speaker, it's about our concerns. Last week in the House I did ask the question. And I'd like to make it clear by my stand and our stand as an Opposition, all our questions have ever been: Is this the best time to do it?

We all get hundreds of emails coming in every day wondering how they're going to make ends meet with this levy the government says they have to impose. We're saying is this the time you take \$750,000 and invest in a study?

It's a study. It's not a road being built; it's not a building being built. It's a study. There was one done 11 years ago. You could dust that up. You can bring some changes about and probably do it for a lot cheaper, I don't know. But is this the best expenditure of money today? Maybe next year or in two years' time or in three years it might be great. Right now, we question it. That's all. We're not here to criticize.

If I was the Member for Lab West or Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair I'd be advocating for it too. Why not? This is not the issue. Our stance is, we're not saying we're for or against, we're just saying is this the best expenditure of money right now? I question it.

Like I said, it was studied in 2005. At the time it was concluded the fixed link wasn't economically viable. So my question is what has changed now? What's changed?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Technology.

**MR. PETTEN:** The Member opposite said technology. Maybe he's right. Maybe we need to incorporate that into our old study. I don't know if we need to reinvent the wheel. Maybe you can apply the new technology to the old report. I don't think that would be a big expense.

The 2005 report listed a number of concerns of potential projects. Critics of the project also listed a number of concerns. The engineering team looked at concepts: a bridge, a causeway, and a bridge and tunnel. Like I just said, the estimated construction cost of the link and tunnel would be \$1.2 billion in 2004 dollars, with a total development cost of \$1.8 billion including escalation and interest. It would take 11 years to complete. I don't think it's going to be any shorter to complete now. As we know, that's 2004 dollars so the cost has definitely increased.

If we had excess funds in the Treasury – I wasn't an elected official, but I remember when the study was done in 2005. I remember it was announced and it kind of intrigued my own interest because I've been to Labrador many times. I never had the opportunity to drive there or go by boat; I just flew there like a lot do. I always thought it would be kind of neat to be able to go and do the full loop. I think it would be wonderful. If you get connected into Quebec, hopefully if they ever get that done, it will be wonderful to be connected. No one is opposing that. It's just right now, we question it.

The 2005 report also listed a number of risks. Even with the safest option there would be risks of icebergs and damage. Again, I'll say if it wasn't viable then, I can't see why it would be viable today.

If we had a budget that came out and listed off that we had a \$1 billion or a \$2 billion surplus or we had even half a billion and they were going to say, why not take \$750,000 and invest it into a study, I think for the most part people would be relatively, generally accepting of that. At this

time, it's a hard one to justify. I know this government has to justify it, but I've heard lots of critics out there – and I don't know if anyone is saying that this is a horrible thing. I think most people are saying what I'm saying. They're saying: My God, why are we doing something like this now at such a time when we're cutting, cut, cut, cut?

I understand you have a budget to do, but I use the term death by a thousand cuts. That's what this budget is like. Then on top of all those cuts, you're cutting everywhere. We all know, it's been talked about in this House day after day after day. Then – it was not announced – it was discovered through Estimates that we're spending three-quarters of a million dollars on a study.

If you're appeasing or you're satisfying the needs of Labrador, why not make that part of your Budget Speech? Why wasn't that brought up on budget day? If Members opposite in government were so proud of that, why didn't they bring it up in the Budget Speech? Let the public decide. Now we're finding it out second-hand again. You find a piece here and a piece there. That would give everyone more of a collective thought to say put that in context with everything else, but obviously it only came out last week.

There's no doubt; there may be economic benefits to having a fixed link to Labrador. I think it's always been something that everyone has always talked about. Again, I'll go back to the point of this may not be the best time, the best expenditure of money in today's environment but who knows, down the road it may be.

When you're looking at the use of over 30 years, the report stated that the fixed link would not be viable. The traffic flow would not justify the cost of the project. If the traffic flow couldn't justify the project then, what has changed now, Mr. Speaker? How is it justified now?

In fact, the study stated, "The economic and business case analysis showed that a fixed link could not be financed privately under normal economic and business case criteria." I find this peculiar in that the current Liberal government

has stated the private sector may pay for the tunnel, but the report in 2005 has ruled this out.

If it couldn't be done in 2005, Mr. Speaker, I'll go back again, I can't see what's changed 11 years later. When the government suggested they would get the private sector to pay for the tunnel, I don't think this is the case. I really don't. Maybe they got someone lined up. I don't see where it's coming from. What's changed?

In 2005, things were turning around in the province. That was the time. If you couldn't get it then – again I'll say that – I can't see where it comes from now. If the fixed link tunnel wasn't viable for the private sector, when you're looking at a 30-year usage timeline, why would it be publicly viable? If the private companies wouldn't put their money behind it, why should we put public money behind it? That's a good question.

I know private and government operate differently to a degree, but if you can't get private investment into something you have to stop and have a pause-and-reflect moment. Is that the best expenditure of money? I do know that sometimes government spends money that private industry would never go near it because it's what you need to do to provide services for the people.

I find it very interesting and peculiar, just taking the time – I really did. When I found out last week actually, or when it was discovered that this was part of the budget – and then the Premier confirmed it there in the House last week – it did strike me kind of peculiar. I'll say it again, it's not a matter – and I know the Member for Lab West is very passionate about it, and I respect that, but it's not a matter of we're against it. I think it's a rational decision. Is this the best time?

When you consider – I could go on for that one, Mr. Speaker, and time is getting to the point. I want to just point out a few comparisons there. So that's my point on that. You got into three-quarters of a million dollars for this fixed link study. I got a call from personal care homes in my district, and I have 13 of them. They got notified from Lawton's Drugs –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Oh, oh!

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

**MR. PETTEN:** He's really excited tonight, isn't he?

They got notified from Lawton's Drugs –

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Name him.

**MR. PETTEN:** Yeah.

– they were drugs that weren't being covered. They got a listing of the drugs that weren't being covered. I've talked to the parliamentary secretary for Health, and he's been very helpful. I was given a listing of the drugs that are not covered.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I got these personal care home operators, if I were to bring that up and give it to some of them, I wouldn't make a second trip. I mean, this is what I was given. This was online, this went public. I don't even know what's covered and what's not covered. I can't find an Aspirin, I can't find Tylenol. All the questions I'm asking – but we're getting into the bread and butter.

You have personal care residents that are making \$150 a month. That's what they get in allowances a month, and they now are being told this is not being covered. So they have to use that \$150 to pay for these things, these medications or alcohol swabs, whatever the case may be for diabetics.

All I've asked is – and I spoke to the Member opposite this morning, we had a great conversation. I just wanted a short and dirty list, tell me what's available. He's done great. It's not directed at him, Mr. Speaker.

We went in online to try to find it, because I wanted to get back to my constituents. Again, sometimes it's about communication. Somewhere along the line someone should be able to pry out those five or six things, because we all know we're looking at – is it Tylenol or acetaminophen, is it Aspirin or ASA, is it cotton swabs, is it rubbing alcohol? I don't know.

I like to use the term, actually, the dummy-down approach, because we all kind of get the kindergarten level of it. So at least we can get it

pretty quickly, pick up the phone and call someone. But if I had to pick up the phone and call someone with that – so then we say we're at that, and we're looking at these personal care homes. Like I say, I have a lot in my district. I visited a lot of those homes over time, Mr. Speaker. My past is around mental health and mental health issues, so I've been very close and I understand those residents, what they require and what their behaviours are.

They're getting \$150. They have their own little money. They have to take that now and spend it on some stuff that they were always accustomed to being covered. But according to what I'm being told, they may very well be covered. That's something that maybe government needs to tell everyone. Maybe that could give them a bit of leeway because right now there are a lot of concerned personal care owners who have great concerns over what is and what is not being covered.

You look at those residents. They get \$150 a month. That includes during the winter if they have to get a pair of boots or a coat. It's not a lot of money, Mr. Speaker, and if they have to start diverting that to medications, it's pretty well going to be little to nothing. Maybe, just maybe, they may not have to if anyone can decipher this for me.

When I finished up, I was going to go across the way or ask someone could they have a look at it for me. In all sincerity, maybe it can be picked out. This is what I find – I got up before and I spoke – maybe there are good things. Communication is everything, so maybe there are good things there. Maybe there are not. I don't know, but I'd like for someone to be able to tell us.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune was asking explain to us, because we're not getting that explanation. You ask a question and you hear a reference across, no, that's not right. Okay, tell us. We never get it explained to us.

We have a lot of trouble getting information explained. As I pointed out, a lot of this stuff don't be justified – well, at least in my mind, it don't be justified – to say why that fee is increased and why that program is there, why that's being done.

It's very difficult when you pick up the phone and you talk to your constituents and you have to try to explain to them, because they expect you to understand. You're there to represent them. You're looking at them or telling them on the phone I got to check it out because I don't understand what's going on here and no one around you seems to be able to make sense of it.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want better communication.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

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

It's a great honour to actually be a critic of my critic, a little role reversal tonight. If I could just start with perhaps a serious point, my thoughts and prayers are with a family of a good friend of mine who appears to have drowned in Mud Lake on Saturday night. I've just been in touch with the search and rescue team. They are still looking for his body. So my thoughts and prayers are with those volunteers, former colleagues of mine, as well as the community of Mud Lake, which is in great shock tonight.

So with that, I'll try to turn my attention to perhaps less serious but just as important items. Maybe I'll start with a little story. I was just thinking about the Member opposite for Conception Bay South and what he said about how we seem to be doing things differently. While that's true in the Department of Environment and Conservation, and I would say in a lot of the departments that I'm responsible for, we also look back in a very traditional way.

I thought I'd start with a little story. A very good friend of mine, he was talking about listening and understanding. He said years ago a colleague of his was going to do his Ph.D. in fur-bearer ecology – perhaps it was on wolves. He said he thought that what he'd do is he'd get

back to sort of traditional understanding of ecology. So he went off and he was going to spend a week or so with a trapper – this was up in the Northwest Territories; I heard about the story a little later on. He said that he met the trapper, he was a very quiet man and off they went into the woods, and they had their packs and they were going to be gone for some period of time. Hours into the march, and the man is in front of him, the young Ph.D. student he's talking away how he'd done this and he had done that, and he'd studied this and he was an expert on all these things. And the trapper wasn't saying much. Oh, how he'd worked on marten, how he worked on wolverine, and all these different studies he had done and how smart he was, but he really wanted to learn from this trapper.

So finally after several hours, they stopped to have a little boil-up, as you would, and the kettle came out and they were boiling the water. The guy's still talking. He said: I worked on snowshoe hare and lynx. That was amazing; I did all these great things. The trapper still hadn't said anything. The water's finally boiling and – I'm not allowed to use props, but I'll demonstrate – he took the kettle, and the Ph.D. student was still talking about, I don't know, talking about coyotes now and all these great things. The trapper started to pour water into the cup of tea, and he started pouring and pouring and pouring, and the tea cup filled up and it started spilling over, and he still kept pouring and pouring.

Finally, the young Ph.D. student, he finally paid attention. He said: My gosh, what are you doing? He says: Why are you doing that? The trapper said: This is you. Your cup is full. He said: Until you got room in your cup to come back and learn and listen to what I may have to say, we're really wasting our time.

I just use that little story by way of an example of how important it is to listen. We do have two ears, one mouth, as they say. I'd like to think that – and we are listening. We're listening to what the Opposition is saying. We're listening to what our constituents are saying. We're listening to what those, frankly, who may have any matter of agenda right now, are saying to us.

We had a lot of reflection, a lot of consideration, but the fact of the matter is that we are in a difficult situation, and as a minister I was tasked – as we all were when we found out what the extent of the problem was – to do our best.

When you're in lean departments like Environment and Conservation, or even some of the smaller ones which are much less in size in terms of budget, people and so on, nevertheless just as important, it is very difficult to try to go deep and find those cuts that we need to find to be able to get this ship back on its keel and floating again.

Nevertheless, we did go forward and we did make changes. As I was interviewed just a little while ago, those changes aren't always losses; sometimes they're just a new way of doing something.

What I'd like to talk about a little bit – and just in reflection to my comrade, colleague, across the way for CBS, he was talking about moose management plans and what we've decided to do. In fact, what's happening in terms of moose management – and moose is a very important species to this province. They were introduced just about 120 years ago or so, but they dominate certainly the Island's ecosystem, extremely important all matter of food, for the outfitting industry, all the spinoffs and so on. So this introduced species of some dozen or so animals in Howley all those years ago is now a huge part of our economy, our culture and our recreation.

So understanding what moose are doing in each of the different moose management areas of the Island and in Labrador – they showed in Labrador just a few decades ago, so they're relatively new, but a very versatile animal it is and is managing to colonize all of Labrador now. We even find them above the treeline if you can believe it.

Nevertheless, in terms of moose management, what we are going to be doing is pulling back somewhat on the aerial inventory component and working a lot more with computer modeling. We do things like – first of all we use satellite GPS collars, Global Positioning System collars, attached to animals. We get a fix every three hours. We take that information, feed it into a geographic information system and, with

that, we do what is called resource selection function modeling. We can actually model where populations are and, as habitat changes, you can actually anticipate where these animals are going to be, in what abundance and so on.

I don't want to get too carried away with the technical details but just by way of demonstration, instead of just collecting a jawbone from an animal – which, yes, provides you some information. Nevertheless, it's a jawbone from an animal that was shot by a hunter; it may not be a reflection at all of the proportion of animals in a population. It's just an animal that was shot by a hunter.

What we're trying to do is more understanding of what happening on the landscape and anticipate going into the future, what changes we might anticipate as a result of landscape changes. So I throw that out there as an example.

My colleague, the Minister of Education, just wanted to remind me – and in terms of the feasibility study, the crossing of that little Strait of Belle Isle, it's actually the responsibility of my look-alike colleague over on the end there, the Minister of Transportation and Works. It's over in his shop, but I will defend the decision because, as I said in my maiden speech and I've said in other speeches, connecting the Island to Labrador has got to be one of the most important nation-building exercises that we need to get on with.

As someone who's a very proud Labradorian – I think I can say that after almost 30 years there, but I'm still not sure in some companies. I'm very proud to live there and very proud to understand why Labrador folks feel the way they do, but I'm also very proud of this province. I think the sooner we can pull these two physical parts together the better.

And, if that's a tunnel, so be it; if it's a very efficient ferry system, so be it. But we do need to find a way to connect ourselves geographically so that there's predictability and so that frankly – and this is what a lot of folks, if I may say, in Newfoundland really need to understand about why we want this done. It's because that route, from the Northern Peninsula, the Strait of Belle Isle, through Labrador, and on into Central Canada, is how Newfoundland is

going to access goods and services from Central Canada in a very efficient way. You are going to find that this is going to be truly a nation-building exercise. I can't wait to see the results of the feasibility study and which way it may steer us.

It's all about vision. Yes, it's a tough call right now, but I think it also talks about the need for long-term planning. I feel a lot of the weaknesses in this political system, and as well as it may be any political system, is that we're too short-sighted, we're always looking four years out. We need to look out 40 years, and where do we want to be and how are we going to get there.

Now back to Environment and Conservation. As I said, relatively speaking, we're certainly not in the realm of what we spend on our deficit each year. Our budget now is in the vicinity of some – well, it was \$25 million just last year. We've knocked off about \$3.2 million in savings so we're just over \$20-something million. With that, we have a lot of responsibility and a lot of activity.

What I thought I'd do is go through some of the decisions we've made, why we've made them and the implications for all of those people who are there who depend on those resources. First of all, in staying in Labrador I want to talk about the cleanup at Hopedale. This has always been interesting. The last time I spoke on the budget I talked about the frustration and the difficulty of defending a budget which has a lot of moving parts in it. It has a lot of moving parts because there needed to be a lot of moving parts.

But folks, we're fixated on the fact that we withdrew, we declined and we had a decrease in some \$200,000 associated with the cleanup at Hopedale. Hopedale is the former US military site. We have some very extensive contamination in the form of PCBs and other contaminants. Government has, to date, spent some \$12 million.

There are two components to this project; one is associated with the PCB and hydrocarbon remediation that is going on. We are committing to another \$1.4-plus million on that this year. I'm very glad to see that. Mr. Speaker, \$200,000 that we pulled back on this year was actually to

clean up non-contaminated metal debris that is in another component. It's in a pond nearby the site. So that has been deferred for this year and that is where the saving of the 200 K comes from. But I must underline, in terms of choosing priorities, human health and the ongoing remediation of the contaminated soil was what we chose.

I've spoken about the moose management area just a little bit in terms of the inventory, but I also wanted to underline, along with my colleague from Transportation and Works, that I have agreed to give him a hand. He owes me supper; I'll just list that out here now. I'm going to give him a hand with this escalating problem of moose-vehicle collisions.

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

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

**MR. TRIMPER:** Since I came to the province in 1987 moose-vehicle collisions have actually doubled. They used to be in the vicinity of 350 a year, maybe 400. We're almost at twice that number now. People are getting killed, serious injuries, huge insurance costs, huge health issues and safety issues.

A variety of techniques have been tried. I'm proposing that this is not going to be simple. It's not going to be one solution, but I've agreed to work with my colleague on a collective. It will probably be in the vicinity of a multi-ministerial approach to get to the bottom of this, but, Sir, we will get to the bottom of this.

My colleague for CBS did mention that we are reducing funding to the Pippy Park Commission by some \$172,300. That is unfortunate. It is a great park. We're very lucky in this city to have such a green space right in our vicinity. I will acknowledge that the amount is reduced. It's a portion of our contribution. We are still making a substantial contribution to its operation.

The park does enjoy other revenues. This is also a number that, while it was difficult for those folks responsible for its operation, it is a number that we arrived on together. It wasn't forced on them. We worked with what we could and realized that kind of saving which we could put

towards reducing our deficit for this year. It's something we're very proud of.

There's an organization that we did phase out this year. It's very unfortunate because we had two very good scientists running it, both of whom I know very well. It was difficult because some of the decisions we've had to make in that department can be personal. I've been in this business of science for almost three decades so I know a lot of these people in government. I found myself while in an enviable position; many times it was in an unenviable position. We've had to shut some aspects of our work to get back to our core priorities.

One of them was the Institute for Biodiversity, Ecosystems Science. That group was overseeing a series of grants that were designed to address special research projects. I'm very pleased to say that we felt we couldn't end up – if anyone who's involved in the research game would understand how awkward, to say the least, it would be to sever that funding in mid-investigation. We felt we couldn't do that. So while we've removed the administrative positions and the oversight positions, we've agreed to carry on with the funding.

One of them in particular – and I know a lot of my colleagues in the House, especially on the other side, they often talk to me about it – is associated with Mistaken Point. We're very anxious to hear some good news coming out of UNESCO, hopefully, in about three weeks' time from now. Hopefully, we'll have another amazing designation at another amazing place in our province come July. As I said, we are very pleased to see that funding going on regarding Mistaken Point and some investigations there around visitor impacts.

Drinking water quality is, has and always will be an important priority. I'm very pleased to say we just recently clued up our annual water quality assessors/operators conference. We had some 300-plus operators from around the province gather in Gander for a tremendous multi-day workshop. We get tremendous feedback from that. We also get a lot of buy-in from municipalities, from folks who really need to be incented, who really need to feel their work is meaningful. And it certainly is. We're able to reach out, through that networking, to actually

ensure this province has the best chance that we can provide, that they have safe and abundant drinking water quality.

Environmental assessment remains a key priority for our government, for our department. I'm very pleased to say that's my background, is understanding how that process works. Wise decision making in terms of all the various undertakings in our province is extremely important, and making sure we strike the right balance between conservation, environmental protection and sustainable development, also the need to get the economy going on its feet. So it's an interesting role that I sit in and I'm very happy.

Again, I'll thank the Member opposite for the compliments of the team that works around me. It's truly a team, and it's a great honour to be somewhat at the helm of them, although, many days, I'm just in awe of them for the work that they do.

On our provincial parks, I made a statement last weekend. It was amazing. We've launched this new online computerized system called Moneris. As we opened up the seasonal campground reservation system just two weeks ago, within one minute in two of the districts, and two minutes in the third, we had completely sold out all available sites.

So it was amazing to see the interest, first of all, in these seasonal park sites, to see the tremendous response, and certainly from a revenue perspective, watch the revenue show up some 15 minutes later. It is a very efficient system without problems; a lot of good work by a gentleman by the name of Geoff Bailey who runs that department – and Geoff, huge compliments and kudos to you and your team for pulling that off.

I guess in terms of making decisions, we had to make some decisions around the park and, unfortunately, we decided we needed to pull back on three of our larger parks and the year-round nature that we've been enjoying. Unfortunately, they're not used full-time all the time, so we decided we needed to pull back from that winter operation. This particularly did affect the Butter Pot Park, because there is a skiing program there when there's snow available here,

which I notice you have a shortage of sometimes in your winter down here. I was still snowmobiling at Churchill Falls yesterday, as a matter of fact.

Also, Notre Dame and Barachois, we also pulled back on that seasonal operation. Again, we're working, I'm very pleased to say that we have an open door and we've been meeting with user groups, and I also will be meeting with the Avalon Nordic Ski Club very shortly to discuss what matter and strategies we can use going forward.

Another program that we pulled back on the funding with somewhat was called the Atlantic Conservation Data Centre. This is collaboration between the four Atlantic provinces in terms of the collection of data, information, that's from the field. I must say in my own research, I've contributed to this for a decade or so. For some reason Newfoundland and Labrador was paying twice as much as the other jurisdictions. So we pulled back and right-sized that to an equal amount of \$45,000.

Perhaps I'll take a second to talk about fees, since my hon. colleague also mentioned that. I just want to remind the House and everyone else listening there are a lot of fees in government. I think there are over a thousand. There are certainly a great portion of them within Environment and Conservation.

When you look at the changes, you see a lot of them, but, frankly, it's amazing that previous administrations have not done a similar scan. It was very evident as you go through them. There are actually a bunch of things that weren't being captured; for example, many of the fees that were raised were those that have not been addressed in some 20 years, some of them dating back to 1998 and so on.

So it was a moving it up. It was also right-sizing, again, what our Atlantic provincial jurisdictions are charging for the same type of service. There were also aspects of cost recovery. We provide a lot of services to industry and industry was enjoying, if you like, not having to pay anything for that. While I wouldn't suggest that we've moved to a complete cost-recovery, we are implementing measures and means in some of these new fees to actually recover costs. I'm

very pleased to do that and I could suggest that it's only fair.

Finally, the other interesting aspect of this is that in many places the fees were not being applied consistently, so certain entities in the province might have been paying more or less than the others. Now, if you're using a resource in the same way, I'd suggest that regardless of who you are, you should be recognizing the importance of that resource and making full use of it.

That's just a little summary, Mr. Speaker, of some thoughts from Environment and Conservation. I wish I had more time to talk about the Office of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, but I'll say thank you very much for now.

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

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

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

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

Indeed, it's an honour to get on my feet again and speak to this budget, Mr. Speaker, particularly as it relates to my critic roles. When the Member for Topsail – Paradise, the Leader of the Official Opposition, came to me in December, once the ministries were announced by the Premier of the day, and asked me would I take on a critic role for Advanced Education and Skills, Education, and Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, I was sort of taken back a little bit because I was thinking from my background with Transportation and Works as the minister, and Services NL as the minister, that there might have been a different role.

But he very eloquently outlined the fact that he felt I had another skill set with my background as being a former employee of the Department of Education, a former employee of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, and outlined that my previous work – I worked very closely with school councils, I've worked very closely with school administrators, I've worked very closely with communities that



enhanced education, that that skill set would be important in the House of Assembly in assessing the programs and services offered by government and, where necessary, keeping the governments feet to the fire if we thought they weren't addressing the needs when it came to education.

While I was honoured to do that, my first immediate thing was, if I'm going to take on these roles, I want to get the mandate letters that are being sent to the ministers. Particularly, I'm going to talk about the Department of Education. So my first thing was to request the mandate letter, and I got the mandate letter that was addressed to the Minister of Education from the Premier.

I went through it and there were a number of things there that impressed me as to what their focus would be, where they would be going, and how, by following that line of thought and implementing those services and programs, our education system would be better off. I'll just note some of these as I go through them.

"Embarking on this journey together, we will be guided by *A Stronger Tomorrow: Our Five Point Plan* to Restore Openness, Transparency and Accountability; Build a Stronger, Smarter Economy; Improve Health and Healthcare; Support Safe and Sustainable Communities; and Invest in Our Future Through Education." They had me there when they said invest through education. I said a great first step.

Then they went on in the mandate letter – and this mandate letter, for those who are watching at home, is based on the principle that this is the Premier directing the minister responsible for that line department, these are your responsibilities. These are the things I expect you to achieve. These are the things that the people of this province have entrusted the government to make sure it improves their quality of life, particularly around education.

"We also committed to creating an environment that captures the full potential of our province's many riches, through diversification, job creation and growth. We will take action to improve the health and well-being of people, empower sustainable community development, protect public safety and advance educational opportunities and outcomes."

Again, somebody with a background in education and particularly a number of educators in my family, I was sold. I figured, we're on the right track here; let's keep going here. I kept reading. "The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is charged with the critical task of supporting the development and education of the youngest residents of the province, and building programs which will carry them through to the end of high school." Again, great focus, a great template to move things forward, and outlines what I think would be a great direction at that point.

Learning and Assessment: "Reading is essential for student success in every aspect of school, and of life. You will conduct a review to understand why our reading scores are lower than those in other jurisdictions and ascertain what actions can be taken to ensure our programs are research-based, our teaching methodologies are strong and teachers are receiving the necessary training and professional development."

Again, I thought a great move forward, a great opportunity to capsulize exactly how we improve our education system. We've been making major strides over the last number of years and moving us to the next level, and I thought this would be again another great opportunity to do that.

"I expect you to work with Memorial University to enhance teacher training programs, including actions to promote more time in schools and classrooms, and increased roles for teacher mentors." Again, something that we had done as an administration. The Premier of the day saw that as a vision of something he wanted to continue. And hats off, I was sold. I was figuring this is going to make my job very easy. It's going to be hard for me to criticize the government if they follow through on these things. I was thinking, maybe I'll have to concentrate on one of my other two critic roles to see if there are ways to keep their feet to the fire.

"All children need to have opportunities to succeed. You must ensure that schools receive the support they need in providing inclusive education which will include more teacher training opportunities and increase

administrative support.” We’ve been echoing that for years. If we have a better process by numbers in our school systems to ensure we have a better level of education, from an economic point of view, it’s a benefit for everybody.

“Work with the Department of Transportation and Works and other stakeholders to improve educational facilities so that they provide exemplary learning environments and support school grounds as areas of learning and play. Tremendous advances have been made in educational technology and you should ensure that the province’s education system is positioned to take full advantage of this technology and that schools have the resources and training required.”

I was in on that. As minister of Transportation and Works I had the privilege of signing off, I think, on 12 school projects; new schools being built, schools that would be advanced to the next levels, including Coley’s Point and schools that needed to be built on to because we had a growing population. I saw this as another asset for improving our education system in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Also, “Reviewing the distance criteria for school bus service eligibility and implementing a more flexible policy.” A great opportunity around things like courtesy busing, in ensuing kids would have access to after-school programs, to improving how buses access the parking lots and that from a safety point of view. These were all things I thought were very important.

“Empowering schools to be available for after school physical education programming, which will be a component of the Health Promotion and Healthy Living Strategy being developed jointly by the Ministers of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, and Health and Community Services.” What better than to use a state-of-the-art facility, particularly where we invested so much money in building new ones. Particularly in communities that had capacity issues, growing sustainable communities, that we knew these investments would only be an asset to those communities.

“Emphasis must be placed on high quality early learning for children. Completion of the

implementation of full-day Kindergarten for September 2016 is essential and you should identify and implement other options ....”

Nobody is more a proponent for all-day kindergarten than we were, but at the time, we realized also there were some shortfalls. Everything wasn’t in place. There were some economic challenges, no doubt.

Our education system, particularly at the kindergarten level, was still comparable to anything in the country. While we wanted to enhance it, right now it was felt it’s a good add-on, but if it’s at the jeopardy of any other class level, this was one you can put on the back burner. Do you know what? They could blame it on us if they wanted to. They could blame us and say we weren’t ready for it. It was too early to bring it, so it was a way out to ensure that they fulfilled the other issues in the mandate letter.

“Our government will report back to the public annually on the achievement of our commitments and make adjustments as required. As a Minister you are accountable for achieving these priorities and meeting other responsibilities within your Department.

“Together, we will provide strong leadership to deliver the change we need to move beyond today’s challenges and on to a stronger tomorrow.”

Mr. Speaker, when I read that, again, I was in. If the minister follows through with 75 per cent of that, we’re going to have an extremely improved education system. It would build on what had been started from the previous administration. It would build on the partnerships that had been developed with the unions, with school councils, with the administrators and with the communities as a whole, Mr. Speaker. I was in.

But it didn’t take very long. A few months into it I noticed cracks in the armour. I had meetings as the critic with line agencies, the Federation of School Councils, the NLTA, parent’s groups, other unions, even groups like Common Front who were telling us no, no, everything is not rosy; they’re not going to achieve these goals. As a matter of fact, not only are they not going to achieve these goals, we’re going to get into a regressive education system. They’re going to

make changes that are not in the best interests of the students of this province.

At the beginning I was skeptical. I touted I have the mandate letter. The mandate letter is gospel when it comes to the responsibility of the minister because it's enforced by the Premier. It's his direction for that minister, and then the minister's direction to his staff to ensure this happens. But as I started to read down through it, again and over the next number of months and weeks, I started to see exactly where this wasn't going to be anywhere near what was promised or what was directed, particularly around accountability, inclusion and transparency.

Most of the organizations that are responsible for enhancing our education system – parents groups, unions and administrators – had no input. Even the school district had minimal input into what was happening. They were being told: Here's where we're putting our money; you have to make do with what you've got. If that means there are going to be caps across the board, you're going to have to live with that.

Committed to creating an environment that captures the full potential of the province's many riches, particularly young people, through advanced education opportunities and outcomes. What they've noted here, as we've seen in the budget only three, four weeks ago, was a number of cuts that do the opposite. They prevent any way for us to expand our education opportunities. They draw back on the advances we had made and they add other hardships to our education system by increasing the cap sizes, by the blending of classrooms, by changing the busing system, by overcrowding our schools with all-day kindergarten at this point.

It became very aware to me that we had a crisis happening. When the budget line came down it was totally evident then. We saw exactly the rumours were true. I didn't think it would be as bad as it would be, because I said the speculation – and rumours may have some truth to it, but it wouldn't be as bad as it would be. And sure enough it was.

Every organization came in. They were in total disarray from their understanding of what they were promised to what they felt they had lobbied

for, which would be in the best interests of education. They all felt, no doubt with the economics, there was going to be certain things that would have to be modified. Maybe in how things were progressing forward. Maybe the time frames there would have been. Maybe how we partnered with other agencies. Maybe how we dispersed the workload. What happened here was a total regressive process when it came to education.

It talked about reading is essential. Now we know that the keyword here under Learning and Assessment – this is from the Premier himself: "Reading is essential for student success in every aspect of school, and of life." No doubt, there's not an educator in this world who'll argue with that, there's not a professor who'll argue with that, there's not a researcher who'll argue with that, there's not a parent who'll argue with that and I guarantee you there's not a young person who'll argue with that.

What did this administration decide to do and the minister? Let's cut 54 libraries. Let's make it harder for people to get to that critical success area and improve their literacy skills. Let's pull that back. Let's make it harder for them to access that. That became another major challenge and another frustration for other agencies that have had, as their lifelong commitment, improving literacy in this province. Obviously it's another indication of the lack of commitment by this administration and the minister to move things forward from an education point of view.

"I expect you to work with Memorial University ... to promote more time in schools and classrooms, and increased roles for teacher mentors." It's hard to do that when you're doing blending classes, when you're asking teachers to take more kids in their school, when you're expecting teachers to go in closets.

When I asked and inquired with teachers and administrators, I heard stories about teachers literally being in closets. I thought that was – you know, everybody embellishing things. But when I saw pictures of a closet in a school with a number of desks in it, and the teacher, herself, taking her desk out to make space for students – and would stand and teach her classes through that mode, and then every day box up her

materials and take it out of the classroom again and bring it home with her – then I realized regression is frightening here. I thought we'd go back maybe a generation. With that process we're going to go back numerous generations, and we're only going to cause havoc on our education system.

Around inclusion: "All children need to have opportunities to succeed. You must ensure that schools receive the supports they need in providing inclusive education ...." I thought inclusive education also meant French immersion and Intensive Core French. Because if you're not in French immersion and you know you're going to be ready for it when you get in junior high, well the Intensive Core French process would work. Now when you're cutting major opportunities in that venue, then you know you're putting our education system at risk and it's becoming extremely regressive.

Review the distance criteria for school busing eligibility. We had talked about it as an administration. It was on our agenda to look at the 1.6 because we know in some areas – particularly growth areas – we've had some real issues around safety on some of our roads. So the courtesy busing system would be something that would be very positive.

Obviously, we saw that this would be very regressive, but we look at how it ended. "Together, we will provide strong leadership to deliver the change we need to move beyond today's challenges and on to a stronger tomorrow."

Mr. Speaker, I guarantee you, that's not a stronger tomorrow for the students of our province. Only a few days ago reality hit home when I went into my own district to a public meeting where some 300 parents showed up to talk about the challenges they're going to face in Beachy Cove Elementary.

I give credit to the individuals who put that off, a very professional process there. They outlined exactly, so everybody was aware, of what blended classrooms meant, what the cap sizes meant, about the challenges around space in their facility, around what busing would do, about the use of their cafeteria, which doesn't exist now, the use of their gymnasium, their

music room, their resource library, all these things. They went through this.

This wasn't a scream and bawl thing. This was a very professional way of outlining to people what their challenges were. Every one of those parents there were flabbergasted about the impact it's going to have on their school system, particularly their students, around core French not being available, the cap sizes, the blending of classrooms.

There is no doubt the minister has an argument and an excuse for every one of them, but that didn't go over with the people of my district and Beachy Cove because they know better. They know this is putting our education system behind. They know, at the end of the day, their students are going to have more challenges. Their parents are going to have more challenges. Their administrators and their teachers are going to have more challenges. That's not in the best interest of anybody. It's not in the best interest of the mental health of our students, the physical health and definitely not the academic health. It's not acceptable.

When they talked about that, they've come up with a process. You've noticed it. The minister has received hundreds of letters from concerned citizens saying: Take a look at what you're doing here, really reflect on how you're going to promote education in this province, tell me that is in the best interest of the people of this province.

When I heard stories that the grade five students wanted to get together and do fundraisers because they knew they were losing one of their teachers around core French and wanted everybody, all their friends and that, to be able to do it so they could move on to the next level in French, to do a fundraiser to hire a teacher – young people not realizing but understanding the importance of education – then I started to think, we're in a crisis here. If these decisions stand and the people on that side over there vote of this budget, then our education system is going to take a major hit.

I want to finish with a letter I received today. The Premier received the same letter and so did the Minister of Education. It's from a student in my district. I'm a fifth-grade student of Beachy

Cove Elementary in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. I'm writing to you today due to the budget cuts in our education.

I signed up for Intensive Core French for grade six, but only 23 children are allowed to participate in the program because of the budget cuts; 52 children signed up today. I received my rejection letter for the program. Next year, I will have to be in grade five/six split English class.

The school didn't look over my academic records to decide my place; they drew names. My future came down to a lottery thanks to these budget cuts, and so has the future of others. Twenty-eight other children from the fifth grade of Beachy Cove Elementary went home today with a rejection letter weighing down their backpacks. This is from a grade-five student. Some of my friends are part of that 28.

As a young Canadian, I believe all children are entitled to a good education and these cuts are preventing me from learning an official language in a bilingual country. On top of that, next year many other students will be challenged due to the fact that two grades will be combined.

We know what's coming, split classes and fewer teachers will reduce the amount of time a teacher has to help a struggling student. I know this is going to be an impact on lots of children going into sixth grade. I know there isn't a lot of money to go around, but this is impacting the future of Newfoundland and the future of Canada. This is not the way I like to think of my home. Someone needs to do something. These cuts are affecting my future and the future of others. Please reconsider how you're spending your money.

Mr. Speaker, this is reality. This is a grade-five student who understands the impacts. Fortunate enough, she understands them, parents understand them, administrators understand them, school councils understand them and the NLTA understands them. It seems the Minister of Education, the Premier and that administration over there forgets one thing, the people who put them in there are the people who have come up through our systems here, who have been well educated, who want to look forward to a brighter future.

To do that, they have to have a sustainable education system. They have to have one that works for them and their children. They have to ensure the next generation is better off than this generation. They're the ones who are going to lead us into the next millennium.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members over there to reconsider. Make the changes now before it's too late. Ensure our education system is not regressive, but progressive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** The hon. Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Concurrence. Essentially, to those who are listening at home, we're speaking in reference to the Estimates that we've been going through line by line for the last few weeks. I'd like to take the first moment to acknowledge the Chair of the Resource Committee, the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay.

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

**MR. FINN:** The Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay was very polite during the whole Estimate process. As he alluded to when he opened debate this evening, we've been going three hours every other morning through a number of departments. We've had great co-operation from the Members opposite throughout this entire process, through their questioning and through our line-by-line items.

As he alluded to, we went through the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development. My hon. colleague, the Member for Lake Melville, the hon. Minister of Environment and Conservation, spoke earlier to the Concurrence debate as well. We went through line by line with his department, as well as the Office of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Fisheries and Aquaculture, the

Department of Forestry and Agrifoods, Natural Resources and Public Engagement.

Going through those items line by line – and I spoke to this the other day. It is not going to be the whole point of my time here this evening. Last week when I spoke to the budget, I referenced the amount of work that goes into Estimates in the line-by-line items and the savings we've been able to achieve. It is just kind of coincidental this week that it seems that Members opposite seem to be raising the fact that if we had kept the HST at 15 per cent, come January, we would have found about \$100 million in savings. Well, in fact, we found \$100 million in Estimates. We found \$100 million in just line-by-line savings through Estimates, which the Members opposite have seemed to agree with every other morning this week when we looked at Purchased Services, Office Supplies, Transportation and Communications, et cetera.

In fact, just this morning, we had the great pleasure to sit down with the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills and his staff and go line by line there. There were a couple of sections in which there was an easy \$50,000 in savings; \$50,000 in transportation, less printing supplies, and so on and so forth. So when the Members opposite question what we could have done with the HST in January as opposed to what we're doing now, I just ask them to reconsider some of the opportunities they had with Estimates.

I won't belabour that subject this evening because I've spoken about the Estimates process. I've spoken about the opportunities the Opposition have had when they decreased the personal income tax to the highest earners in the province at a time which they shouldn't have.

I'm going to deter from that this evening. One of the Members opposite earlier this afternoon, I believe it was the Member for Ferryland – and while he certainly did raise some good points and ask some great questions, as the Opposition should do, he also said that we're having a tough time selling the budget. He said the Members opposite – he said we don't understand it. He said your own Members don't understand it, the public doesn't understand it; the media doesn't

understand it for that matter. You're having a tough time selling your budget.

Well, I'd like to point out that we're not selling anything. We're not selling the budget here. We're, in fact, painting a reality.

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

**MR. FINN:** Oh, it is interesting now. Everybody is interested in what I have to say opposite here now. That's fair enough.

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

**MR. FINN:** Yeah and I'm hearing it now from the other side, as Members on our end will know.

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

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

**MR. FINN** But that's fine, I'm going to go right back to that. We're not selling anything; we're painting a reality right now of the situation we're in. Newfoundland and Labrador is a different province now than it's ever been. We just went through a decade of the best prosperity our province has ever seen. Right now we're in a completely unfortunate financial crisis.

Our population, just over 500,000 souls, is spread out some 400,000 kilometres. I don't need to educate anyone here on that, but I'm just trying to put it in perspective as to how many people we're trying to serve and the sheer geography of where these people live. We're looking at basically like the State of California that has 38 million people. We're in the same ballpark there in terms of size but we're spread out in every nook and cranny.

All other Atlantic provinces combined only make up a third of the size of Newfoundland and Labrador. So when you look at the impacts of this budget and the fact that it certainly does impact every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, we're also thinking about the realities.

The citizens in the Avalon and the Northeast Avalon have a different reality than those in rural Newfoundland. And there was some good reference to that earlier from the Member for

Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune and the realities of rural Newfoundland. Well, let me tell you there are many of us over here that do represent rural Newfoundland as well.

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

**MR. FINN:** The reality and the impacts of this budget are going to be completely different to those right now who are frustrated, and rightfully so with some changes. In particular, I'll just give the reference of education and the multigrade classrooms. That's a big concern right now for people on the Avalon, but the reality is that people in rural Newfoundland, we've been doing that for 30, 40 years.

The reality is while the constituents here and the residents here are upset with some of these changes, and rightfully so, no one is easy to change. Change is not something easy to take. But the reality in rural Newfoundland – and as the Member for Labrador West pointed out earlier, services in Labrador – it's a completely different situation.

When you look at the impacts of this budget it certainly is affecting every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, and we understand that. We understand the implications of such, but the realities are going to be different on the Northeast Avalon as they are in The Straits, as they are in Labrador and as they are in my District of Stephenville – Port au Port.

You know, when I think about some of the changes that are impacting our municipalities and our different areas, I think we have to look to the strength of our municipalities and the things they have to offer. Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, has the Urban Municipalities Committee. That represents the 20 largest towns in the province. Stephenville, my hometown, happens to be the 12th largest municipality in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, MNL and the UMC, the Urban Municipalities Committee, they've done some great work and some looking at how can we share services better. Outside of this budget and outside of everything else, we already have municipalities looking at how we can provide services better. We're looking at things about

sharing services and how can we share services better.

The word “regionalization” gets tossed about. I'll relinquish from the fact of using the word “amalgamation.” Nobody likes to hear the word “amalgamation” and I don't believe that anybody wants that forced upon them. But the reality of looking at how we're going to deliver services to our population that's spread out amongst 400,000-plus kilometres and how we're going to do this, we need the cooperation of our municipalities in order to do this.

I was fortunate enough to spend two years as a councillor in the Town of Stephenville. I can tell you I learned a great deal on my time with the Town of Stephenville town council. One of the things that stuck out to me – which really helped prepare me, as a matter of fact, when it comes to these Estimates and looking at millions of dollars budget lines, because I was able to take my experience from hundreds of thousands of lines to now millions of lines.

One of the things that stick out to me is how the municipality of Stephenville, as a prime example, and the municipality of Kippens – Stephenville is separated from Kippens by about a six-metre bridge. The Town of Stephenville has 6,790-odd residents as according to the last census. I'd wager to believe it's around 8,000. The Town of Kippens has, I think, 1,800 citizens and I'd wager to guess that's around 2,000 or more. So a six-metre bridge separates these two municipalities. We're both incorporated as municipalities, but what we've done is we've learned how to share services to have a greater impact to the citizens we serve.

Just a couple of examples for you: the Town of Stephenville and the Town of Kippens have partnered with garbage collection; we've partnered with fire and emergency services; our fire departments train together right now on a regular basis; we've partnered with respect to looking after our cemetery and how we take care of our loved ones who've passed on; we've partnered in regional services; we have a regional aquatic centre; both municipalities have contributed funds to our hockey rink, to our museum; our water plant operators in the Town of Stephenville back up, assist and help the water plant operators in the Town of Kippens;

and, we share our street sweepers. These are just a few examples of how two municipalities are sharing services.

I bring this up because we're looking at how we can do things differently and how we can serve our population. Then today in Question Period, and again throughout the afternoon through the course of debate, we heard a number of references as well to how municipalities may suffer right now, and some of the challenges they're faced with and pressed with. Good on the Minister of Municipal Affairs to stand up and say to the Members opposite earlier this afternoon in Question Period that, in fact, we've given municipalities exactly what they've asked for.

They asked for their Municipal Operating Grants to remain the same. We've certainly taken care of that. They've asked for the cost-sharing ratios to remain the same. For those here on our side, Members opposite, and to those at home, there was a lot of buzz prior to the budget that people were in fear of the cost-sharing ratios changing from the 90-10 and the 80-20, and they may be bumped up or bumped down. But our government recognized the important role that municipalities play and the services they deliver to our citizens. We didn't change any of that. So we've given the municipalities everything they've asked for and more. What we're encouraging them to do now is to look at ways to share resources together, in the same fashion in which I've just referenced.

Rural hubs are becoming more of a reality right now, and I referenced the 20 largest towns and Stephenville being the 12th. I think areas such as Stephenville are becoming a rural hub in the sense that it has nothing to do with what we did with this budget; it's just the sheer reality of the demographics of our province. So the outlying rural areas – Stephenville being the rural hub for the Stephenville – Port au Port area – we're seeing senior citizens move in from Cape St. George, from the Member for St. George's – Humber's District out in St. Fintan's and so on.

Individuals want to move in. They want to be closer to the bank. They want to be closer to the grocery store. They want to be closer to the hospital. The aging population that's moving into these rural hubs – Gander is another great

example as a big rural hub right now, and all the Gander Bay area, of the people that filter into these areas.

**MR. HOLLOWAY:** Clarenville.

**MR. FINN:** Clarenville is another one, as the Member for Terra Nova just mentioned.

There are all kinds of rural hubs. Now, I'm not trying to say we need to take away from rural Newfoundland, but historically our citizens move naturally anyway, and as they age right now they want to be closer to services. This is a huge reason why we need to really re-examine the way in which we deliver services.

The Minister of Health has mentioned a couple of times – and I think the reference is quite poignant – that the time of plenty is beyond us. We've had our greatest decade of prosperity. We've reached peak oil. The oil royalties have gone significantly down from \$148 a barrel in 2008 to – what was it trading at today – around \$45 a barrel for Brent crude. So when you look at how things have changed in just a seven- or eight-year period, we really, really have to examine how we're delivering services.

This morning in Estimates as well – and I bring that up again because I think the Estimates is a great exercise. It's a great opportunity to learn how different departments operate. We learned in Estimates this morning – and some of the Members opposite raised some questions, and rightly so, so they should have, great questions, particularly around reference to a few Advanced Education and Skills offices. The Minister of Advanced Education and Skills was quick to point out that, in fact, in 2013 the former administration cut 20 different Advanced Education and Skills offices.

I can't knock them for having done that. Is that a bad decision? Did it affect people? Sure, absolutely, but it goes to show that somewhere along the way in 2013 they had half an idea to look at we need to reevaluate how we deliver our services. They cut Advanced Education and Skills offices in some of the most rural and remote areas, and reorganized the whole lot. We've done the same thing. We've taken the exact same exercise and looked at ways in which we need to reorganize as well. While I can't



necessarily applaud efforts in closing offices, at least they had the idea to recognize that there needed to be opportunities in realizing how we're going to deliver services to our people.

Now, the only trouble I have with that is they did this and, in the same breath, decreased taxes to the highest income earners in the province and knocked down HST in successive years when they really shouldn't have. If they had of just kept the cuts that they had in 2013, as bad as that budget was – because, believe me, it was bad. I was personally affected as well, by the way. I think there was a closure of 72 employment assistance offices across the province, some 225 employment counsellors – I happened to be one of them – and they were employed through various non-profit aspects. What I've yet to understand as well is how a non-profit entity didn't deliver services any cheaper than what a government service would have been.

In any event, the cuts they made at this particular time, they did so at a time, which again, they decreased the personal income tax to the highest earners and they also decreased HST. Now, I'm not over here saying we have all the answers. There's no doubt about that. I wouldn't stand up and dare to dream we have all of the answers, but we had to act now and I think that's been recognized. I'm hearing that from constituents in my district as are other Members as well.

Kicking the can, kicking the problem down the road to future generations is simply not an option right now. We're paying more on debt than we are in education. In that sentence alone, you just have to kind of pause and reflect on that for a moment. We've had some changes to our education system in this budget. They are changes that have not been embraced by all, and others have embraced them. There are some challenges in presenting these new opportunities to deliver education. But when you're paying more in debt than you are in education, how can you further ask your province to grow? How can you further ask your residents to learn? There are just so many ramifications of paying more in debt than on education.

If we continue to do nothing right now, we would be struggling to deliver everyday

government services. How do we pave roads? How do we deliver Municipal Operating Grants? How do our hospitals operate? If we did nothing and put our head in the sand like the ostrich – there's no way out of this particular mess right now, so difficult decisions had to have been made. We've recognized it impacts every Newfoundlander and Labradorian. Rural Newfoundlanders are going to be impacted a lot different than those on the Northeast Avalon and so on in between, but we're never going to be able to please everybody. At least we've recognized now, and we've had to make some decisions. We've had to make some very difficult decisions.

Does raising taxes make this any easier on anybody? No. I'd be a fool to stand here and say that it does, but it's a measure that we had to take right now. The Members opposite don't like to acknowledge the fact that some of increases we've made are only temporary, and fair enough. I believe just a moment ago, actually, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune got up and referenced again all the fees that we're going to pay, all the fee increases and the 300 fee increases. Well, I went through the fees when I spoke to the budget last week. I implored Members opposite to find over half of those 300 fees that affect everyday Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

There are a few increases that are unfortunate, that people are bearing the burden of right now. One of them of which the Member for Lake Melville, the Minister of Environment and Conservation, just brought up, we increased park fees. Park fees went up a very minimal amount. Did it have any great impact on anyone? No. In fact, the park in my district, Barachois Park, or for the Member of St. George's – Humber District – it's the general vicinity – that sold out in five minutes.

We increased park fees a few dollars and the park sold out in five minutes. So now, did the individuals who bought those seasoned park passes, are they upset with that fee increase? I'm certain they are, but it didn't have a grave impact on everybody's pockets across the province. In fact, it increased our revenue and our coffers as a result of that, and only those members going to the park are going to be the direct ones taking up that cost.

The other thing about the fees, and the Minister of Environment and Conservation just mentioned as well, some of the fees I brought up last week, thousands of dollars in environmental impact assessment studies that hadn't been raised in 20 years; 20 years before you even had to look at a fee increase. These are some of the other measures we've taken that no one likes to look at and applaud as a good fee increase, because again, it's a difficult thing to say. We've had fee increases in victim fine surcharges, the *Highway Traffic Act* legislation that is coming in this fall; those are some good fee increases as well.

Outside of the fees and the other measures we've taken in the budget, one of the common things that we've heard from Members opposite and some of the things that are touted in the media is around people are now going to leave our province, and people are going to be leaving in droves as a result of the drastic measures we have just taken.

Now, historically we've been a province where people leave anyway. People leave to work, people leave to come back, this is a commuting flow of traffic whether it's through employment or what have you, but what I need to look at –

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

**MR. FINN:** I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, (inaudible) hearing from the Members opposite.

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

**MR. FINN:** When we look at the Atlantic provinces in general, our tax rates are comparable and competitive with all the Atlantic regions. Then you have to take in other factors. What is it taking for you to leave this province right now that is greater than what's keeping you to stay? Is that the cost of housing? Is it employment? What are the circumstances that are going to make you leave? Because a consumption tax of 2 per cent on HST, people will adjust their spending. People have said in the media they can handle a consumption tax because you can curb your expenditures here and there. But what are the other factors that are pushing you to leave?

One thing that no one else has talked about with respect to this budget, and we look at our demographics which I referenced earlier and that we're so spread out and we have an aging demographic across the entire province, is that we have ton of baby boomers that are going to retire now in the next five to 10 years. So as much as it doesn't seem like there's anything bright now, we have a significant amount of retirements year over year over year.

The Minister of Education just referenced last week some 200 approximate retirements in the education system over the next year. So retirements are continuing and our baby boomers are retiring; therefore, therein lies the opportunity for the rest of us to take the time now, to stay, and to look at the opportunities that are before us. It doesn't make it any easier to increase taxes right now, as I said.

One other thing I'd like to point out and that's in particular to media and social media. I have to wrap up here quickly, 30 seconds on the clock, but media and social media has paid a huge factor in this budget. Ten years ago, when the former administration had layoffs, they increased taxes and everything else, Twitter and Facebook did not exist. In fact, the only way the educated public could get their message out was a letter to the editor in the newspaper.

We're engaged in a whole new world right now with Facebook, Twitter and social media. One of the good things, as much criticism is coming from individuals who are now reaching out to speak about the budget; we're engaging a lot more citizens right now. We're engaging our young people and we're engaging everyone else who wants to engage in this dialogue.

Over the next few weeks as we continue and conclude the debate, I encourage people to keep contacting us and reaching out. My time is out, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

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

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

I'm glad to be able to stand this evening and speak in Concurrence as we come to the end of the work of the Resource Committee. I'm glad the MHA for Stephenville – Port au Port stood ahead of me and taught me a whole new lesson about why I should be happy about this budget.

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Because this is a province where people leave anyway. What a statement for a Member of the House of Assembly to make.

We have nothing to worry about. It doesn't matter that our young people are going to leave. It doesn't matter that our population is going down. It doesn't matter that immigrants are not going to stay here because we're going to be the most expensive place to live in the country because this is a province where people leave anyway.

Well, that has about as much hope in it as this budget. I've never heard of a budget having a document attached to it which all it does is tell you everything that's going: the jobs that are going to be gone, the programs that are going to be gone, the facilities that are gone and the services that are gone. Ten pages telling us. The positive, in the mind of the Minister of Finance, is these are savings. If I hear that word once more I think I'm going to scream in this House – savings.

What I want to hear about is growth. When I was going through the Estimates discussions, I would have loved it when I went through the Estimates for Natural Resources or the Estimates for the fishery or the Estimates for agriculture, if I saw a plan. If I had seen a plan for jobs, if I had seen a plan that showed how we were going to grow in this industry, how our manufacturing was going to grow.

Our manufacturing is going down. Everything is going down. What is this government concerned about? What is the Minister of Finance concerned about? This inner circle of eliminate

government waste, stop excess spending, treat public money responsibly, be more efficient.

Not a word about the people in the province. Not a word about how to make sure our budget is working for the people. Not a word about how we create more jobs. Not a word about vision. No vision, none whatsoever. Not a word that gives people hope.

Well, sure, we're a province where people leave anyway. Good heavens, what a statement. Imagine saying that. I hope people in this province know that was said in this House tonight. Instead of giving people a feeling of this is where I want to live, this is where I want to stay, it's we've got a budget that's going to be kicking people out.

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Today, in the Estimates for AES, Advanced Education and Skills, we were talking about the population strategy. I asked the Minister of AES could he give me the plan. What is the strategy, what is the plan for population growth?

Basically, all he talked about was we're going through a better time with immigrants. I mean, God help us if the disaster in Syria is our hope here because we've got over 250 Syrian refugees in our province. Well, I've got news for you, some of them may make out okay – and there is a wonderful story of the man, the barber over in Corner Brook, a lovely story.

But I'm willing to bet, just like with others who came here, in a years' time a lot of them will be gone. It will be because there will be no hope for a job. It will be because the taxation here is higher; it will be higher than anywhere else in Canada. It will be because our cost of living has gone so high. It will be because services that they thought they could get in Canada they can't get here in this province.

There will not be a place for refugees. You just can't think, oh, we're going to bring refugees and they're going to stay. If they're going to be here they have to know that they can live here and that they can thrive here.

We have, right now, our young people running scared. I don't want them to run scared. I want them to stay. I want them to try to tough it out. We've all got to try to work this together because the government is not doing it. But, good heavens, you've got an MHA telling you that you might as well go, boys and girls, because leave here anyway.

I wanted something to put me on fire before I got on my feet tonight and, boy, did the MHA from Stephenville – Port au Port do it for me. Wow, I just can't believe it. But that's the lack of vision on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Absolutely nothing.

We have a deficit of \$1.8 billion. Now, I'm sorry but the two parties in this House, besides ours, can take responsibility for the fact that \$1.3 billion has gone to Nalcor out of this budget. We have a deficit of \$1.8 billion and \$1.3 billion of our expenditures have gone to Nalcor. And the majority of that is Muskrat Falls.

We, in this House, voted – we didn't, we voted against it. But the government and the Official Opposition, you both voted for the legislation that put everything in place for Muskrat Falls; put all the plans in place without ever being shown the proof that it was going to work economically.

And now the government has put somebody the head of it who is on record as never believing in it because he didn't believe that he had the proof it would work economically. They've got a Minister of Finance who once upon a time drove Muskrat Falls as a policy in this province – drove it. So what a mess we have here and nobody wanting to take responsibility for it.

Well, we have to take responsibility for it, but we don't take responsibility by digging a hole and putting our head in it, and saying we can't do anything but cut, cut, cut, save, save, save. That's not a vision. We have to be able to look at who we are and what we have and say what can we make of it?

The resources we have in this province are unbelievable – they are. Read the book *The Economy* that came out with the budget, because it reminds us of what we have in our natural resources. It reminds us of the renewable resources. It reminds us of the non-renewable resources. It reminds us of what we could be doing. But did this government put any new money in this budget into projects that would create jobs? No, they didn't. They boast about the infrastructure money they're spending, but it's \$138 million less than what was in last year's budget. They don't tell that story. So it is absolutely unbelievable; no vision.

People say what could we be doing? Well one thing we could be doing, Mr. Speaker, is looking at our energy, looking at all the potential we have here in this province and looking at the potential for creating industries based on green energy. We have a whole network of people in this province, small industries that are aching to be able to really be involved in developing green industries in this province. They have wonderful ideas but they get no support from this government. That's one thing we could do.

We could also, instead of having the gas tax doubled, people are still – they don't know what's going to hit them when the gas tax of 16.5 cents goes on every litre that we buy. Instead of doing that, what could we have done instead? What we should have done is really looked at how a carbon tax based on polluter pays could have worked. Have a real discussion in the province about it. Just don't spring it on people, have a real discussion on what a measured carbon tax could look like and how we could make it work. There are so many things they could have done.

We should have looked at this budget and looked at it from the perspective of people. Not from the perspective of this circle that's here, being more efficient, stop excess spending, treat public money responsibly, eliminate government waste. What a shame that in that circle it wasn't see how we take care of our people, see how we plan so that people are going to be better off at the end of this year and not worse off.

This government has to stop telling people they won't be worse off because they will be. People who have chosen to look at the budget calculator

that we have put out there, a budget calculator put together very carefully, people now can see how much more money is going to be taken out of their pockets this year.

I had an email, or it was a Tweet actually, from a woman who said: Thanks to the NDP for this budget calculator. It shows just about what I had thought myself, but it's done technically. You put in your information and you find out how much more you're going to spend. Ordinary, middle-class people are finding out they're going to have to find \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 more in their pockets because of this budget; just ordinary people.

Like I said earlier today in the House – and I'll repeat it – I had somebody from a high tax bracket, the highest tax bracket, say to me yesterday at an event: Hit me, don't hit the low income, don't hit seniors; hit me, I can pay more tax. But is that what this government did? No, they did not. That levy – and that's what this person said to me as well: You know, I wasn't feeling good about the budget, but when the levy came out, that finished it for me. When I heard that, that finished it for me.

So this government forgot in putting the budget together, the Minister of Finance forgot in putting the budget together, the Premier forgot as the person ultimately responsible, that people are the most important thing. We have to take care of people, and what are they doing? They're hammering people.

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** And they're hammering our economy. They're driving us into the ground. They say we're fear mongering, we're exaggerating; we're not. When you do the mathematics you see it. They themselves have said – and I've said this more than once and I'm going to say it again. They themselves in the budget admit that this budget will make things worse. This budget will add to unemployment. This budget will add to lower salaries. They admit it. This budget is going to have a negative impact on the economy.

What do you do when things are rough? You don't make the economy worse; you try to build it up. You look at fishery and you say what could we be doing here? How could we work with industry? How could we work with the workers in the industry? How can we work to find ways in which we bolster the industry?

Look at agriculture, people in agriculture have all kinds of ideas about what needs to be done to try to build up our agricultural industry in this province. Really work with them. Don't hold bogus consultations and say we're listening to you and then create a budget where they show they listened to nobody. Have real consultations where you sit down – we would do that – with the industry. Talk to them, get the ideas, see how we can really make them work.

All you have to do is go to one annual general meeting of the agricultural industry, for example, and you'll be just full of ideas and full of life. The young farmers, the young agriculturalists now with their own Twitter, their own website, are doing fantastic things. They have energy. Why wasn't that in the budget? Why didn't we see ideas for that in the budget?

Government does know it's in trouble with Muskrat Falls, but what are they going to do about it? What's going to happen? What happens with Mr. Marshall now at the top? Is it all going to be silent for a long, long time now and we don't get to see anything public? We need to see.

We need to have changes made to the legislation that protects Muskrat Falls. We can't get at anything with Muskrat Falls because the legislation this House passed and that we voted against is legislation that protects them from the public eye. We can't get at their books. We can't see the real facts of what's going on, and we have to know the real facts of what's going on.

People are asking should we stop it. Should we mothball it? I don't know. I don't know at this point because we don't have the information. Now is that what Mr. Marshall is going to find? I don't know that either. Would it be better for us down the road? Would we lose less by stopping it now? Would we? We don't know unless we have all the information to put that together.

I don't know what's in the contracts. I don't know what it would cost to mothball it. I don't know what it would mean but if we had all the information we might be able to figure it out. I got news for the government; it's not just their responsibility. It's owned by the people of this province.

Every single one of us in this House of Assembly has the responsibility to want to know what's going on with Muskrat Falls; every single one of us because it belongs to the people, and we were elected by the people to represent them. Right now they're terrified, and they're not terrified because of me standing here tonight or anybody from the Official Opposition standing here tonight. They're terrified because they know how to read. They've listened to what you said about your budget. They're reading it. They know what it is saying and they are terrified.

We have a responsibility. We have to be creative. We have to come up with more ideas. We have to put an end to some of the things that are in this budget.

I don't know how this government in conscience can continue with the levy tax. I just don't know how that can happen. I don't know how you can think that that's the right thing to do. How people, somebody with an income of \$21,000 having to pay an extra \$300. Maybe none of you know what that feels like.

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** They don't have the money. The seniors don't have the money. They just don't have it. You did not put any effort into looking at our resources, looking at how we could be creating new jobs. Really, if it weren't so serious it would be funny.

In the budget, the section on Workforce of the Future – boy, this makes you feel really positive. “The sheer magnitude of the financial challenge that we are facing is immense. We must, and the people of our province expect us to, look at every avenue for savings.”

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** That's what people want from you, is it, to look at every avenue for savings.

“We are eliminating approximately 450 Full-Time Equivalents in the Agencies, Boards and Commissions. It is hard to pinpoint the exact number of people that will be impacted as Full-Time Equivalent is not a position. Planning work on the exact impacts continues in the Agencies, Boards and Commissions.

In core government, we are eliminating approximately 200 positions; of that 125 people will be impacted directly. Approximately 30 per cent of those are management or non-union positions.” – That's supposed to make it better – “As is always the case, the final number of people impacted will not be known until the conclusion of the process.”

This is the workforce of the future. There's going to be no workforce of the future. The government is so focused only on the government itself and not realizing that government is the people, and the government has to be finding revenue from our resources. The government has to be working with industry to make jobs, to create jobs, and more money has to go in. I know that, and you're going to say: oh yeah, there she goes, wanting to spend the money.

The most conservative of economists will tell you that you do not – at a time like we are in right now in this province – put a budget in place to make the economy worse. You try to strengthen it. I don't know why you can't see that. I don't know why they can't, Mr. Speaker. The people in the province don't know why they can't. People are just so confused by what's happening.

No matter where I go, no matter who I'm speaking with, it doesn't matter; everybody is of the same word, whether it's somebody who's on Income Support or whether it's somebody from the top-tax bracket in our province. I'm getting the same message – from different perspectives, but the same message. This budget cannot work. This budget is hurting people. This budget is going to make things worse for us.

How can they sit there – I don't know – knowing that all over this country people are looking at us and saying: What is going on? How can they do it? All I can say is thank goodness we aren't in the –

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** – terrible situation that Alberta is in. After everything they've had to deal with over the past year, they now have had this awful fire that is so terrible, but as a government and as a people they are standing strong. Instead of buckling under, they are showing strength and showing vision even in the face of this terrible disaster out there. God help us if that had happened to us because we couldn't even put a budget together that had a vision, let alone deal with the kind of disaster they're dealing with.

Mr. Speaker, I am begging this government to listen –

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** – to not just hear people talking but to really listen to what people are saying and to make a change to this budget. They have to do that. They have to get rid of the levy, for example. That has to go. Wake up, listen and really hear what people are saying to you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

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

It's always a privilege, any time you can stand on your feet and speak on behalf of the people of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair. As I've been sitting here today – I can't believe it's still

Monday, just the first day. I have lots I want to talk about.

Sometimes they say nothing surprises me anymore. You'll hear people say that: nothing surprises me, I expect to hear anything. Well, I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I was surprised today in Question Period when the Leader of the Opposition could get up and have the gall and the audacity to question a fixed link and the benefits that would bring to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I couldn't believe what I was hearing; then later followed by the Member for Conception Bay South. I couldn't believe it. People need to be educated, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the Opposition and to the Leader of the Opposition, if you had a plan and if you had vision, that \$1.2 billion subsea cable would be going through a vehicular tunnel, but that requires vision. It requires planning.

I'm going to talk about, over the next 20 minutes, why a fixed link is the right thing to do for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm also going to say that when Route 138 is connected down through the lower Quebec North Shore the Island portion of the province – not where I take up residence, but I do care about and have lots of family on the Island – will need the fixed link much more than Labrador do, Mr. Speaker, but they haven't tuned into the realization of that yet.

First, Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment to the Leader of the Third Party, putting words in the mouth of my colleague for Stephenville – Port au Port is unacceptable; putting words in his mouth.

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

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Mr. Speaker, the point that my colleague for Stephenville – Port au Port was making is that people from our province have gone for decades away to work. They've always left for work. There is a pocket of people that have gone.

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

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Highly skilled, Mr. Speaker, highly skilled and educated. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, all over the world in significant positions, and we're very proud of the people that go to other places and hold some of these positions. That will always be, I say, Mr. Speaker, no matter what the economy is here in this province.

So shame on the Third Party for – my new colleague here in the House that I think speaks very well – trying to twist words. He did not say that, Mr. Speaker. He was making a point that – since the budget came down on the 14th of April for the people, don't blame us for the people that for generations have left and went away to find work, many holding positions that may not even be available in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Mr. Speaker, for the last two or three years I stood on my feet many, many times and I petitioned for a study on the fixed link. I've done a lot of media interviews. We pay about \$10 million a year in the Strait of Belle Isle; \$10 million if we want to talk about money to run that ferry. What do we get for our \$10 million? A very, very unreliable service, Mr. Speaker; not only that, but I've often wondered over the last several winters as we've had one icebreaker and sometimes two, what is it costing to move residential and commercial traffic?

The Leader of the Third Party was just saying we need something to stimulate the economy. Well, I want to say to the Leader of the Third Party have your researchers do a little bit of work and you will find out that a fixed link in the Strait of Belle Isle right now is the number one diversification project that this province could have.

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** It would create hundreds of high-paying construction jobs, not to mention the easy flow for thousands of tourists to come and spend money here, Mr. Speaker. But more importantly, perhaps, it would give the people of this province a reliable, dependable transportation service; shame on the previous

government for not having the vision and the planning when they were negotiating things, when they brought in Bill 29 and they covered everything up and they sanctioned Muskrat Falls. Now we have this subsea cable which should have been going through a vehicular tunnel. Many, many dollars would have been saved there, Mr. Speaker. These are the kind of initiatives like a fixed link that we need to change the fundamentals in our economy; cheaper goods and services, economic diversification.

I want to mention Labrador for a minute, because when I stand here in this House – and often my colleagues ask me a lot of questions about where I live and the lifestyle, because on the Island there are a lot of people who have never been to Labrador. They don't understand Labrador. A beautiful, beautiful part of this province and people ask me questions. Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to tell them about Labrador. What I say to them is Labrador has been good to this province. Labrador has been good to this province.

Where is the Voisey's Bay Nickel deposit located, Mr. Speaker? Where is the Muskrat Falls power going to be generated from? Where, for that matter, is the Upper Churchill? Where is the iron ore rich Labrador Trough? That one was easy, right, I gave you a hint. Where is the area that is perfectly situated as a gateway to Arctic development?

By now you should have drawn the conclusion. It's Labrador. The conclusion is inescapable, a region that generates so much wealth and attracts as much investment as Labrador. I hear it all the time, they say we should not have to beg for anything. I'm very proud to be a part of a government that is once and for all going to do a full feasibility study to see if, in fact, a tunnel is the way to go.

This is something, Mr. Speaker, that has been talked about for almost 40 years. Back in 1978 there was a commission of inquiry into Newfoundland transportation – back in 1978. Burf Ploughman, a well-known name here, was one of the people that was involved in that inquiry. From that time, Burf Ploughman has advocated for the immediate construction of a fixed link under the Strait of Belle Isle



connecting the Island of Newfoundland to Labrador. They saw the benefits almost 40 years ago and here we are dragging this far behind.

Mr. Speaker, Labradorians, where I live and make my home, have never needed convincing that they deserve a better road access and a more reliable transportation.

Mr. Speaker, I'll throw out another name known to many, now passed on. Tom Kierans passed away in 2013. He spent much of his professional career touting the plan. It's interesting to note that Kierans was a technical advisor to Environment Canada for PEI's Confederation Bridge. A bridge that was built back in '97 that didn't require any funds from the public purse, Mr. Speaker, I might add. So, that just goes to show that there are creative ways for this to happen, but we must do the full feasibility study first.

Danny Williams went up in all his hype in his pre-election days and said I can't believe this hasn't been done. Look how close it is, nine miles from point to point. I'm standing here; he could see the lights to my in-law's house on the other side. He was going to do the big hoopla, but what did he do? What we've seen happen again and again, he did a half job. It was a pre-feasibility study. It is not acceptable. Mr. Speaker, the time has come now. Forty years of talking about this, places like Norway that have over 900 tunnels; the time has come to carry out a full feasibility study that includes a cost analysis and a geological assessment.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Conception Bay South can get up and talk about long-term care beds and things like that. I want to say to you, we have health needs in Labrador as well. And while we do not have a transportation link reliable, do you know what happens to the people in Labrador? They go up to the ferry that doesn't go.

They might have waited nine months for a specialist appointment, and when they go and they miss that appointment, then, Mr. Speaker, perhaps they don't get another appointment for six months. Ask the person who has been stranded for 10 days paying money out of their own pocket to stay in hotels if we need a more reliable transportation network. Ask the store

owners, whose store shelves go bare for days; there's no fruit, there are no vegetables?

Mr. Speaker, we have a Medical Transportation Program in this province that we spend about \$8 million a year on. Many of those people, when they cannot go by ferry, they have to fly. Most of that, oftentimes, is reimbursed by the government. So there are many, many, many savings to the idea of a fixed link between Labrador and the Island.

Mr. Speaker, commercial and residential traffic continues to increase. The growth that we have seen is astronomical. That ferry in the Strait of Belle Isle, when she's moving, is moving over 100,000 people, but it continues on with many interruptions; days, sometimes weeks. I say to the Members opposite: Ask the senior who has been in the ice on a ferry for 50 hours if we need a more reliable transportation network. That's the things that we've been experiencing, Mr. Speaker, the last four or five winters.

People in this Legislature, so few people know about the transportation woes; somebody very sick, 50 hours on a ferry. Mr. Speaker, it should be common sense that if we are spending \$10 million on a ferry – I don't know how much we're spending for the icebreakers that provide the escort every day. We have to look a little bit more long term. We have to say let's spend this little bit of money now and let's see if there really is a big return at the end of the day on this with a cheaper cost of goods and service and a more affordable, dependable transportation service.

Airfare in Labrador, Mr. Speaker, is extremely high, astronomical. Most people are taking the ferry service when it's moving simply because they cannot afford to fly. Another thing that's very difficult for me when I sit here is when they say: Can we afford? Why weren't we asking those questions for the last 10 or 12 years? Why? Because we had \$25 billion in oil money, everything was rolling in; we didn't need to look at efficiencies anywhere. We didn't need to look to see where we could find savings. Times were good. The people of the province need to realize that we would have been in a very, very, very serious situation right now today if change had not happened, spending had not been reined in and tough choices had not been made.

Do you think people over here are smiling and are happy about decisions that had to be made by this government?

Absolutely not, but who wants another province to run the affairs of our province. Who wants to be taken over by the Government of Canada?

Mr. Speaker, I commend the people that had to make the tough decisions for still managing to come out with a budget that is going to inject \$8.48 billion in revenue in this province.

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Mr. Speaker, that had to take a lot of nights, a lot of hours of work and a lot of strategic thinking to ensure that this province continues to run. There is a lot of hope and optimism on this side of the House that this ship will turn around. I used the analogy of a ship the other night when I was speaking. This ship will turn around, she will sail and she will be stronger because we have learned from bad decisions and bad choices of other administrations in the past.

I said I was surprised today and I couldn't believe it when the former premier got up and asked about the fixed link. But I shouldn't have been, Mr. Speaker, because they announced a province-wide ferry strategy. We were super excited; we had been plagued with ferry woes in Labrador. We were excited at the prospect of a new boat, a boat that would be able to navigate the waters, would have the horsepower and would have the ice class for the Strait of Belle Isle.

What happened with that, Mr. Speaker? Myself and my colleague for Torngat, and my colleague for Lab West, we know all too well what happened. After a full year of delays and broken promises by the Davis government, the long-awaited contract for the new Labrador ferry service was cancelled.

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

The Speaker would remind the hon. Member that it's not parliamentary to call a Member by name.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, you get frustrated sometimes and you forget the things you're not supposed to say.

Mr. Speaker, very, very frustrating the way people in Labrador were misled with false promises by this government around the whole ferry issue. There was delay after delay after delay. They talk about the information that they found out on budget day this year in 2016. Well, it was budget day in 2015 that we learned the RFP for the new ferry was pulled off the table.

Now that was very, very upsetting, Mr. Speaker, initially. But when we saw how badly they had bungled the whole RFP, it was a divine intervention that the RFP didn't go ahead because they couldn't get that straight either. They threw in the North Coast ferry service with the Strait of Belle Isle, and they knocked proponents off the table whose bids were compliant. They totally ignored the fact that my colleague for Torngat lives in an area where they have a land claim agreement and you have to consult with them if their bids are compliant. They made a real mess of it, Mr. Speaker, so I am hopeful now that we are going to correct this as we go forward.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, not only was it a terrible RFP that did not meet the needs of the area, but they were going to lock us in for 15 years with a possibility to renew for another 10. Twenty-five years of people stranded for days and days paying out of pocket, 25 years of trucking companies going bankrupt, losing business; store owners suffering without goods and services on the shelf. What a mess.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** They don't want a ferry.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** They don't want a tunnel and they're not very fussy about giving us a dependable ferry service either. We've seen examples of that with the RFP.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be a part of a government now that is moving forward, is going to make the right choices and is going to make the people of Labrador feel like they are equal in this province; something that we have not had for a long, long time.

I'm really, really pleased, Mr. Speaker. I know when we talk about transportation links the ferry is one thing. We also have to have reliable roadwork. Mr. Speaker, when you get off the ferry and you drive in to my district at the border of L'Anse au Clair we have pavement there that's almost 40 years old. Many, many times I've stood on my feet and expressed grave concern about the safety of those 100,000 people on the ferry that are getting off and driving down over that road; but year after year after year, nothing was done.

The Minister for Transportation and Works, the tenders are gone out, he's started the levelling of that and we've started the desperately needed work on Route 510 in the Labrador Straits, and we're going to leverage some federal funds to see that through to its fruition.

Then we move on down into an area where I reside and we are seeing significant investments again into the Trans-Labrador Highway; \$63.7 million. Mr. Speaker, when I heard the city councillor here in town talking about Labrador not needing the road finished, I just thought he was speaking on his own. I didn't think his views were shared by the Members of the Opposition.

But clearly today, Mr. Speaker, to stand here in Question Period and say how can you spend the money on a fixed link, how can you give the people of Labrador what they deserve – and what is lost on everybody is this is a provincial thing. Until we have that link – and my colleague for Labrador West said it very good today when he said tourists coming in, tourists never want to travel the same route twice. When a tourist comes in, if they come in across the Strait of Belle Isle, they're going to drive down through the Big Land of Labrador and they're going to leave through Quebec.

I'm very pleased to see this moving forward; many, many benefits as I mentioned; a great diversification project that will create – Muskrat Falls will end in a couple of years. They're talking about the wastage with Muskrat Falls. Well, I want to say, since we formed government, I'm very proud of the work that the Minister of Natural Resources has done to put some oversight and scrutiny into that project, and to rein in spending.

We will see in the coming weeks if, in fact, the project will continue; but if it does, it will be done in a way that is very, very fiscally prudent. Something that was not done as contracts came and went and money came and went, taxpayers' dollars, and here we are today having to make tough decisions and people not happy with having to pay the price for that.

There is no question where I stand, Mr. Speaker, on a fixed link. The Opposition might not share the view, but I will tell you I hear from many people around the Island portion of the province that say it's time for us to get connected. It's time for a fixed link. It's not only something for the people of Labrador. But if it was just something for the people of Labrador, Mr. Speaker, they certainly deserve that reliable transportation network as a way to get in and out of that Big Land where the cost of air travel presents many, many challenges and it's very expensive.

When I look at the things that government has had to subsidize in terms of air travel, every which way you look at this, if the full feasibility study on the fixed link shows us that it is doable – and I see no reason why not, Mr. Speaker, as we have made advancements in technology, and as we've looked to other countries that had tremendous experience with building hundreds of tunnels – I believe that the savings will be realized to this province and we will have a better flow of commercial and residential people, goods and service. It will just move us along to where we need to be in this 21st century.

Thank you for the opportunity.

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

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

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

Again, it's a pleasure to get up here to represent the beautiful district of Cape St. Francis, but I really got to go to the former speaker. I applaud her. I watched her over the years and she really

has stood up in this House and she spoke for Labrador, every time she gets up here. She's a great advocate for the people in Labrador. I always do applaud her because she speaks with passion. A lot of times I get up, I speak with passion too, so I really respect her.

I don't mean to say this in a bad way at all, but she should have been your minister from Labrador, I guarantee you that.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Anyone that speaks like she does for the people of Labrador, I applaud because she should be there. I said that from day one. I really think that someone who is that passionate about the area that she is from, and represents them so well, I really applaud her for it.

I don't agree with everything she said. The fixed link – I really don't know with the fixed link. But the one thing I'd like to say to her is I think what the thing was today, was there are choices to be made and that's what this budget is all about. I spoke last week about choices that we have, what we're doing in this budget.

To the hon. Member – and I respect her opinion – but when I look at a choice that's made in this budget to cut \$860,000 in health care spending in Labrador, that is a choice you have to make. So the choice to me on this one is simple. Do we do a study on a fixed link, or do we save a nurse who is in Black Tickle? We're eliminating a nurse in Black Tickle. Is that a choice that the people in Black Tickle want? Do they want the fixed link or do they want to have a nurse in their community?

I look at the different cuts we're doing with the libraries. I got a list of them here and I'm not going to go through them because I'm up tonight and I want to speak a good bit on the fishery. But it's all about choices. This whole budget is about choices and it's the choices that you've made. That's the whole point. Making the fixed link, that's a great thing. If we can come with a fixed link and we can join the Big Land to the Island, I think it's a great choice.

I listened to a couple of speeches here tonight – I'm going to get to the fishery now in a few

minutes, but I just have to speak to what I heard tonight. We're all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I don't care if you're from the top to the bottom. I'm from the bottom. I live over in Flatrock. Pouch Cove sees the sun the first time in Cape St. Francis. I don't care where you're from. We're all from the one area.

When I hear Members get up and say rural Newfoundland is different than it is on the Northeast Avalon. We're all the same. We all have different issues. You may have different issues across the way. Rural Newfoundland's issues are the same. But we all want health care. We all want a good education.

You talk about education in rural Newfoundland where there are 50 students in a school. You can't expect the same education level as you can where Holy Trinity next year is going to have 950 children in the school. We're all alike, but we all have issues. You can't separate – don't do that. Really, we shouldn't do that. That's something we shouldn't do. We're all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We all stick together. We always do.

You look at communities in this province and look what happened this weekend. We just came through what happened in Fort McMurray. On Saturday, VOXM and K-ROCK and all of them, people donated \$250,000. The volunteer fire department down in Torbay this weekend are collecting money.

We're all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're the most generous people in the world. We're definitely the most generous people in all of Canada, so don't divide us. Don't divide us that I'm from Labrador or I'm for rural Newfoundland or I'm from the Northeast Avalon because we're all the same. The issues are different; there's no doubt about it. School issues are different, financial issues are different, but we're all here to support each other and we should support each other. If the fixed link is a good thing for Labrador, then I agree with it. It should be done.

Let me tell you something right now. Take a nurse away from a small community, that's a huge thing for that small community. So there are a lot of decisions – closing down the libraries like were closing down libraries. There are three

libraries in your district that are getting closed down.

The Member who got up and spoke for Stephenville – Port au Port – the mayor of Lourdes said on CBC: We have no hope, we have no money and now we have no library. You gave them a lot of hope tonight because you told them we move away anyway. That's something we do.

Do you know what? That's not what we do. That's not something that we do. We don't move away. We try to encourage people to stay. We try to encourage our young people by giving them the best education in Canada, to stay. We try to put things in our schools we could never see before so people can stay, so they can get the best education.

I looked at the news this evening and I saw the minister was out today and saw small businesses, their new ideas of innovation. Innovation Week is this week. We have great, smart individuals. Do you know why? Because we've educated them. We gave them the best possible education that you can get. That's what we want.

We don't want people to move away. We don't want to say, listen, okay, that's all we can do. Go on to Alberta, go on to Ontario. That's it; it's not here in Newfoundland for you. Go away anyway, but that's not what we're here for. We are here as elected representatives to make sure we do the best for our people.

This whole budget is about choices. It's the choices you make. I've heard this budget called the lazy budget because all it is is tax, tax, tax and cut – tax, tax, tax, tax. Well, we should be thinking differently.

You look at a small business; I spoke to a small-business owner who owns a restaurant. He said there's absolutely no hope. He said last year my business operated on a very small margin, very, very small margin. Now he said, this budget, I can afford it. Me and my wife, we'll be okay, but my business – he said I'm afraid my business is going to shut down. He has 15 employees. He's afraid his business is going to shut down because of the bit of hope that we took from individuals.

We're telling all the unions, we're telling everybody, there's another budget coming in October. You think this one was bad, wait until you see that one. What does that tell people? We have no hope.

The Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi spoke about it earlier. She said the same thing. She said, you know, we lost all our hope because of this budget.

Look, I applaud all you on the backbench. I applaud what you're doing here. I applaud how you're standing up for your government and how you're standing up for your Premier. It's good to see what you're doing, but I know when you go back in your districts, every weekend you went back in your districts that you have hard times. I know it. The Member also said we don't need to sell this budget. We don't need – yes, you do. Look, you have to let the people know what's in it. You have to be honest with people.

I saw the Member for Bonavista get up the other day and he did his speech. He was going, yes Sir, yes Sir. At the same time, the Town of Bonavista was tweeting about what they were saying in Bonavista about the budget. Seriously, you have to understand. Look, I'm not saying you're not telling the truth, you're misleading anybody or anything at all, but you know what. I understand you're going through difficult times with this budget because it's a hard sell in your communities, but be honest about it.

I heard the Member for Terra Nova get up and say: oh, he went into this place and they all shook his hand and he felt really, really good about how the budget was going down. But he didn't tell people he was presented with a petition about the budget with 100-and-some-odd names on it. I have the petition. So I'll read out a few things that were said, but be honest with the people. Don't come in here and try to sell – not try to sell, but try to say things are not like they are, because we know what they're like.

I understand where you're coming from. I understand that you have to go back to your communities. It's hard on a lot of you to try to sell this budget to your people because it's a hard budget. You're taking away a lot of stuff

from people. People have to figure out – and not only in rural Newfoundland. For the Member for Stephenville, it's not only in rural Newfoundland.

I don't know what I'm called. Down my way it's the same thing. My people are telling me, they say: Kevin, I don't know where I'm going to get that 15 per cent extra on my car insurance that I got to pay. I don't know how I'm going to do this.

This is a hard budget on a lot of people, but be honest with people. Be honest with this House of Assembly, that when you come in here every one of you are having a hard time selling it – everyone. I don't care who you are. I know the Premier is having a hard time with it. I'm sure every time he goes back to his district he's having a hard time selling it too, because it's a hard budget.

There's no doubt, this budget is a terrible budget. It's a terrible budget. It's all about choices and the choices we made – not we made. The choices you made about this budget.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** They are choices that you made. They are choices that you made to tax people and tax people and tax people, and take it out of their pockets.

Oh my God, the levy. I've never heard so much about it. People are calling it everything. It's a cover charge to come to Newfoundland. Is that what it is? That's what I'm hearing. Is it fair? Does anybody over there consider it fair? I don't think you do. I think when you go back to your districts – I don't know. I bet you any money that there's no one person in your district who said that levy is a fair thing to do.

Be honest with people. When you get up in the House of Assembly talk about it, don't go on with the great thing it is, how they shook my hand when I walked into the hall, because it's not true. They presented you with a petition.

To the Member from out in Stephenville, listen, I tell you, I applaud you. You're a young man that's here in the House of Assembly and a great job. It's nice to see such a diverse group of

people in this House of Assembly. It's great. Your opinion, I bet, is so good in caucus and everything else that people will listen to you because you come from a different perspective than a lot of us do, but we all got different opinions. I got an opinion.

The Member for Lab West got up today and talked about MNL, how positive it was. I spoke to mayors in my district and they were surprised – and the minister, now the minister said today something about me supporting the budget. Well I can tell the minister, I am not supporting this budget. I can guarantee you I will not support this budget.

A news release – I guess she's called the Chair. Is that what she's called? No, she's the President of MNL. She ran against you for the Liberal nomination down in Lab West. She wouldn't come out with something too negative, but do you know what. They were all unified with the displeasure of this budget, and you get up and say how happy they were. Yes, they're glad they kept the 90-10. I guess they are; 90-10 is a great thing because it gave everybody an opportunity to be able to afford it. They're very glad about that. The sustainability where there's extra money invested into municipalities, that's a good thing that they can afford to keep the operating grants and stuff like that they have going.

Again, as I say in this House of Assembly, we all have to realize, no matter if it's federal or provincial or whatever, there's only one taxpayer and they have to pay it. So whether you take it and put it on municipalities, they still have to pay the taxes at the end of the day because there's only one taxpayer that's going to be paid here. They're concerned. They said they weren't consulted. No plan; small communities in chaos. That's what came out of their news release. Now what you said here today was completely opposite, but that's what they put out in their news releases for everyone to see.

Now, I only have eight minutes left. I have gone on way too far that I didn't want to go because I really want to talk about the fishery. The fishery is important to me, and I want to thank – I should do this also. I want to thank the Chair, the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay.

Do you know something, it's very important that we understand what Estimates are all about. Estimates are a great opportunity to be able to come in. I've been on Estimates for eight years but in a different perspective. I've always been back here and I always liked them. I used to sit in on Estimates for other Members because I like to hear how the departments are run. It's a real good time, and I'm sure all the new Members who were in Estimates this year, I bet you all enjoyed it because it gives you a real good vision of the departments. It shows you different things with the departments.

The one I was involved with is the Fisheries, and I want to thank the minister because I have to say, as I told him before, that the fishery – there are a lot of people in the Department of Fisheries that have some great knowledge.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I said, yes, municipalities look good. I told you the 90-10 was a good sustainability. I don't agree with downloading libraries to them; neither do they. They're frightened to death to know what else you're going to do to them. We never knew about the libraries when we had the – that's true. I'm only telling you what they said. You said it was such a great time the weekend.

Anyway, with the fishery – I'm going to get back to the fishery.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, can you protect me over there or what? He's really yacking at me there now.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, the fisheries technology program. I just want to go to this. It's very important that – I stated this a little while ago, how important the fishery is to our future. I really believe it. This fund that was there and I don't believe it's there anymore. What it used to do, it was for a lot of different technologies that they'd use in the fishery.

Just an example of some; the processors use the technology for processing crab. There are new

ways to process crab and it's called a crab hauler. They haul a crab apart. It's a great innovation thing because it helps get the crab through so you can process it more. There were new baiting systems that were put in place for different technologies, for different fish they were catching. This is a part of how the new lobster pots were developed and stuff like that. That's a very important area that we should be making investments in is the technology.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, while we think we're a great big player in the fishery, we're not. We're very small. When anybody goes to the Boston seafood show or goes to any of these places and sees what's available in the rest of the world, we're a very, very small player when it comes to the fishery.

So it's very important that we have the latest technologies. It's very important that we, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, give our processors and give the harvesters the opportunity to make sure when they get on that world stage that our product is as good as anywhere else in the world. It's very important that we have these funds.

When it comes to research, I know the minister explained it to me a little bit because I asked him about the *Celtic Explorer* and the research that we're doing. We're not spending as much money on research as we normally did. Again, it's something we should be doing. Maybe if we did better research back in the '70s and '80s, we wouldn't have had the cod moratorium. Maybe if we had to do better research, we would understand what's happening with the shrimp today.

The shrimp today, we're having a major problem. We have an all-party committee and we're working with the federal government to make sure the proper thing is done with LIFO. We're at a stage now where we see one area, Area 6, this year where 40 per cent of the shrimp that are in Area 6 is gone. No matter what happens with the federal government, it's going to affect Newfoundland and Labrador like you wouldn't believe. No matter if it's the inshore or the offshore that gets the quota, the quota is going to have to be cut by 40 per cent. That's what they're telling us. The Minister of Fisheries is shaking his head; he's agreeing with me.

That's where we should be with our research. The *Celtic Explorer*, for example, went out and they looked at cod and saw how cod was growing, what it was doing on the spawning grounds and stuff like this. These are things we need to know. These are investments we need to make because guess what's going to happen – the Member for the Northern Peninsula is there shaking his head at me now. Let me tell you, you have four shrimp plants in your district. This is not funny, 40 per cent of the shrimp – a place where you're getting all your shrimp. You're going to lose a couple of your plants. It's not funny.

We should have done the research. We should have had the research done so this wouldn't happen. This is what's happening. Yes, that's what's happening. We have to do more research. We can't cut research in the Department of Fisheries.

Today, in case you don't know, the crab fishery is not as good as what it was last year. We should be doing research. We should be working with the federal government, forcing the federal government into making sure that the proper research is done so we know what's happening to the crab, we know what's happening to the shrimp.

We have fishermen that are waiting right now –

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

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** What's Trevor Taylor going to do?

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** What are you talking about? You don't even know what you're talking about. He's on a committee that is looking at LIFO right now. LIFO is about Newfoundland and Labrador; it's about two different sectors in Newfoundland and Labrador (inaudible) –

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

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I know I've used up a lot of time this evening. You're not reeling me in. He's over there laughing right now. You can laugh all you want.

Let me tell you, Minister, this is very important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's not a funny thing. When you get up in the House of Assembly I don't laugh at you, so don't laugh at me. Show me the respect. I deserve it.

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

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

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Don't you be laughing at me.

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

I ask Members to –

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

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

I ask Members not to directly engage in debate with another Member of the House. Please direct your comments to the Speaker. I ask all Members of the House for some peace, order and decorum.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I have to finish, I only have a minute left. I want to talk a little bit about vessel size. I want to talk about what I think our Department of Fisheries should be doing when it comes to vessel size –

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** He's at it again. I'll never show that man any respect anymore because you're a disrespectful man.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about a life and safety thing with fishermen in the province when it comes to vessel sizes. We saw last year in Arnold's Cove where fishermen lost their lives. Fishermen lost their lives in Arnold's



Cove last year because they had to go out in a small 29-foot boat and haul crab, when they had a longliner tied up at the wharf.

That is all about policy. It is all about what we should be doing and the Department of Fisheries should be doing making sure that federal fisheries understands that we are more about – we can all work together on that. It's a very important – I've talked to the minister about it and he agrees with me. It's something we should be doing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not very happy with that man over there.

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

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

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

As a young Member of this House of Assembly, but one that has experience and also a part of this government, as the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development and Responsible for Forestry and Agrifoods and Research and Development, I certainly have hope and optimism for the province as we move forward. We have strong and resilient people and a business community with ambition to invest and to create those opportunities to move forward.

Tough times don't last, but tough people do. Since the beginning of time, Newfoundland and Labrador has been able to weather a storm, and we will get through this matter. It will be this government that will do the hard work and the heavy lifting that needs to be done.

I want to point out to the Member opposite, the Member for Cape St. Francis; I will clearly say that it is no laughing matter looking at the shrimp situation. And to make the statement that in my particular district that two shrimp plants will close is fear mongering and spreading misinformation, as Members opposite often do.

I would say to the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, to get up here again tonight, it really

speaks to the credibility of the Member to get up tonight and say, after the Premier had answered the question and made the statement earlier that if you're earning \$21,000 you're paying a levy of \$60, not \$300 – yet she continues to repeat misinformation and spread misinformation out there. It is clearly not factual and if that person's net taxable income – they may have a gross income of \$21,000, but if their net taxable brings them under \$20,000, they will pay no temporary levy.

I would say to the Member opposite that you have to put forward the correct information. As an hon. Member of this House, you should not be putting misinformation out there over and over and over and over again. It speaks volumes.

I want to say, though, that as a government we're looking at all sorts of opportunities to diversify the economy and look at the opportunities. The Member for Cape St. Francis did talk about, again today, downloading of libraries to municipalities. The Minister of Municipal Affairs said earlier today that there will be no downloading to municipalities for libraries. They will have consultation to see if there's a way to operate library services, if a municipality wants to offer that service. There will be no downloading in that matter. This government is not going to be strong-arming municipalities.

When it comes to looking at our opportunities of economic diversification because the Member opposite talked about the lack of jobs and the lack of planning that went into the budget. Now, there are significant jobs that will be created in *Budget 2016*. It is an \$8.48 billion budget. There will be 1,000 jobs created in infrastructure alone; \$570 million in infrastructure.

Looking at things you can do in terms of advancing an economy. There are two major things you can do; two major things to help any economy grow. That is to develop advanced transportation and advanced telecommunication links; yet, the Leader of the Opposition and the Members opposite ridicule the study of a fixed link, to go from prefeasibility to look at full feasibility to see what the opportunities would be around nation building of this great country.

When you look at connecting the railway, Canada became a county because of the railway link that connected us through transportation. It was a project that had a lot of ambition but it was the right thing to do, and because of it we have this great country, Canada. This advanced transportation network at that time.

If we look at what a fixed link could bring to the economy in terms of transportation, the shipment of goods and services, the flow of people and also to look at, from a tourism economy, to promote a great circle route. Coming up through Quebec, across Labrador, coming down the Northern Peninsula, West Coast, going through Port aux Basques back to Nova Scotia. Opening up and seeing that great opportunity that exists, as well as other parts, because we have other transportation links going into Argentina, doing shipping into the international economy. In St. Anthony, international containerized shipping.

When we talk about our opportunities of ferry services, looking at shipping opportunities, looking at our airports; just this last week weekend, on Saturday, I was at the airport and WestJet has expanded its service, doing a second transatlantic flight out of St. John's to London. They have one to Dublin. St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, is the only airport that West Jet has two transatlantic flights.

We also have an Air Canada flight that's going as well to London. So we have connections to Europe. When we look at the opportunity that brings, when we talk about doing business to business, when we talk about the tourism economy, it just presents extra opportunity for Newfoundland and Labrador, for the business community and for cultural connections.

We talk about Air Labrador and how they've expanded service for Happy Valley-Goose Bay to get direct flights into Deer Lake and also St. John's. This is all about expanded economic development; the flow of goods and services, of people as well. This is really important when you look at roads and you look at the investment that's being made into infrastructure. The Minister of Transportation and Works is doing a significant amount of roadwork in the province to look at making sure that we have services for

the people. It's critical when you look at providing these types of services.

Research and development, and we're doing quite a significant amount of research and development. The Member for Cape St. Francis wanted to tout the fisheries research that was being done. Well, federal fisheries research, this is a federal responsibility of which the province continuously funded millions and millions of dollars under hiring the *Celtic Explorer*. Right now, we're seeing the federal government put \$140 million into fisheries research. That is critical. We have friends in Ottawa that are investing in research in the fishery because it is the right thing to do.

The former administration failed to get this type of partnership with Ottawa. It had to spend provincial dollars in a federal jurisdiction to make it happen. It's quite unfortunate that those funds couldn't be put into other uses when it comes to diversification and economic development.

We want to look at the opportunities we have. As Minister of Business and responsible for economic development, I've been touring farms here in this province, touring sawmills, talking to operators in value-added. People have ambition and they want to invest. They want to create jobs all across this province, both in urban and rural.

I would suggest to the Member opposite to get out in these communities. Talk to the business people, talk to the job creators that are out there in the economy and the hard work they're doing. They want to see our province prosper. It is not all doom and gloom, as the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi wants people to believe that it is.

Tourism is growing in leaps and bounds in Newfoundland and Labrador. The numbers are up if you talk to operators, if you talk to people in the industry, from motorcoach to airport traffic statistics to talking about the value that's being added. We are very optimistic. Our new ad campaign has been extremely successful from a digital perspective in the multimedia and also in the markets. We're being very strategic. Our website visits are up 16 per cent from last year.

So we're doing things right when it comes to our department.

We've invested in the arts community; \$18.5 million in arts and culture. I've attended a number of events, met with the arts community and continue to work with them and work on looking at elevating the arts community here in the province to add value, because from a culture and heritage and arts point of view, we have so much to offer. There is tremendous potential.

We looked at memorandums of understanding and how we're bringing in partnerships when it comes to Nunavut. We'll be doing trade delegations and we'll be reaching out and bringing in inbound trade missions as well when it comes to the opportunities to profile our business community.

The Member opposite talked about manufacturing. I will be addressing the Canadian Manufactures and Exporters tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. I invite her to be there, to attend, to sit with manufactures, talk to them and engage with them because there's certainly opportunity to look at them and the value that they add to our economy.

When we talk about Innovation Week this week, I was there for the launch at Common Ground. This is something that started as a grassroots initiative. They've created 50 jobs, Mr. Speaker, and they are entrepreneurs that are giving back that believe in our ecosystem. We have a lot of great assets here, whether it be the Genesis Centre looking at our post-secondary institutions that the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills is responsible.

Looking at the accelerators and the programing we have, our economic development officers on the ground, our partners, our industry associations, like NATI. Working with our entrepreneurs and really advancing and resetting the innovation agenda because it really needs resetting. We have so much potential here. We are going to create new policies, new framework and opportunity to grow an industry that has 4,000 jobs, \$1.6 billion in the economy.

We talk about, the tourism economy represents a billion dollars in revenues spent, 18,000 jobs

from 2,500 businesses. The fishery represents a billion dollars. We have tremendous opportunity, and we're constantly working with the Minister of Natural Resources when it comes to looking at the mining sector and the opportunities that exist there to use new technologies.

Our Research & Development Corporation, we have a lot of potential assets and opportunities to engage people and create new opportunities right here so people can live here and work here. To the Member opposite, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have always gone away. They have always left this province to find other opportunities. There is nothing wrong with going away and finding opportunity and using your skill and your knowledge to add to other economies and to also bring back that skill and knowledge here.

There are a lot of people that go away. I've been there. I've been away. I've gained knowledge. I've worked internationally. I lived in Europe. I've studied there. I've lived in Alberta, like many other Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. All of this helps make somebody a well-rounded person. It helps to become cultured. It helps generate new ideas. When people go away and can come back, they add significant value to the economy.

I think, in fact, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi spent some time out of province. I think her bio clearly states that she's been away.

There is nothing wrong with going away, for anyone to go and earn. Actually, in terms of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we have a tremendous amount of commuters that come and add value to our economy, whether they're full-time or part-time residents, as well as looking at our export potential.

When we look at export in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, 75 per cent of our exports are either service based or a service and a product combined. So we're really selling our knowledge economy, our expertise that we have. A number of consultants in the oil and gas sector, the Minister of Natural Resources could clearly confirm this. We have so much potential.

For a small province of 500,000 people – as the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair talked about Labrador and all of the resources and the rich economic value that's there. We are looking at diversifying our forest sector. There are opportunities in Labrador for that, also in farming for new egg entrants.

In talking about opportunity, we have tremendous potential in this province. This is not a lazy budget as the Member opposite has said. What's a lazy budget for the Member for Cape St. Francis is what his administration had done for about 12 years: spend, spend, spend, spend. This is why we are in the problem that we're in. That \$20 billion in oil royalties, \$5 billion in Atlantic Accord and a tax break to their rich buddies for \$4 billion to that tune, has cost our Treasury significantly. So now, we're really doing the heavy lifting and the hard work here to look at economic diversification and creating opportunities. We're going to work with our partners. We're going to work with people on the ground.

I challenge every single MHA in this very House. I know my colleagues here on this side are reaching out, are being involved. They are speaking out to the community. They're being connected and they want to see Newfoundland and Labrador thrive. They want to see a culture of entrepreneurship. They want to see that ecosystem foster where small and medium enterprises grow, where there is more foreign direct investment, where there are opportunities to attract joint ventures, for venture capital, seed money.

We want to see a very ambitious trade file here in Newfoundland and Labrador where we see through CETA, where we see through the TPP, where we see through other trade deals, whether it be the Agreement on Internal Trade, where we see that potential for us to capitalize, to use our knowledge, our expertise and our ingenuity as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We have a ton of potential.

As the Member for Cape St. Francis talked about a small-business owner, I will say our budget kept the small-business tax at 3 per cent. It is something that I lobbied for heavily while I was on the other side of the House. When the former Minister of Finance, Tom Marshall,

continuously refused to do it over and over and over again – and stated we have a competitive small-business tax when six other provinces had a lower small-business tax than Newfoundland and Labrador – we were seventh in the country at the time. Now we're at third place.

We have a great competitive environment when it comes to looking at our small-business tax, when it comes to looking at the opportunities and the supports that exist to grow small business from craft, gift and apparel to the arts and cultural industries, to heritage, to small-scale manufacturing, to looking at our fishery, our forestry and farming. There is a great time in Newfoundland and Labrador to invest, to believe in our province and to grow that opportunity right now, right here at home.

We encourage people to talk to the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development because I believe, and we believe, in advancing telecommunication networks. This is why there is \$2 million in broadband to look at advancing our knowledge-based economy to create a level playing field in many rural communities that don't have access to broadband Internet.

This will create jobs in communities; create opportunities to bring people home, to create sustainability in small towns. Places like Goose Cove and Bide Arm in my constituency are towns; they're municipalities without broadband Internet. I challenge anybody on the other side if they have municipalities that don't have access to broadband Internet in 2016.

I will work very hard to see these communities and others without coverage to have that gap, because we do need to build a knowledge-based economy. We really do. We need to focus on our renewable resources like the fishery. We certainly do. There's a tremendous opportunity in Newfoundland and Labrador as we see the resurgence of codfish and other groundfish species and the value added there. There is potential. We have to look at a transition.

In 1992, during the cod moratorium – and I can remember this, my family, all of them fished and many of them still do. I'm the only Member I think in my generation of my family that didn't have the opportunity. Looking at 1992, we see

the groundfish and we see a number of people transition into shellfish. Now we're starting to see where there's a decline in shellfish and there seems to be that need to transition back to groundfish, to multispecies and to look at the broad-based economy of which we can grow and we can grow right here.

Budget 2016-2017 is certainly filled with a lot of difficult decisions. But in it we remained a balanced approach when it comes to remaining sure that personal income taxes are competitive. That we are competitive in Atlantic Canada, that we look after those most vulnerable in society by having a program like the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, looking at the enhanced Seniors' Benefit and also making sure that we have adequate supports, but a balanced economic policy so that we can grow a robust revenue stream.

We have many, many aspects of which we're growing the economy. We will continuously roll out announcement after announcement after announcement of good things that are happening right here in Newfoundland and Labrador –

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** – despite the Opposition continuously rolling out doom and gloom and that we have no plan for economic diversification. Completely not true.

We have a plan. We're continuously rolling out that plan. We will work collectively, as a caucus here and as a government, to make sure that Newfoundland and Labrador thrives. That it continues to develop where it needs to be and that we continue, as a society, to make sure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians continue to have every opportunity for this generation and the next.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

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

I'm very happy to stand this evening and speak to Concurrence. I'm probably going to focus primarily on the whole area of culture and heritage because that is an area that really – although government talks about how much they support it and how much they value it – it's under supported.

It's an incredible resource that is labour intensive but the labour is so productive. We know for every dollar that's invested in the arts, it generates \$3. How wonderful is that? That's probably one of the best investments we have in the province right now.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk a little bit about that in terms of the missed opportunities right now. We have artists that we are so proud of, and our cultural industries and our heritage industries reflect who we are as people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Whether we were born here, whether we arrived here, whether we were indigenous peoples who've been here for much more than 500 years, it is one of our strengths. It's something we are known for all over the world –

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** – certainly in North America, certainly in Canada.

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

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

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

So our culture and our heritage, what is that, our cultural and our heritage activities from live music – and, boy, are our musicians known internationally. Right now, we know that JUNO award-winning Amelia Curran is travelling the world right now. We have The Once who has been travelling the world. We have The Fortunate Ones who've been travelling the world. How fortunate are we to have these incredible musicians and artists.

This year, we saw the loss, the death, of our own Ron Hynes and how that affected so many of us. I remember being in a pub in Ireland, Mr. Speaker, and there was live music; there was a musician playing “Sonny’s Dream” and everybody stopped and started singing along. I said to the person next to me: That was written by someone from my hometown, from my home province. And they said: No, no, no, that’s an Irish song. I said: No, that was written by Ron Hynes. And how many people in Ireland truly believe that “Sonny’s Dream” is an Irish song. So that’s how far our culture reaches.

We had an exchange with our cultural workers, with our artists and musicians with Tasmania. They were celebrated in Tasmania. There’s also a TV program that’s going on right now where our musicians are brought to the Bahamas and they’re doing an exchange with the Bahamian musicians. It’s really quite exciting. There’s an international TV show that’s being done with them.

We have much to be proud of with our artists, and many of us are. When we have people visiting us from away, how many of us will take people down to George Street or to Water Street or Duckworth Street to hear live music, or we’ll take them to The Rooms to see the visual arts by our artists, or we’ll take them to some of our heritage sites.

That’s something I’d really like to talk about as well tonight, Mr. Speaker, our heritage sites, which are so important to our understanding of our history – so incredibly important; whether it be the history of indigenous peoples, whether it be history of Europeans who came here, whether it be histories of generations of Newfoundlanders who were settlers here, how important those heritage sites are and how underfunded and neglected many of them are by our government.

But we know that people who are so passionate about our heritage sites, who volunteer, who raise money, who scrimp and save to ensure that we have heritage sites that are available, that remind us of where we’ve come from but also point to where we are going. All these are so very important.

So in our cultural and heritage activities we have live music, dance and theatre. How many of our fantastic artists are actors who are in Stratford; Bob Joy in LA doing wonderful work in films. Our films have gone around the world; they have been at film festivals.

Myself, I’ve done documentaries that have won awards all over the world and because we, as a people, whether settlers or indigenous people, are storytellers and we are so eager to share our culture. But we are also so eager to listen to one another and to hear from other cultures, when we look at the Festival 500 and the choirs that come here, when we look at the Folk Festival and the acts that we bring here.

Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that our stories are told from a place of strength, a place of resilience, a place of great adversity at times. When we look at our writers, Lisa Moore, and now her daughter Eva Crocker, how exciting is that; Michael Crummey, Wayne Johnston, Meg Coles, Elisabeth de Mariaffi, Ed Riche; our incredible local publishers Boulder Publications, Breakwater Books, Creative Book Publishing, Pedlar Press, that have done works, that are publishing works that are celebrated the world over. It’s so exciting.

Again, how many of us buy a book or a buy a CD by a Newfoundland artist and send them to family and friends in different parts of the world because we are proud of that. We are proud of our heritage. It’s kind of interesting when we look at what is happening right now, taxes on books and closures of libraries, really limiting access to these wonderful gifts that our artists give to us.

Our arts are not only for tourists, it’s not only for export, but it’s also about improving our own quality of life, and that’s what we see. One of the things that I think is important to talk about tonight here, Mr. Speaker, is how the arts are also economic generators in our communities throughout the province. When we make a film, it involves writers, it involves actors, it involves technicians, it involves artists who are painting scenes, who are building sets, who are painting the sets. It involves so many people. It involves publicists, cinematographers and technicians.

Again, our arts can be a real economic generator. What has happened with this budget, Mr. Speaker, is that government has missed an opportunity. They've missed an opportunity to really invest in the arts, to really use them as economic generators, to really use them as a way to keep our young people here, as a way to celebrate our culture.

When we look at Grenfell, a fabulous art school, university, fabulous university of the arts, how many young people graduate from Grenfell ready and willing to work in the arts, to apply their trade and the knowledge that they have gained. Only that many of our young people leave now because the funding for our arts is not on par with the rest of Canada. So we see these well-educated people who are self-starters, who are ready to roll up their sleeves and they leave because the funding isn't here, because the jobs and the opportunities aren't here. So they go off to other parts of the country and they build the arts community there in other parts of the country. We are the poorer for that.

One of the things that I find in this budget which is really disturbing is that the budget has missed so many opportunities to propel us forward. As a matter of fact, I believe with the cuts that what the budget is doing is it's impoverishing our people. I'm sure nobody on the other side of this House wants to impoverish our people, but impoverish in both an actual sense and impoverish in a cultural sense as well.

When I look at our heritage sites and the number of small museums all across the province, museums that wait and wait and wait, they never know when their funding is going to come because they don't have multi-year funding, museums that are operated often by volunteers or by one or two staff people, their funding has been cut back and their funding has been shrunk. The shoulder season has been shrunk. These are people who are so proud of what they have to offer. It's so important to our cultural understanding of where we've come from, what we've done and where we are going.

Mr. Speaker, I believe government can do a better job of investing in our arts. I believe government can do a much better job of investing in our heritage industries. We have nothing but to gain from that because we do

know that with every investment in our arts, our artists are able to leverage funding from the city. They're able to leverage funding from the federal government and, at times, they're able to leverage funding internationally as well. But if they don't have access to that initial pool of funding, then they too miss those opportunities. So government is stifling opportunities on a number of levels and I do believe that it can be better.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council is the chief source of provincial money for artistic creation. It's sort of our R & D phase of the cultural sector. We've seen that squeezed, first by the previous Progressive Conservative government and now by this government as well.

With its current budget, only about half of eligible applications are approved with an average grant of \$4,000, which is well below other provinces. I would encourage the Minister of Culture to attend a granting-decision session to see how difficult it is, to see some of our most mature, experienced artists who put in proposals for incredibly powerful work and they're turned down, or they're given only a fraction of the money that makes it very difficult for them to leverage any other funding or makes it very difficult for them to really precede with the project they were intending to do.

Mr. Speaker, what I would recommend for our arts and culture sector is funding that would, in fact, grow the industry, not shrink it, not suffocate it, but make it a real economic, financial generator for the province. I think what has to happen is we have to work with the cultural and heritage sectors on a new plan to invest in artists, ensure public access to our arts and heritage and strengthen our school arts program so that we can grow that industry. Mr. Speaker, everyone will win by it, our own people in our province. It will become an economic generator and it would be a true, true investment in diversification.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The motion is to concur with the Estimates of the Resource Committee.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**MR. SPEAKER:** As the Speaker sees, the motion has been carried.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Division, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Division has been called.

**Division**

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

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

**CLERK (Ms. Barnes):** Mr. Andrew Parsons, Ms. Coady, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Trimper, Mr. Lane, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Browne, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Letto, Ms. Haley, Mr. Bernard Davis, Mr. Holloway, Mr. Bragg, Ms. Parsley, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Warr, Mr. Finn, Mr. Reid, Mr. Dean, Mr. King.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 27; the nays: nine.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I declare the motion approved.

On motion, Report of Resource Estimates Committee, carried.

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

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

Prior to adjourning tonight, I would just make clear to the House that tomorrow morning at 9 in this House, we will have Estimates for Finance and OCIO. Our final set of Estimates in this House on Wednesday morning at 9 will be Health and Community Services.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of BTCRD, that the House do now adjourn.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is that the House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against?

Carried.

This House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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